

**THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER**

Faculty of Humanities and Social Sciences

Holocaust Education in British Society and Culture

Kara Leanne Critchell

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THE UNIVERSITY OF WINCHESTER

ABSTRACT FOR THESIS

FACULTY OF HUMANITIES AND SOCIAL SCIENCES

Doctor of Philosophy

Holocaust Education in British Society and Culture

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Moving away from traditional encounters with Holocaust education in academic research this study explores the role of Holocaust education in the construction and mediation of British historical consciousness of the Holocaust. Following contextual explorations of the role of two of the most dominant symbols to have emerged within the field of Holocaust education since the establishment of the National Curriculum, the Holocaust survivor and Auschwitz-Birkenau, this study closely analyses the way in which each of these Holocaust icons has been represented and utilised within educational programmes promoted by the Holocaust Educational Trust. It is shown that the educational representations of these symbols contribute to the domestication of Holocaust consciousness within a British narrative, reinforcing positive interpretations of British national identity and the benefits of liberal democracy whilst, simultaneously, distancing the crimes committed during the Holocaust from the British public through representing these acts as the very antithesis of what is deemed to be British.

Through such analysis it is demonstrated that Holocaust education, as it exists in Britain today, reflects the British context in which it has evolved whilst illustrating how it has also fundamentally been shaped by this same context. Whilst considering the ways in which these representations both reflect and shape understandings of the Holocaust this study also illustrates that the Holocaust as it exists in popular consciousness, and educational programmes, is being increasingly unmoored from its historical context as the iconic symbols associated with it are becoming gradually dehistoricised as a means of providing relevant “lessons” for contemporary society. As Holocaust educators reach a crossroads in their field and prepare to decide the future shape British Holocaust education will assume this research constitutes a timely contribution to existing knowledge and understanding of how the Holocaust is encountered within the educational sphere and within British society and culture.

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Declaration

No portion of the work referred to in the Thesis has been submitted in support of an application for another degree or qualification of this or any other university or other institute of learning.

I confirm that this Thesis is entirely my own work.

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## Preface

This research has been carried out as part of an AHRC funded Collaborative Doctoral Award between the University of Winchester and the Holocaust Educational Trust. The content of this thesis reflects the collaborative nature of this project in that Holocaust education in Britain is mainly explored through the lens of the work carried out by the Trust. Thereby providing a snapshot of the field of Holocaust education through exploring the work of the organisation with the most public and political profile of all those involved in the mediation of the Holocaust in British society.

As part of this collaborative arrangement I was, during the course of my research, required to spend a few months at the Trust in order to better understand the ethos of the organisation. These awards are seen as a simple way of encouraging relationships between universities and non-academic organisations. Such partnerships not only reduce the conceptual distance between university led research and the public sphere but they are also seen to provide doctoral students with the opportunity to gain first-hand experience of a non-academic organisation and to disseminate their work within a non-academic environment. Through this AHRC award the Trust have willingly entered a dialogue with university based research and the decision to engage with a collaborative research project of this kind suggests a very constructive approach to how they view themselves, their work and the future direction of their organisation. For, despite the worthwhile and seemingly straightforward aims of these collaborative awards, the reality of undertaking a collaborative project is actually far more complex, for both the student and organisation, concerned. Hosting a PhD student of course poses some tensions particularly if that student engages critically with the work carried out by the host organisation as opposed to simply documenting a history of the organisation itself. These tensions are often amplified if the organisation is a charitable one which is reliant on a particular public image to ensure the continuation of their work.

In this regard the time I have spent working at the Trust has highlighted the extent to which organisations like the Holocaust Educational Trust find themselves in a difficult position in terms of their ability to evaluate themselves, and appraise their work, honestly and openly. This difficulty stems, in part, from their own success and status within British society and culture. As will be demonstrated within the thesis itself, Holocaust education is today viewed by survivors, politicians, and the general public as not only being necessary in British society but, also, as carrying out an almost sacred role in ensuring the inoculation of society against discrimination,

racism and prejudice. As such the Trust has assumed a position of authority in British society. Whilst of course this authoritative position has allowed the Trust to increase their prominence in the promotion of knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust it has also meant that it is increasingly difficult for the organisation to maintain critical distance from their work, their aims and their objectives.

It is clear that those who support the Trust, both in principle and financially, hold certain expectations of the charity in terms of the work they carry out, the education they mediate and the ethos underpinning their public, and political, roles. As such, it is presumed by these stakeholders that the Trust will act in a certain accepted way and, therefore, any attempt to re-evaluate or re-orientate the focus of their educational programmes or the political position assumed by the Trust in media reports is likely to be met with resistance. Even significant changes in light of research conducted into their own projects could be seen by some as being detrimental to the extremely emotive, and popular, educational projects which the Trust currently promotes or the overall objectives of the organisation itself.

This of course puts the Holocaust Educational Trust in a difficult position which should not be underestimated for their success has ultimately meant that for many the work they do resists critical analysis. Equally, there are more practical considerations. A charitable organisation such as the Trust needs to project a certain public image and their work needs to be viewed in a positive light so as to ensure the continuation of their funding and, subsequently, their work. Ultimately, therefore, however hospitable and open to discussion the Trust as a host organisation may be, they of course had concerns about what I might say about their work particularly within the public sphere. Given that the aim of research is to disseminate information to a wider audience this tension can be acute yet it is also an understandable response to the situation within which the collaborative partners find themselves.

The complexities faced by the Trust in terms of balancing their successful public role with the desire for critical engagement with their work were also encountered, and had to be negotiated by, myself. Being both a part of the organisation you are researching, whilst also engaging objectively with the work of that organisation, poses some difficult questions. Whilst it was of course important that I recognise the public facing role of the host organisation throughout this study it was also crucial that I ensured that the integrity and independence of my research was maintained. Managing this relationship can be challenging especially when you are working

alongside those whose work you are analysing. As such, and reflecting the public nature of the Trust's role in society, much of the work carried out on behalf of the Trust has been presented internally. Alongside such complexities, I have also had to encounter the fact that Holocaust education, and those who carry it out are viewed, and view themselves, as untouchable and criticism of them, however constructive, is often viewed extremely negatively both inside and outside of the organisations which promote it. Society has invested a considerable amount into Holocaust education and as such, both the general public and the organisations that carry out this education are, understandably, defensive over any perceived criticism of the way in which it is implemented.

Nonetheless, by entering into this partnership the Trust has allowed critical engagement with their work. Yet whilst the Trust has opened their organisation to critical analysis they should not read the research included within this thesis as disparagement of their work. The study has been carried out through an impartial lens and it is hoped that any critical analysis will be considered as being constructive. Any points found within this work which refer to the contradictions inherent within British Holocaust education should not be considered as being directly projected towards the Trust, their work or objectives. These reflections are projected through the lens of this organisation for it is they who have opened their doors to this research, and they who are the most public facing organisation of its kind in this field, however, the observations made are oft more general comments on the contradictory landscape of Holocaust education. As this study shall demonstrate, the Holocaust Educational Trust have been instrumental in the establishment of Holocaust education as it exists today but this should not suggest that they alone are fully responsible for the shape it has come to assume.

Through allowing research to be conducted in this area they have taken the first step in allowing the academic community to gain more of an understanding of the complexities charitable organisations face and the pressures inherent in providing a mode of education which has such political investment and public influence. Working within the organisation I have been researching has provided me with an unrivalled experience and has allowed me to gain a greater understanding both of the ethos of the organisation and the difficulties and challenges encountered on a daily basis by those who work within it. Therefore, for the opportunity to embark on this partnership I would like to express my gratitude to the Holocaust Educational Trust. In particular, those within the Ed Team who have willingly, and tirelessly, answered any

question I have posed to them and who accepted me as a part of their organisation from day one.

## Introduction

In February 2013 the Department for Education published its draft proposals for the reform of the National Curriculum. Included amongst the programmes for study highlighted within the suggested reforms for Key Stage 3 history it was proposed that pupils should be taught about the 'Nazi atrocities in occupied Europe and the unique evil of the Holocaust.'<sup>1</sup> That the Holocaust would continue to assume a place on the National Curriculum was not in itself a surprise. This historical event has been part of the curriculum since 1991 and, despite concerns expressed in 2007 after rumours were circulated that it was to be removed from the educational calendar, the new proposals indicate that there was no intention of the subject being extracted from historical study in schools.<sup>2</sup>

Yet whilst the continued presence of the Holocaust on the National Curriculum was not a surprise the use of term "unique evil" to describe the Holocaust caused astonishment amongst historians, educationists and teachers. Some articulated their concerns that to situate the 'unique evil of the Holocaust' alongside a new history curriculum aimed to inspire a positive affirmation of British history and identity would not only be to ignore other genocides but, more significantly, could encourage the view that, as one history teacher noted, the Holocaust took place 'outside of history as something which was perpetrated by aliens from the planet evil who were defeated by the forces of good.'<sup>3</sup> Although this line was removed after the initial consultation period for the curriculum came to an end the original decision to define the Holocaust as being an event of 'unique evil', and the use of such striking and emotive language in an otherwise neutral, and somewhat bland, policy document, raises a number of questions about the way in which the Holocaust has been absorbed into British society and culture.<sup>4</sup>

Over the course of the years since 1945 the question as to whether pedagogy has a 'special and unique task in the education of man in the world after Auschwitz' has been asked repeatedly.<sup>5</sup> Yet despite the importance of education in the construction of historical consciousness, the

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<sup>1</sup> The Department for Education, *The National Curriculum in England: Framework Document for Consultation*, (February 2013), p. 171.

<sup>2</sup> 'UK Government Acts on Hoax E-Mail', (February 4 2008), available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/7226778.stm>, (accessed 15 December 2013)

<sup>3</sup> Morgan. P, 'New History Curriculum Draft Proposal - Have your Say!', The Historical Association, available at [http://www.history.org.uk/forum/topic\\_view.php?os=40&fid=27&tid=160](http://www.history.org.uk/forum/topic_view.php?os=40&fid=27&tid=160), (accessed 17 December 2013)

<sup>4</sup> Although the term 'unique evil' had been removed the Holocaust remains the only mandated content within this particular part of the curriculum. Please see: The Department for Education, *The National Curriculum in England: Framework Document*, (July 2013), p. 210

<sup>5</sup> Carmon. A, 'Problems in Coping with the Holocaust: Experiences with Students in a Multinational Program', *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 450, (July 1980), pp. 227 – 236, p. 227

unique influence of Holocaust education carried out by privately funded organisations such as the Holocaust Educational Trust, and the specific role that the field of Holocaust Education has played in both creating and sustaining a particular perception of British history and of British identity has rarely been considered. This study will rectify this omission in what is hoped will be the first step towards encouraging more engagement with the role of these organisations, and Holocaust Education more broadly, in the sculpting of a domesticated British narrative of the Holocaust within popular imagination.

Following this introductory chapter, during which I will discuss the themes which both surround and are encountered within the study, I will provide contextual explorations of the role of two of the most dominant symbols to have emerged within Holocaust education since the establishment of the National Curriculum, the Holocaust survivor and Auschwitz-Birkenau. This study will then closely analyse the way in which each of these Holocaust icons has been represented and utilised within educational programmes promoted by the Holocaust Educational Trust. Throughout this study it will be asserted that the educational representations of these symbols contribute to the domestication of Holocaust consciousness within a British narrative whilst simultaneously distancing the Holocaust within cultural understanding. Whilst upon an initial reading this may appear to be a contradiction, it will be shown that it is possible to reconcile these two statements when considering the Holocaust in British consciousness. This study will also illustrate that the Holocaust as it exists in popular consciousness, and educational programmes, is being increasingly unmoored from its historical context, and the symbols associated with it are becoming dehistoricised, as a means of providing relevant “lessons” and meaning for contemporary society both inside and outside the classroom. For the way in which the Holocaust has emerged within British Holocaust education reveals just as much about British society and culture as it does about the role of the Holocaust in British educational spheres.

### *Britain and the Holocaust*

When discussing the opening of the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum in June 2000 one social commentator observed that, ‘as it recedes into the past, the Holocaust becomes ever more a part of our present.’<sup>6</sup> Certainly the Holocaust has become progressively more pervasive in British cultural life as time has passed and, as the distance between the event and new generations of British citizens grows, the imperative to remember the Holocaust appears to

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<sup>6</sup> Greenberg, S, ‘Visual Art: A Salutory History Lesson for us All - Holocaust Exhibition Imperial War Museum’, *The Independent on Sunday*, (11 June 2000)

become even more acute. This imperative reflects an upsurge in Holocaust memory across Europe, Israel and the United States where, Young claims, there has been a 'veritable explosion' of monuments to the Holocaust in recent years.<sup>7</sup> Within Britain there has been a concerted effort made within both political and popular culture in the last twenty-five years to ensure that the Holocaust is remembered in British society.

This intensification of Holocaust memorialisation can be discerned through the inclusion of the Holocaust in the national calendar through the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day, the opening of a permanent Holocaust exhibition within the London branch of the Imperial War Museum in 2000, and the compulsory position that the Holocaust assumes on the National Curriculum. Memory of the Holocaust has also permeated other areas of society. During the 2012 European Championship campaign in Poland and the Ukraine, for example, the England football team not only visited Auschwitz-Birkenau but also heard from a survivor before the tournament began.<sup>8</sup> All of these commemorative actions reinforce British consciousness of the Holocaust but, even more than that, these sites of memory, along with other vehicles of memory such as literature and film, in the words of Kansteiner, 'neither simply reflect nor determine collective memory but are inextricably involved in its construction and evolution.'<sup>9</sup>

The explosion of Holocaust memorialisation should not be considered in isolation. For interest in commemorating and memorialising the Holocaust has to be considered alongside a greater engagement in both the public arena, and academic study, with both memory and memorialisation. Kerwin Lee Klein encapsulates the prevalence of discussions surrounding memory when he announces to his readers, 'Welcome to the memory industry.'<sup>10</sup> The use of the term "memory industry" is extremely pertinent for, in the latter part of the twentieth and early years of the twenty-first century, there has been a considerable rise in the amount of interest shown in the concept of memory and the representation of events which have taken place in the past - considered to be what has occurred prior to the present time. Within the academy, studies of memory are becoming increasingly common place, be they looking at the use and form of memorialisation in a post conflict society, discussing oral history as a means of historical enquiry, detailing in-depth case studies of memory transmission in a localised context, analysing the historiography of memory studies itself or exploring one of the many facets of memory

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<sup>7</sup> Young, J, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, (London, Yale University Press, 1993), p. x

<sup>8</sup> Winter, H, 'Players have to speak out against intolerance, People listen to them', *The Telegraph*, (24 May 2012)

<sup>9</sup> Kansteiner, W, 'Finding Meaning in Memory: A Methodological Critique of Collective Memory Studies', *History and Theory*, Vol. 41, No. 2, (May 2002), pp. 179 – 197, p. 195

<sup>10</sup> Klein, K.L, 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse', *Representations*, No. 69, Special Issue: Grounds for Remembering, (Winter 2000), pp. 127 – 150, p. 127

which have yet to be extensively detailed within academic research. Yet this seeming preoccupation with memory does not appear to be purely confined to the pages of the academic journal, indeed, the industry of memory to which Klein refers is just, if not more, prevalent within contemporary culture.

This interest in the past is reflected by the increasing memorialisation which is taking place across Britain. With the proliferation of memorials to victims of war, blue plaques on houses dedicated to well-known residents and the continual erection of monuments to catastrophic events it appears that Dan Stone's assertion that 'An obsession with memory as expressed in memorials, museums and public commemorations is one of the characteristic expressions of modernity' appears to reflect the reality of British society's relationship with the past.<sup>11</sup> It has even been described that this most recent interest in memory appears to be bordering on an 'obsession.'<sup>12</sup> Despite the articulation of such concerns, however, what is strikingly apparent is that this so called memory "obsession" is showing no sign of abating.

The increased memorialisation of the Holocaust therefore reflects wider trends of commemorating and remembering the past and must be considered within this context. Yet it is apparent that the Holocaust has gradually come to emerge as a ruling symbol in British culture and memory. Despite the prevalence of Holocaust memorialisation and commemoration in British society and culture this should not suggest, however, that the Holocaust as it is known and understood today has always assumed a place of prominence within British consciousness or academic research. For whilst, as Stone observes, 'It is hard now to imagine a time when the Holocaust was not central to western consciousness or when there was a dearth of writing on the subject' as Kushner acknowledges, when considering research on Holocaust, despite the current abundance of literature available, in Britain, 'it was far from inevitable that it would develop as extensively as was the case.'<sup>13</sup> This is not least due to the fact that the very concept of the Holocaust 'as a particular component of the Second World War or more generally of the Nazi era, involving specifically the planned extermination of European Jewry, took many years to evolve, a process that was uneven and is still perhaps incomplete.'<sup>14</sup> Certainly British historians

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<sup>11</sup> Stone. D, 'Memory, Memorials and the Museums', in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, Stone. D (ed), (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 508 – 532, p. 508

<sup>12</sup> Bourke. J, 'Introduction: 'Remembering' War', *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 39, No. 4, Special Issue: Collective Memory (October 2004), pp. 473 – 485, p. 473

<sup>13</sup> Stone. D, 'Introduction', in *Historiography of the Holocaust*, Stone (ed), pp. 1-8, p. 2; Kushner. T, 'Britain, the United States and the Holocaust: In Search of a Historiography', in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, Stone (ed), pp. 253-275, p. 254

<sup>14</sup> Ibid. p. 255

such as A.J.P. Taylor, Hugh Trevor-Roper and Alan Bullock were heavily criticised by Lucy Dawidowicz in 1981 for their perceived failure to engage with the Holocaust in the formative years of Holocaust historiography, as Dawidowicz claimed, 'The English historians of modern Germany, whose work has gained them international renown astonish us with the minimal attention they give to German antisemitism and to the destruction of the Jews.'<sup>15</sup>

Despite such criticism, however, it is apparent that more recent research from within Britain has focused more heavily not only on the Holocaust itself but also on the continuing impact of Holocaust remembrance on the memory of the historical event, both in Britain and internationally. Oft cited, and of seminal importance to the field, and to this study, is Tony Kushner's *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History*. Kushner's work continues to influence new generations of scholars by encouraging them to look more critically at British memorial practices given British reluctance to engage with the Jewish specificity of suffering before, during and after the Second World War.<sup>16</sup> Moving away from traditional explanations of purely antisemitic sentiment for the lack of engagement with the Jewish experience, Kushner has highlighted what Levene recorded as the, 'essential ambivalence of the liberal west' and the failure of the British liberal imagination to accept and acknowledge the specificity of the persecution of the Jewish population of Europe in preference for a more inclusive mode of understanding and remembrance.<sup>17</sup> Kushner's study has certainly influenced the direction of future research conducted into Britain and the Holocaust. For example Louise London's, *Whitehall and the Jews*, which explores the complex history of Jewish immigration into Britain, and reflects Kushner's focus on the complexity of the British relationship with its own Jewish population, and the Jewish population outside its borders. London's work seemingly echoes Kushner's assertion that to explore British responses to the in isolation, can provide only limited insights into a period of history whereas adopting 'extended chronologies' and by seeking greater context for British engagement with the Holocaust one is able to gain a longer term perspective into not only the functioning of a nation state but also, as this thesis will

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<sup>15</sup> Dawidowicz. L, *The Holocaust and the Historians*, (Cambridge, Harvard University Press, 1981), pp. 31-32; Cesarani. D, 'From Bullock to Kershaw: Some Peculiarities of British Historical Writing About the Nazi Persecution and Mass Murder of the Jews', in *Holocaust Historiography in Context: Emergence, Challenges, Polemics and Achievements*, Bankier. D & Michman. D,(eds), (Yad Vashem, The International Institute for Historical Research, 2008), pp. 339-354

<sup>16</sup> Kushner. T, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History*, (Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1994)

<sup>17</sup> Levene. M, 'Review Article - The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History by Tony Kushner', *The English Historical Review*, Vol. 112, No. 446 (April 1997), pp. 538-539, p. 539

demonstrate, a more enhanced understanding of the gradual evolution of Holocaust consciousness.<sup>18</sup>

Certainly the significance of considering historical context when engaging with altering perceptions and interpretations of an event is emphasised throughout this study. Alongside Kushner this thesis acknowledges the importance, not only of contextual understanding, but, also, of critical self-reflection, both in Holocaust education and wider British culture. For, it is argued, the way in which the Holocaust is both remembered and taught in Britain has drawn not only on pre-existing conceptions of liberal democracy but, also, Britain's own cultural and ideological relationship with the "Other", either in the form of the social construct of the imaginary Jew as the original outsider within or the image of the violent perpetrator represented through the image of the German nation or the representation of Eastern Europe. A lack of self-analysis and contextual understanding from within Britain itself, however, means that these preconceptions and existing narratives are rarely explored within research focused on the evolution of historical consciousness of the Holocaust and are also frequently overlooked within educational research, despite the fact that the way in which the British people encounter the Holocaust both within cultural representations and education is within a British context and built on existing British narratives.

Despite the work of those such as London, Kushner remains concerned that little progress has been made 'in understanding the cultural, societal and ideological underpinnings of either state or society's responses to the plight of the persecuted Jews in the liberal democratic and other bystander nations.'<sup>19</sup> Whilst certainly this area requires further sustained exploration it is apparent that the legacy of the Holocaust in Britain has, in recent years, achieved more consideration within British research although this area remains surprisingly under researched. It is hoped, however, that the recent publication of an edited volume entitled *Britain and the Holocaust: Remembering and Representing War and Genocide*, is a gesture towards greater engagement with this subject in the academic arena.<sup>20</sup> Prior to this publication some debate had, however, ensued about the relevance of the Holocaust in British life and British memory, in particular, surrounding modes of Holocaust remembrance such as Holocaust Memorial Day. Debate concerning a day of Holocaust remembrance may, on the surface, appear to be a

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<sup>18</sup> Kushner. T, 'Britain, the United States and the Holocaust', p. 262. See also London. L, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003)

<sup>19</sup> Kushner. T, 'Britain, the United States and the Holocaust', p. 262

<sup>20</sup> Sharples. C & Jensen. O (eds), *Britain and the Holocaust: Remembering and Representing War and Genocide*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013)

somewhat peripheral aspect of Holocaust research especially considering the volume of publications concerning the historical event itself. Yet, as Zygmunt Bauman has noted, 'By comparison with its posthumous life, the reality of the Holocaust seems simple and straightforward' and within a British context, it certainly appears that it is the complexities of the posthumous life of the Holocaust which has prompted an increase in engagement with the Holocaust in the academic arena whilst also exposing some of the fractures inherent in historical debate.<sup>21</sup>

When discussing the commemoration of Yom HaShoah in October 1997, one British newspaper reporter observed that, 'Desire to commemorate the Holocaust is so acute that Jews have a special day set aside on which to do so.'<sup>22</sup> Yet despite articulating an awareness of a need amongst members of the Jewish community to commemorate the Holocaust this article offered no suggestion that a commemorative day was required for the wider British public. Even during the 50th anniversary of the end of the Second World War the Holocaust provided merely a side-story to the official political, and public, commemorations which took place. The Holocaust, it seemed, existed only as a marginal narrative in British discourse or national memory. Yet within two years of this article being published plans for a national day of Holocaust remembrance would be unveiled and on 27 January 2001 the first Holocaust Memorial Day would take place. A day of international commemoration, Holocaust Memorial Day is commemorated by many of those 31 nations which form the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (from herein referred to as the IHRA) previously known as the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education Remembrance and Research, of which Britain became a founding member in 1998. As an intergovernmental body whose central purpose is to 'place political and social leaders' support behind the need for Holocaust education, remembrance, and research' the IHRA has played a significant role in the promotion of Holocaust Memorial Day and in encouraging international Holocaust research and understanding.<sup>23</sup> Commemorated in Britain on 27 January each year, the date of the Soviet Union's liberation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the day was designed to be a day of remembrance and of education, to ensure that not only are the victims of the Holocaust, and of more recent genocides, not forgotten but that also so 'we seek to learn the lessons of the past' to ensure future discrimination and intolerance are prevented.<sup>24</sup>

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<sup>21</sup> Bauman. Z, 'The Holocaust's Ghost', in Decosta. F.C & Schwartz. B, *The Holocaust's Ghost: Writings on Art, Politics, Law and Education*, (Edmonton, University of Alberta Press, 2000), pp. 3–15, p. 3

<sup>22</sup> Garner. C, 'Rabbi calls for end to Holocaust Memorial Day', *The Independent*, (20 October 1997)

<sup>23</sup> 'About the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance', [www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us](http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us), (accessed 16 December 2013)

<sup>24</sup> 'About HMD and HMDT', [www.hmd.org.uk/page/about-hmd-and-hmdt](http://www.hmd.org.uk/page/about-hmd-and-hmdt), (accessed 17 December 2013)

Despite the fact that public, and political, engagement with the subject had been relatively fragmentary up until this point, the British Government was to become one of the leading advocates of the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day. Once Government proposals for such a day were announced in 1999, discussions surrounding the need for a Holocaust Remembrance Day in Britain became increasingly more animated within the public arena. Yet whilst Carly Whyborn, Chief Executive Officer of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust until February 2012, claimed that 'Holocaust Memorial Day has been really embraced by the UK community' the reality is, as one social commentator has observed, that the entire notion of a day devoted to Holocaust remembrance was 'mired in controversy' from the start.<sup>25</sup> Some suspected that such a day would become 'a triumph of professional mourning over history' whilst others expressed concerns that the notion of a day dedicated to commemorating those who perished during the Holocaust was undesirable due to the specificity it inferred.<sup>26</sup> Despite being designed to discuss more recent genocides as well as the Holocaust, some felt that by naming the day Holocaust Memorial Day it implied a hierarchy of suffering in which other victims of oppression would not be recognised. The Muslim Council of Britain, for example, officially boycotted the national commemorations until 2008.<sup>27</sup> In opposition to such sentiments others felt that such a day was needed, 'to pay respect to those who died and suffered at the hands of those madmen who wanted to control man's destiny, and to be there as a stark reminder that if we forget history, it will surely visit us again.'<sup>28</sup> As Kushner has suggested, rather than encouraging unity some of the discussions surrounding Holocaust Memorial Day 'have been heated and at times unsavoury.'<sup>29</sup>

Discussions about the legacy of the Holocaust in Britain, in particular with regards to Holocaust Memorial Day, highlight that whilst the position of the Holocaust as a seminal event in British memory has made some uneasy, for others, the acceptance of the Holocaust as an integral part of British memory has been firmly welcomed. These debates have not remained confined to the

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<sup>25</sup> Whyborn. C, 'About Holocaust Memorial Day and HMDT Podcast', available at <http://hmd.org.uk/resources/podcasts/about-holocaust-memorial-day-podcast>, (accessed 13 August 2012); Pierce. A, 'Holocaust Ceremony Wins Little Support - Holocaust Memorial Day', *The Times*, (25 January 2001)

<sup>26</sup> 'Comment: Who is allowed to remember the Armenians? Not us', *The Observer*, (5 November 2000)

<sup>27</sup> It should be noted that despite the end of the boycott representatives have subsequently failed to attend in protest at Israel's military intervention in Gaza, due to the fact that they feel a more inclusive title such as Genocide Memorial Day should be employed. Dodd. V, 'Muslim Council ends Holocaust Memorial Day Boycott', *The Guardian*, (3 December 2007), available at, [www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/dec/03/secondworldwar.religion](http://www.guardian.co.uk/uk/2007/dec/03/secondworldwar.religion), (accessed 20 December 2013) and Bright. M, 'Muslim Council of Britain Split Over Holocaust Day Broadcast', *The Jewish Chronicle*, (14 January 2010), available at, [www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/26063/muslim-council-britain-split-over-holocaust-day-boycott](http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/26063/muslim-council-britain-split-over-holocaust-day-boycott), (accessed 20 December 2013)

<sup>28</sup> Bogusz. J, 'Talking Point: Do We Need a Holocaust Memorial Day?' (30 January 2002), available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking\\_point/1774160.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/talking_point/1774160.stm), (accessed 14 August 2012)

<sup>29</sup> Kushner. T, 'Too Little, Too Late? Reflections on Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day', *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture*, Vol. 23, No.1, (2004), pp. 116-129, p. 117

public, or political, sphere and have also entered into academic discourse. Those such as David Cesarani have praised the establishment of such a day stating that, 'There is now a day in the calendar that will be contested terrain for interpretations of the Holocaust and genocide.'<sup>30</sup> Others, most notably Bloxham, Stone and Kushner, have gestured to some of the more difficult questions associated with such a day which have yet to be addressed, such as the lack of engagement with the role of the perpetrator due to the move towards commemorative practices rather than educational interpretations, or the failure to address the issue of Britain's own colonial history.<sup>31</sup> Cesarani, however, considers that those who raise concerns such as these about the day are simply 'offering a counsel of despair' suggesting that, when considering the establishment of such a day of remembrance, one should start from the position that 'politics is the art of the possible, not the realm of perfection.'<sup>32</sup>

Such debates reveal much about the many divisions which surround interpretations about the way Holocaust memory in Britain has developed. For all forms of memorialisation, and the way that they are interpreted, continually change according to contemporary concerns, for, 'the past is the remembered present, just as the future is the anticipated present: memory is always derived from the present and from the contents of the present' and this knowledge appears to have influenced scholars who have sought to explore what it is in the present which influences the direction of Holocaust memory.<sup>33</sup> It will be reiterated during this study that the way in which the Holocaust has been taught, both in the past and in the present, has evolved according to contemporary concerns and political acceptability.

Institutionalised Holocaust remembrance has become 'an invaluable prop with which to promulgate Western values while at the same time acting as a moral alibi for interventions against anti-Western regimes.'<sup>34</sup> This thesis will demonstrate that within Britain Holocaust education has become one of the fundamental vehicles through which these values and, more specifically, values surrounding British identity, are sustained through the perpetuation of a

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<sup>30</sup> Cesarani, D, 'Seizing the Day: Why Britain Will Benefit from Holocaust Memorial Day', *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 34, No.4, (2000), pp. 61-66, p.66

<sup>31</sup> Stone, D, 'Day of Remembrance or Day of Forgetting? Or, Why Britain Does Not Need a Holocaust Memorial Day', *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 34, Vol. 4, (2000), pp.53-59, Bloxham, D, 'Britain's Holocaust Memorial Days: Reshaping the Past in the Service of the Present', *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol.21, No.1-2, (2002), pp.41-62 and Kushner, 'Too Little, Too Late?'

<sup>32</sup> Cesarani, 'Seizing the Day', p. 63; Cesarani, D, 'Does the Singularity of the Holocaust make it Incomparable and Inoperative for Commemorating, Studying and Preventing Genocide? Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day as Case Study', *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (Autumn 2001) pp. 40-56, p. 51

<sup>33</sup> Funkenstein, A, 'Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness', *History and Memory*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (Spring-Summer 1989), pp.5-26, p. 9

<sup>34</sup> Levene, M, 'Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day: A Case of Post-Cold War Wish-Fulfilment or Brazen Hypocrisy?', *Human Rights Review*, Vol. 7, No. 3, (April/June 2006), pp. 26-59, p. 26

recognisable and domesticated historical narrative of the Holocaust. Certainly the establishment of such a day in Britain poses some interesting questions. In particular, 'since commemoration of the Holocaust [in Britain] does not derive from a shared experience of it, the question of who decides on what form the commemoration takes, who it will include and what it will seek to achieve is highly politicized.'<sup>35</sup> Whilst not ignoring the good intentions of those politicians who instigated the day such memorialisation, 'presents a convenient, if not cynically opportunistic occasion in which the government can shape the country's collective memory with a narrative that will undoubtedly follow the pattern of most mainstream narratives of the Holocaust: catastrophe and redemption. The horror of the Holocaust will be occluded in a celebration of our moral superiority.'<sup>36</sup> It will be the position of this study that, despite the occasional gesture towards critical self-reflection, Holocaust Memorial Day, and the education carried out by educational organisations both as part of this commemorative event and throughout the rest of the educational calendar, act as highly politicised tools in which British moral superiority over Holocaust perpetrators, and perpetrators of more recent genocide and discrimination, is celebrated. Thereby reinforcing a sense of British identity fostered on a deep belief in the superiority of liberal democratic values through what Bloxham describes as 'rather safe and politically acceptable, not to say convenient, messages' for humanity.<sup>37</sup>

### Holocaust Education

Alongside discourse regarding Holocaust memorialisation, considerable discussion and debate also surround the way in which the Holocaust is taught. Having become mandatory on the National Curriculum for England and Wales in 1991, the Holocaust now forms the basis of a mode of education aimed at creating more enlightened citizens who do not remain impervious to racism or injustice in everyday life. As the London Jewish Cultural Centre asserts, the aim of their Holocaust teaching programme is to 'fight prejudice and bigotry through education.'<sup>38</sup> Despite this mandatory position, however, questions as to why the Holocaust is taught, how it is taught and what precisely can be learnt from studying the subject have been fiercely contested in educational, academic, and political circles and within public discourse. Not surprisingly, these debates have been extensively analysed by educationists as teachers, independent educational organisations and educational theorists attempt to improve Holocaust education within the

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<sup>35</sup> Stone, 'Day of Remembrance or Day of Forgetting?' p. 56

<sup>36</sup> Ibid. p. 57

<sup>37</sup> Bloxham, 'Britain's Holocaust Memorial Days', p. 44

<sup>38</sup> London Jewish Cultural Centre, 'About Us: Holocaust and Anti-Racism Education Department', available at, [www.ljcc.org.uk/holocaust/](http://www.ljcc.org.uk/holocaust/) (accessed 17 December 2013)

confines of the curriculum. This literature has been carried out through an educationist lens and, therefore, much of the literature is concerned only with the practicalities of teaching the Holocaust or seeks to provide teachers with information which they can then utilise in the classroom.

Despite the arrival of the Holocaust on the National Curriculum it is clear that guidance for teachers on how to tackle this complex and emotive subject was scarce and remained so during the formative years of Holocaust education studies. The publication of Carrie Supple's work *From Prejudice to Genocide: Learning about the Holocaust* in 1993 provided a comprehensive Holocaust specific text amassing maps, text and source material in an attempt to provide teachers and students with appropriate material to use in the classroom as well as an historical and thematic overview of some of the main issues to be raised within the classroom.<sup>39</sup> This publication was to prove to be one of the first steps into the creation of Holocaust specific educational materials. In 1997 a teaching and resource pack entitled *Lessons of the Holocaust*, created by the Spiro Institute (now known as the London Jewish Cultural Centre) in conjunction with the Holocaust Educational Trust was published. This comprehensive resource provided extensive teacher guidance notes and an instructional video as well as student worksheets and other resource materials. In 1998 in the wake of this publication, and echoing Supple, Ronnie Landau, in his work *Studying the Holocaust: Issues, Readings and Documents*, also sought to give guidance to teachers by providing key thematic readings, educational exercises and a glossary of terms in order to move Holocaust education away from the notion that the Holocaust is somehow removed from historical understanding.<sup>40</sup> Landau's pedagogical assumption that there are "lessons" to be gleaned from a study of the Holocaust is, however, highly contentious both inside, and outside, of the educational sphere, as will be explored later in this chapter.

Despite such material it is apparent that research conducted specifically on British Holocaust education has been, and continues to remain, somewhat sparse. A notable exception is the work produced by Paul Salmons who has been extremely influential in seeking to improve understanding of Holocaust teaching within a British context and has highlighted a number of issues inherent in Holocaust teaching within the Historical Association's *Teaching History* editorial – a professional journal aimed at providing Secondary School teachers with information

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<sup>39</sup> Supple, C, *From Prejudice to Genocide: Learning about the Holocaust*, (Stoke on Trent, Trentham Books Ltd, 1993)

<sup>40</sup> Landau, R, *Studying the Holocaust: Issues, Readings and Documents*, (Routledge, London, 1998)

and guidance about issues relating to History teaching within the curriculum.<sup>41</sup> The journal has proved to be a central site on which school teachers and educationists have debated and argued some of the fundamental principles of Holocaust teaching and, as such, provides a fascinating insight into some of the practical, and theoretical, complexities of teaching the Holocaust in Britain.

Aside from the respected and reasoned work of Salmons, published works which engage specifically with British Holocaust education remain relatively few. Those previous studies which have considered the topic, such as Lucy Russell's valuable narrative of the development of Holocaust education in the 2006 publication *Teaching the Holocaust in School History: Teachers or Preachers?* and Geoffrey Short and Carole Ann Reed's comparative, if somewhat limited, 2004 publication *Issues in Holocaust Education*, sought to document the development of Holocaust education with the latter focusing on the educational dilemmas faced by teachers building on previous research Short had conducted in 1995 which analysed Holocaust education, in particular the attitudes of teachers, in the years since the establishment of the National Curriculum.<sup>42</sup> In 2009 'an extensive empirical investigation of Holocaust education in England's state maintained secondary schools' was undertaken by the newly formed Holocaust Education Development Programme (HEDP) which was to form a part of the Institute for Education.<sup>43</sup> Although led by Stuart Foster, Paul Salmons was heavily involved in the research as were a number of other leading Holocaust educators, including the former Head of Education at the Holocaust Educational Trust, Kay Andrews. The aim of the research was to explore 'when, where, how and why' Holocaust teaching took place in schools across England through online surveys and interviews with teachers.<sup>44</sup> The propensity towards approaching Holocaust education through a survey based analysis reflects the fact that previous research into Holocaust education has mainly been conducted through a pedagogical, as opposed to an historical lens, and the methodological approach assumed tends to be quantitative, rather than qualitative.

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<sup>41</sup> Salmons, P, 'Moral Dilemmas: History-teaching and the Holocaust', *Teaching History*, Vol. 104, (2001), pp. 34-40 and Salmons. P, 'Universal Meaning or Historical Understanding? The Holocaust in History and History in the Curriculum', *Teaching History*, Vol. 141, (2010), pp. 57-63.

<sup>42</sup> Russell. L, *Teaching the Holocaust in School History: Teachers or Preachers?* (Continuum, London, 2006) and Short. G & Reed. C, *Issues in Holocaust Education*, (Ashgate Publishing, Aldershot, 2004) and Short. G, 'The Holocaust in the National Curriculum: A Survey of Teachers' Attitudes and Practices', *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (Winter 1995), pp. 167 – 188

<sup>43</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for Education, *United Kingdom Country Report for the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research*, (2010), p. 3

<sup>44</sup> Institute of Education, *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools: An Empirical Study of National Trends, Perspectives and Practice*, (London, Institute of Education, 2009), p. 7

One crucial piece of information that previous studies of British Holocaust education have yielded, however, and which has directly informed the direction of this study, is that, surprisingly, given the complexities inherent in an exploration of the subject, governmental resources and guidance with regards to the teaching of the Holocaust have been fragmentary and limited. This perhaps accounts for the influence which non-governmental institutions in particular the Holocaust Educational Trust, Imperial War Museum and Holocaust Centre had, and indeed still have, on the development of British Holocaust education. Despite this influence, however, very little research has been conducted into the role of these organisations in the mediation of memory, the way in which they represent the Holocaust. This omission is surprising considering that education can be interpreted as being one of the foremost mediators of historical consciousness in Britain today. Whilst the difficulties of Holocaust education have been debated at length and despite considered attention being paid to the role of history education as a significant site of memory construction historians appear to have given rather less attention to the nature of Holocaust education as a site of memory formation or transmission nor to the role of those organisations dedicated to Holocaust education within this. What is also notable is that previous studies, particularly those conducted by Short, have failed to consider in any depth the wider cultural context in which both they, and the education they discuss, were created. This study seeks to rectify these omissions within the literature and, moving away from a quantitative educationist perspective, will consider not only the influence non-governmental organisations have had on the development of Holocaust education but, also, the importance of contextualisation on the representation of Holocaust icons within British Holocaust education itself.

### *“Lessons” of the Holocaust*

One aspect of Holocaust education which has been frequently debated, and which is significant for this study, is the notion of the Holocaust possessing universal “lessons” for common humanity. Reflecting wider cultural representations and commemorations this idea has become a significant part of Holocaust education and, subsequently, of the way in which the Holocaust is understood in British society. Whilst this approach has been adopted internationally, in Britain the concept of universal “lessons” of the Holocaust has achieved particular significance and is perhaps the most utilised justification for the position of the Holocaust on the curriculum and the national calendar in Britain today. Short and Landau are keen proponents of Holocaust education as a means of imparting “lessons” and moral instruction to students, with Short in

particular being adamant that the Holocaust has “lessons” to communicate to students about racism and other issues relating to intolerance and prejudice. Shorts’ position is highlighted in his unequivocal assertion that, ‘The Holocaust has been shown to possess unambiguous and important lessons for both the educational system as a whole and for individual students.’<sup>45</sup> He claims that a study of the Holocaust ‘leaves students in no doubt as to where racism can lead’ and that the “lesson” they ultimately learn ‘is to treat any manifestation of racism with concern.’<sup>46</sup> This view is shared by Landau who believes that, ‘As we look with hope and optimism into the new millennium that stretches before us, we also cast a nervous and shame filled backward glance at the blood soaked century we have left behind and from which we would like perhaps to learn some lessons.’<sup>47</sup> From this perspective it is apparent that there is a strong mode of thought that Holocaust education provides the means by which students not only receive help in leaning ‘about the Holocaust but also in learning from it.’<sup>48</sup> Certainly in Short’s view learning from the Holocaust allows educators to ‘inoculate the generality of the population against racist and anti-Semitic propaganda.’<sup>49</sup>

Nonetheless, the question as to whether there are “lessons” to be derived from learning about the Holocaust has in fact prompted fierce debate with many competing and diametrically opposed views being expressed. A proponent of the view that the Holocaust cannot provide easily distillable and transmittable “lessons” is Peter Novick. In Novick’s view, ‘If there are “lessons” to be extracted from encountering the past, that encounter has to be with the past in all its messiness; they’re not likely to come from an encounter with a past that’s been shaped and shaded so that inspiring “lessons” will emerge.’<sup>50</sup> For Novick the extreme nature of the Holocaust renders the likelihood of “lessons” which can be gleaned from it to be minimal. One of the problems associated with the notion of “lessons” is that ‘many students do not want to see the subject as complicated and problematical, which is an inevitable feature of emotive and controversial history’ and as such the “lessons” which are considered to be able to be learnt fail to engage with the complexities of the Holocaust.<sup>51</sup> If carried out in this frame, Novick argues,

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<sup>45</sup> Short. G, ‘Lessons of the Holocaust: A response to the critics’, *Educational Review*, Vol. 55, No. 3, (2003), pp. 277-287, p. 286

<sup>46</sup> Ibid. p. 285

<sup>47</sup> Landau. R, *The Nazi Holocaust*, (London, I.B.Tauris, 2006), p. x

<sup>48</sup> Short. G, ‘Learning from genocide? A study in the failure of Holocaust education’, *Intercultural Education*, Vol. 16, No. 4, (2005), pp. 367-380, p.378

<sup>49</sup> Short, *Issues in Holocaust Education*, p. 6

<sup>50</sup> Novick. P, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*, (London, Bloomsbury, 2000), pp. 261-263.

<sup>51</sup> The Historical Association, *Teaching Emotive and Controversial History: A Report from the Historical Association on the Challenges and Opportunities for Teaching Emotive and Controversial History 3-19*, (The Historical Association, London, 2007), p. 5

the Holocaust can be reduced to simplistic and shallow “lessons” which does not necessarily render them incorrect but ultimately leads to them being ‘empty and not very useful.’<sup>52</sup>

Some, such as Marrus, whilst less outspoken than Novick, ‘confess to having always been sceptical about the so-called “lessons” of history.’<sup>53</sup> Whilst Morris argues forcefully that ‘there are no universal “lessons” to be drawn’ from the historical event and that Holocaust education should not be carried out on the assumption that there are.<sup>54</sup> Dawidowicz was herself dismissive of the teaching of the Holocaust through the lens of moral lessons stating that:

‘As for the teaching of moral lessons, all the curricula come to pretty much the same conclusion, with the variations among them apparent only in their rhetoric. Santayana’s words ‘that those who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it’ are widely quoted or misquoted. A cruder version of the same idea turns up as so that it will never happen again.’<sup>55</sup>

Nicholas Kinloch has stated that, ‘the Shoah probably has no more to teach British students than any other genocide of modern – or for that matter, medieval – times.’<sup>56</sup> Kinloch sparked impassioned debate on both sides of the “lessons” divide in a review article he wrote for the *Teaching History* journal in which he questioned the suitability of framing the Holocaust through a moral as opposed to an historical lens.<sup>57</sup> As Kinloch argued in a latter issue of the same journal, in which he provided a rejoinder to the criticisms he had encountered since his first publication, ‘There may be good reason to teach children that killing other human beings is generally undesirable. Whether the history class is really the place for such lessons, however, remains debatable.’<sup>58</sup> Kinloch was not the first to articulate concerns about the suitability of teaching the Holocaust through a predominantly moral frame. Indeed, his words echo the concerns which had previously been expressed by British historian Lionel Kochan who, during debates about the place of the Holocaust in school education, was particularly outspoken against the inclusion of the Holocaust on the original National Curriculum, asserting that despite the belief amongst some that a study of the Holocaust could prevent future atrocities, ‘Have these reminders and all the scholarly investigations into the causes of wars, ever prevented a

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<sup>52</sup> Novick, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*, p. 240

<sup>53</sup> Marrus, M, ‘Good History and Teaching the Holocaust’, *Perspectives*, Vol. 31, No. 5, (May 1993), online edition, [www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1993/9305/9305TEC.cfm](http://www.historians.org/perspectives/issues/1993/9305/9305TEC.cfm)

<sup>54</sup> Morris, M, *Curriculum and the Holocaust: Competing Sites of Memory and Representation*, (Mahwah, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, 2001), p. 19

<sup>55</sup> Dawidowicz, L, *What is the use of Jewish History?* (New York, Schocken Books, 1992), p. 70-71

<sup>56</sup> Kinloch, N, ‘Parallel Catastrophes? Uniqueness, Redemption and the Shoah’, *Teaching History*, Vol. 104, (2001), pp. 8-14, p. 13

<sup>57</sup> Kinloch, N, ‘Learning about the Holocaust: Moral or Historical Question?’, *Teaching History*, Vol. 93, (1998) pp. 44-46

<sup>58</sup> Kinloch, ‘Parallel Catastrophes?’ p. 13

recurrence? We hear a great deal about the supposed “lessons” of the Holocaust; the precedent of the “lessons” of war offers no encouragement at all.’<sup>59</sup>

It must be acknowledged that, unlike Kochan, Kinloch was not against the teaching of the Holocaust in schools per se. Yet he was concerned that the complexities of the historical event were being lost, asserting that, ‘Some acceptance of the complexity of the topic, and the difficulty in extracting from it more than the most banal of moral conclusions, would do the profession no harm.’<sup>60</sup> For Short the negative response to the concept of “lessons” being able to be transmitted within the classroom is born from the fact that those who subscribe to such views overlook ‘the critical distinction between a historical event providing lessons and those lessons being learnt.’<sup>61</sup> From this perspective Short articulates his belief that “lessons” can be learnt and that whether they are heeded or not should not detract from the fact that they exist. Wading in on the debate Illingworth claimed that ‘Many history teachers, especially the “well meaning” ones would regard Nicholas Kinloch’s aspirations as unduly pessimistic and lacking in ambition.’<sup>62</sup> Against Kinloch and in a similar vein to Short, Illingworth claimed that when teaching the Holocaust, ‘it is necessary that we engage not just the minds of the pupils, but also their hearts and souls.’<sup>63</sup>

When analysing Holocaust Memorial Day which has, it has been suggested, become increasingly concerned with the commemoration of the Holocaust as opposed to the educational importance of learning about the event, Bloxham considers the current trajectory of Holocaust education to be continuing along the path of the ‘pathos approach’ favoring moral judgment and ceremonial processes of remembrance as opposed to tackling historical questions regarding how people came to commit such crimes and why they were able to do so.<sup>64</sup> It will be shown throughout this study that despite an increasing feeling amongst some that there is ‘little justification for teaching the Shoah as a moral, rather than as a historical, topic’ the pathos led, and “lessons” based approach has come to dominate Holocaust education.<sup>65</sup>

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<sup>59</sup> Kochan. L, ‘Life over Death’, *Jewish Chronicle*, (22 December 1989)

<sup>60</sup> Kinloch, ‘Parallel Catastrophes?’ p. 14

<sup>61</sup> Short, ‘Learning from Genocide’, p. 368

<sup>62</sup> Illingworth. S, ‘Hearts, minds and souls: Exploring values through history’ in *Teaching History*, Vol. 100, (2000), pp. 20-24, p. 22

<sup>63</sup> Ibid, p. 20

<sup>64</sup> Bloxham, ‘Britain’s Holocaust Memorial Days’, p. 47

<sup>65</sup> Kinloch, ‘Parallel Catastrophes?’ p. 8

This shift is certainly a concern for, as Miller observed in 1990, ‘the Holocaust does not teach. It is not a religion or an ideology. It cannot provide a moral or political framework for living one’s life.’<sup>66</sup> The concern with the prominence which has come to surround the notion of such “lessons” existing for moral instruction is that, despite the understandable aim of preventing future genocide or acts of atrocity, ‘Essentially the moral lessons that the Holocaust is often used to teach reflect much the same values that were being taught in schools before the Holocaust, and yet – in themselves – were evidently insufficient to prevent the genocide.’<sup>67</sup> In addition, when presented predominantly through this moralistic lens the Holocaust, Alice Pettigrew states, ‘appears to take the form of a cautionary tale: a dramatic example of an always extant danger intrinsic in human nature. Inadequate attention is drawn to the specific social, political and economic circumstances in which that danger has been historically realised.’<sup>68</sup>

The concern expressed by some, and echoed throughout the course of this study, is that Holocaust educators risk unmooring the event itself from its historical context in order to provide the Holocaust with meaning for contemporary audiences. It is the position of this thesis that the decontextualisation of the Holocaust from its historical context through the emphasis on universal moral lessons and contemporary experiences has ultimately led to a dehistoricisation of the way in which the Holocaust is transmitted in both the classroom and, ultimately, within wider British historical consciousness.

### Historical consciousness

Such increased interest in the Holocaust, the proliferation of memory sites and engagement with memory in popular culture has renewed interest in a concept known as collective memory. Whilst the subject of memory and the problems associated with it should not be considered an entirely new phenomenon, indeed, as Olick and Robbins suggest, memory has been ‘a major preoccupation for social thinkers since the Greeks’ and division surrounding memory has existed for as long as preoccupation with it has, contemporary debates on memory from the standpoint of the social, as opposed to concerns about individual memory from a psychological or philosophical perspective, developed in the nineteenth century.<sup>69</sup> The title of “founding father”

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<sup>66</sup> Miller, J, *One by one by one: Facing the Holocaust*, (New York, Simon and Schuster, 1990), p. 279

<sup>67</sup> Salmons, ‘Universal Meaning or Historical Understanding?’ p. 60. As Salmons goes on to suggest notions such as the need to promote tolerance and of individual rights have been advocated since the Enlightenment.

<sup>68</sup> Pettigrew, A, ‘Limited lessons from the Holocaust? Critically considering the anti-racist and citizenship potential’, *Teaching History*, Vol. 141, (2010), pp. 50-55, p. 53

<sup>69</sup> Olick, J & Robbins, J, ‘Social Memory Studies: From “Collective Memory” to the Historical Sociology of Mnemonic Practices’, *Annual Review of Sociology*, Vol. 24, (1998), pp. 105–140, p. 106

of current memory studies is usually attributed to the renowned French sociologist, Maurice Halbwachs. Halbwachs' principal contention was that all human memory is formed within the collective of society and within social institutions.<sup>70</sup> Halbwachs was astonished that, 'when reading psychological treatises that deal with memory to find that people are considered there as isolated beings.'<sup>71</sup> This astonishment reflects Halbwachs' thesis that society cannot be separated from the collective in the memory making process for, 'it is in society that people normally acquire their memories. It is also in society that they recall, reorganize, and localize their memories.'<sup>72</sup>

As Jan Assman notes, Halbwachs managed to successfully 'shift the discourse concerning collective knowledge out of a biological framework into a cultural one.'<sup>73</sup> Yet despite the seeming resonance of Halbwachs' work, initially left virtually unexplored for over 40 years after his death in Buchenwald in 1945, it has become increasingly challenged. Noa Gedi and Yigal Elam, for example, seek to create a distance between themselves and certain aspects of the sociologists' work. In particular, Halbwachs' seeming 'determined anti-individualism' which sees memory as a purely social phenomenon is viewed as cause for concern as it discounts the role of the individual in the memory-making process.<sup>74</sup> Yet Halbwachs was not simply being a determined anti-individualist. As Anastasio et al argue, 'According to Halbwachs, individual and collective memory are inextricably intertwined.'<sup>75</sup> Halbwachs thus acknowledged the role of the individual within the collective even if, in his view, the capacity of the individual memory was shaped within a community of memory.

Given this context it may be unsurprising that one is much more likely to discover tension, as opposed to consensus, within the realm of memory studies. There is not even 'scholarly consensus' about what the term collective memory actually means and interpretations of the concept are continually under debate.<sup>76</sup> Even the term "collective memory" is frequently criticised or redefined with most students of memory studies being, Cappelletto claims, 'critical towards the notion of collective memory, and instead they adopt the terms of communal or

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<sup>70</sup> Halbwachs. M, *On Collective Memory*, (Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 1992)

<sup>71</sup> Ibid. p. 38

<sup>72</sup> Ibid.

<sup>73</sup> Assman, Jan, 'Collective Memory and Cultural Identity', *New German Critique*, No. 65, (Spring - Summer, 1995), pp. 125-133, p. 125

<sup>74</sup> Fogu. C & Kansteiner. W, 'The Politics of Memory and the Poetics of History', in *The Politics of Memory in Postwar Europe*, LeBow R.N, Fogu. C & Kansteiner. W, (eds) (Duke University Press, Durham, 2006), pp. 284-311, p. 287

<sup>75</sup> Anastasio. T, Ehrenberger. K, Watson. P & Zhang. W, *Individual and Collective Memory Consolidation: Analogous Processes on Different Levels*, (Cambridge, MIT Press, 2012), p. 46

<sup>76</sup> Winter. J & Sivan. E, *War and Remembrance in the Twentieth Century*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2000), p.2

group memory.<sup>77</sup> Negotiating the terrain of memory studies is fraught with complexities and characterised by division and even the work of those who appear to be the leading figures in the field is constantly in contention. In short, the study of memory has ‘developed into a fragmented field’ with varying terminologies being employed in an attempt to define exactly what, if anything, is meant by “collective memory” and what alternative to the term can be found.<sup>78</sup>

The more that is written about collective memory the more it appears to emerge as an ‘elusive entity.’<sup>79</sup> As Funkenstein states, ‘Just as a nation cannot eat or dance, neither can it speak or remember.’<sup>80</sup> This sentiment is echoed by Bourke who asserts that, ‘The collective does not possess a memory, only barren sites upon which individuals inscribe shared narratives, infused with power relations.’<sup>81</sup> Despite these objections the phrase national, or collective, memory is utilized so frequently both in the media, and in academic publications, that one can almost overlook the fact that the collective cannot physically experience a shared memory. It is arguably still the case, as Kansteiner has so astutely observed, that despite much discussion, debate, and theorization, scholars of collective memory studies, ‘have not yet sufficiently conceptualized collective memories as distinct from individual memory.’<sup>82</sup>

The all-pervading nature of that which is known as collective memory has led to fractures in memory studies as people seek to solve the problem of collective memory in society through the establishment of alternative phrases. Fentress and Wickham prefer the term “social memory” whilst James Young, in his seminal work *Texture of Memory*, seeks to distance himself from the psychological implications inferred by the term “collective memory” preferring instead the term “collected memory” throughout his study of Holocaust memorials and their changing meanings in society. Michael Rothberg proposes the notion of shared memory to explain the way in which that which is often termed collective memory is formed. Essentially noting that through discussion and interaction the personal memory of individuals can become collective or can

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<sup>77</sup> Cappelletto, F ‘Introduction’, in Cappelletto, F (ed), *Memory and World War II: An Ethnographic Approach*, (Oxford, Berg, 2005), p. 8

<sup>78</sup> Confino, A, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method’, *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 5 (Dec, 1997), pp. 1386-1403, p. 1387

<sup>79</sup> Funkenstein, ‘Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness’, p. 5

<sup>80</sup> Ibid. p. 6

<sup>81</sup> Bourke, ‘Remembering War’, p. 474

<sup>82</sup> Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory’, p. 180

become shared.<sup>83</sup> Other scholars have sought to separate out and explore certain strands of memory such as public, local and national memory as to attempt to break the trend of what Kerwin Lee Klein describes as memory as a 'metahistorical category' whilst others go as far as Gedi and Elam who claim that collective memory is 'but a myth.'<sup>84</sup>

Whilst I do not believe that collective memory is a myth, it is certainly apparent that whilst one may attempt to engage with, or interpret, the past to a certain extent interaction with the past does not, and cannot, exist. It is not possible to touch the past nor can we recapture it. It is possible to engage with historical documentation and discussion, preserve historical artefacts, commemorate those in history who have experienced suffering or committed acts of heroism through memorial practices and ceremonies, and we can engage with the past through books and films. Yet it is the representation of the past that we engage with and interpret rather than the past itself and it is also these representations which help to construct collective consciousness. As Stone explains this is not suggesting 'that there is no past, but that the past does not exist today outside of its representation.'<sup>85</sup> Despite considerable debate about the exact meaning of the phrase, and regardless of the fact that the social collective cannot possess a memory in the psychological sense, it is the position of this study that one cannot, and indeed should not, presume that there can be no collective sense of historical consciousness or no sense of the collective in the remembrance process. If a shared popular consciousness, awareness, or perception of the past, even if formed purely through representations, does not exist then why, in the words of Le Goff, is it 'one of the great stakes of developed and developing societies?'<sup>86</sup> And, in essence, does it matter? One can argue and discuss as much as one chooses about the lack of ability for the collective to possess a memory of the past, or for the possibility of each individual to remember the same event identically, however, the perception in society of shared memories or shared consciousness of the past does exist and if it is perceived to exist, then it does not seem unreasonable to engage with the abstract concept of a collective consciousness of the past as if it did exist, whilst at all times of course maintaining an awareness that in psychological terms it cannot. Indeed, the perception of such shared, or national memory, can reveal much about the relationship between memory, history and identity for, 'A common past, preserved through institutions, traditions, and symbols, is a crucial instrument –

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<sup>83</sup> Fentress. J & Wickham. C, *Social Memory: New Perspectives on the Past*, (Oxford, Blackwell, 1992), Young, 'The Texture of Memory' and Rothberg. M, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 15

<sup>84</sup> Klein, 'On the Emergence of Memory in Historical Discourse', p.128; Gedi. N & Elam. Y, 'Collective Memory: What Is It?', *History and Memory*, Vol. 8, No. 1, (Spring/Summer 1996), pp.30 – 50, p. 47

<sup>85</sup> Stone. D, *Constructing the Holocaust*, (London, Valentine Mitchell, 2003), p. 15

<sup>86</sup> Le-Goff. J, *History and Memory*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 1992), p. 98

perhaps the crucial instrument – in the construction of collective identities in the present.<sup>87</sup> An example of this sense of a shared past being mediated through symbols and traditions can be seen through British “memory” of the First World War which is sustained through a national day of remembrance, the symbol of the poppy and by honouring those who have perished through holding a two minute silence on Armistice Day.<sup>88</sup>

Taking the work of Funkenstein and Kansteiner as point of departure when considering the position of Holocaust education in British consciousness, this study will consider the term historical consciousness as, in the words of Kansteiner, a ‘developed and organized form of collective memory’ and:

‘the result of the interaction among three types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore or transform such artefacts according to their own interests.’<sup>89</sup>

With this conceptual frame it is possible to accept the presence of, what Funkenstein has termed a ‘collective mentality,’ or a collective historical consciousness, of the remembrance of the past.<sup>90</sup> Despite the influence of Kansteiner’s work on this study the use of either the term collective memory or historical consciousness should not infer, or be taken to mean, consensus. No popular consciousness can, or should be, considered as monolithic. There has been, is and will always be division within popular thought, as Kansteiner himself admits observing that, ‘one faces a veritable paradox: the more collective the medium (that is, the larger its potential or actual audience) the less likely it is that its representation will reflect the collective memory of that audience.’<sup>91</sup> The Holocaust consciousness that will be explored throughout this study should not, therefore, be considered as consensus but should be viewed as that which is ‘subsumed within a culture that is constituted by common practices and representations.’<sup>92</sup>

Whilst considerable debate has taken place surrounding historical consciousness, a lack of considered attention has been given to exactly how such historical consciousness of the past is

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<sup>87</sup> Seixas, P, ‘Introduction’, in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, Seixas, P (ed), (London, University of Toronto Press, 2004), pp. 3-25, p. 5

<sup>88</sup> For more information on the memory of this conflict please see: Winter, J, *Sites of Memory, Sites of Mourning: The Great War in European Cultural History*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996) and King, A, *Memorials of the Great War in Britain: The Symbolism and Politics of Remembrance*, (Oxford, Berg Publishers, 1998)

<sup>89</sup> Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory’, p. 180

<sup>90</sup> Funkenstein, ‘Collective Memory and Historical Consciousness’, p. 19

<sup>91</sup> Kansteiner, ‘Finding Meaning in Memory’, p. 193

<sup>92</sup> Confino, ‘Collective Memory and Cultural History’, p. 1399

transmitted by memory makers and the subsequent influence of memory transmission on individual, and collective, consciousness. As Confino has claimed, 'many studies of memory are content to describe the representation of the past without bothering to explore the transmission, diffusion, and, ultimately, the meaning, of this representation.'<sup>93</sup> Popular consciousness may well, as Irwin-Zarecka suggests, be best located 'not in the minds of individuals but in the resources they share' but the question remains as to whether it is enough to simply explore these resources or so called 'vehicles of memory' used to transmit and represent the past.<sup>94</sup> This study illustrates that it is also crucial to consider how these symbolic vehicles are mediated within society and what influence such mediated symbols and representations have, both on society, and our perception of the past. By omitting any exploration of these aspects of memory we risk restricting ourselves to what Confino and Fritzsche refer to as the 'internalist view of culture.'<sup>95</sup> For studies of memory to be content with this restriction and simply describing the varying representations of the past is extremely concerning as it is the very transmission and mediation of these representations which, one can ultimately claim, has a primary role in both the construction and sustaining of historical consciousness or, as it is more commonly known, collective memory.

The importance of attempting to understand or conceptualise historical consciousness should not be underestimated. It has been asserted by Huyssen that, 'remembrance shapes our links to the past, and the ways we remember define us in the present.'<sup>96</sup> In much the same way it must also be acknowledged that, what is chosen to be transmitted, and the symbolic images and icons which are used to inform or educate about past events, not only reflect the continued presence of the past in present life, and on our present sense of identity, but also reflect the influence of the present on the representation of the past. By escaping from a purely internalist view of culture and thus considering the symbols of mediation and their influence on our understandings of the past and, thus, the influence on our present we can form a greater understanding of both historical consciousness and the constructed nature of collective consciousness in society today. A 'tenuous fissure' between past and present exists which is oft traversed by popular consciousness and understanding of historical events.<sup>97</sup> With a deeper

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<sup>93</sup> Ibid. p. 1395

<sup>94</sup> Irwin-Zarecka. I, *Frames of Remembrance: The Dynamics of Collective Memory*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (New Brunswick, Transaction Publishers, 2009), p. 4; Confino, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History', p. 1386

<sup>95</sup> Confino. A & Fritzsche. P, 'Introduction', in Confino. A & Fritzsche. P (eds), *The Work of Memory: New Directions in the Study of German Society and Culture*, (Champaign, University of Illinois Press, 2002), pp. 1-24, p. 4

<sup>96</sup> Huyssen. A, *Twilight memories: Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia*, (London, Routledge, 1995), p. 249

<sup>97</sup> Ibid. p. 3

consideration of the transmission and mediation of such historical consciousness it is possible that this tenuous fissure may come to be better understood.

### Education and Political Interest

Starting from the premise that there is such a thing as historical consciousness and that academic study needs to explore how it is mediated, the question remains as to exactly how it is both created and sustained within Britain today. Alongside the media, the archive, the library and the museum it is also within education that historical consciousness is created, transmitted and mediated to memory consumers. When considering the classroom, particularly in the history classroom, one can discern that it is not simply a space in which the act of teaching and the act of learning is taking place but that it is also a space which helps construct, cultivate, and reshape historical consciousness. Like the archives, it may be considered that the educational system should simply be classified as an institutionally dictated memory of the Holocaust and therefore any “memory” which it mediates will be that which is dictated by the political elite of the time. History education in particular has oft been considered as an official or political form of representing the past.

Certainly, the establishment of the General Certificate of Secondary Education in 1986 and the National Curriculum in 1991, prompted by the Education Reform Act of 1988, caused considerable tension and fierce debates within political circles between the conservative right and the neoliberal left. Such conflict often centred on concerns of what history should be taught in secondary schools and how the subject should be taught, with much of the debate prompted by anxieties that the so called “new history,” influenced by the social sciences and moving away from a British orientated syllabus, had started to supplant a more “traditional” historical approach within schools. As John Slater stated, ‘Once upon a time there was a consensus about teaching history’ yet, increasingly, finding a consensus about history education has become ever more difficult to discern.<sup>98</sup> For whilst it is true that ‘History has always been political’ one can see that, during the late twentieth-century, there has been more animated discussion surrounding history education in schools.<sup>99</sup> As Lee observes, ‘History education is often thought

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<sup>98</sup> Slater, J, *The Politics of History Teaching: A Humanity Dehumanized?*, (London, Institute of Education, 1989), p. 1

<sup>99</sup> Phillips, R, ‘Contesting the Past, Constructing the Future: History, Identity and Politics in Schools’, *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 1, (March 1998), pp. 40 – 53, p. 41

of as a relatively straightforward matter, it is learning about the past' yet the realities surrounding it are more complex than one may initially conceive.<sup>100</sup>

Le Goff notes that, with the onset of social history alongside the challenges posed by decolonisation, classroom based history found itself having to 'respond to the demands of the former colonizers who have lost their empires and find themselves limited to their little European space' and the demands of minority groups themselves fighting for recognition of their experiences.<sup>101</sup> Such new public history which had become increasingly popular in the 1960s and 1970s was, the conservative right claimed, 'threatening the transmission of a strong sense of national identity to children' by deflecting attention away from British history towards a wider world history view, considering social themes as opposed to traditional historical events.<sup>102</sup> As a social commentator at the time noted, 'many schools teach so little British history that they risk undermining the sense of belonging to the community.'<sup>103</sup> Whilst acknowledging the 'healthiness' of this shift towards a more inclusive history syllabus, *The Times* also noted that, 'This is an age sceptical not only about great men and women but about the very idea of greatness, particularly when it is attached to nationhood. Educational fashion has tended to invest internationalism with all the virtues and nationalism with all the vices. One result has been that children are not encouraged to look closely (let alone with pride) at their own history.'<sup>104</sup>

At the time the National Curriculum was established, the history curriculum in particular was to become a battleground for conflicting views surrounding the notion of national history and, increasingly, national identity. Roberts Phillips observes that when it was introduced, 'politicians made no effort to hide the intentions behind the NC [national curriculum] in England. It was national in the sense that it sought to create a set of common values and ideals.'<sup>105</sup> The practice of political influence being exerted on the educational system should not be considered as having originated with the establishment of the National Curriculum for, as Dessi notes, 'Nations often construct, and transmit to the young, representations of the past intended to provide an

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<sup>100</sup> Lee, P, 'Understanding History', in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, Seixas (ed), pp.129-164, p. 129-130

<sup>101</sup> Le-Goff, *History and Memory*, p. 209

<sup>102</sup> Waldman, A, 'The Politics of History Teaching in England and France during the 1980s', *History Workshop Journal*, No. 68, (Autumn 2009), pp. 199-221, p. 201

<sup>103</sup> Clare, J, 'History is Presented for Debate', *The Times*, (10 February 1987)

<sup>104</sup> 'British History', *The Times*, (23 January 1989)

<sup>105</sup> Phillips, 'Contesting the Past, Constructing the Future', p. 49

attractive account of the nation's cultural values and identity.<sup>106</sup> Seen from this perspective it is apparent that education is indeed a somewhat 'value saturated process.'<sup>107</sup>

Yet this political investment in history should not only be viewed as being confined to the establishment of the National Curriculum. For whilst certainly during the formative years of the curriculum studying British history was viewed as 'essential for the survival of a nation under threat' it would be naïve to consider that the perception of Britain under threat has disappeared in the years since Keith Crawford penned this observation.<sup>108</sup> Successive Governments have considered history as the frame through which to exploit a certain reading of British history as a means of restoring pride in being British. Even during extensive reconfigurations of the curriculum in 2013, for example, it became apparent that the history curriculum, as the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove admitted, experienced 'a more extensive rewrite than any other.'<sup>109</sup> Richard Evans, on consulting the revised draft curriculum in July 2013, observed that 'Gove's original intention of using history teaching in our schools to impart a patriotic sense of national identity through the uncritical hero-worship of great men and women from the British past. Gone is the triumphalist celebration of victories such as the Spanish Armada or the Battle of Waterloo.'<sup>110</sup> Whilst the overtly triumphalist and celebratory history may have been removed after the initial consultation period its original position on the draft curriculum, much like the original reference to the "unique evil" of the Holocaust, reveals the way in which history is still viewed by politicians and indicates a desire to encourage a certain reading of historical events as a means of harnessing them in order to establish or sustain a particular heroic British narrative of the past. Such battles over history may appear inconsequential nevertheless, as Crawford notes, they can also be interpreted as 'attempts to control definitions of the past designed to justify political action, promote particular social trends and develop economic doctrines.'<sup>111</sup>

Laville states that, 'Today, most of us see the goal of historical education as the formation of the citizen – someone who is well informed, ideally, and able to think critically and ready to

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<sup>106</sup> Dessi. R, 'Collective Memory, Cultural Transmission, and Investments', *The American Economic Review*, Vol. 98, No. 1, (March 2008), pp. 534 – 560, p. 539

<sup>107</sup> Reynolds. J & Skilbeck. M, *Culture and the Classroom*, (London, Open Books, 1976), p. 71

<sup>108</sup> Crawford. K, 'A History of the Right: The Battle for Control of National Curriculum History 1989-1994', *British Journal of Educational Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 4, (December 1995), pp. 433-456, p. 441

<sup>109</sup> Evans. R, 'Myth-busting', *The Guardian*, (13 July 2013)

<sup>110</sup> Ibid.

<sup>111</sup> Crawford, 'A History of the Right', p. 433

participate in democratic society, as the fundamental principles of democracy require.<sup>112</sup> Laville continues by asserting that;

‘In earlier times the teaching of history was geared instead to the creation and development of the nation-state; its goal was to foster in the citizen a sense of inclusion and respect for established order. Such an attitude now seems to have been definitively cast aside and, with it, its principal pedagogical tool, the official version of a shared historical past – the story of the nation’s birth – used to teach future citizens what they should know and even, by extension, what they should think and feel.’<sup>113</sup>

Certainly British post-imperial decline, alongside the move towards a more socially inclusive and expressive mode of historical enquiry, has led to a more notable emphasis on the positive attributes of democracy, rather than seeking to develop a pride in the imperial nation. Yet encouraging democratic pride and teaching history which encourages pride in the nation state are not diametrically opposed to each other. For whilst Pearce suggests that what Laville calls the ‘transition from a history pedagogy devoted to the nation-state to a pedagogy in the service of democracy’ was a prerequisite for the very establishment and acceptance of Holocaust education and the later popularisation of its “lessons” it is the position of this study that history education, including Holocaust education, is valued not only for the “lessons” it is seen to impart about the value of liberal democracy but, concurrently, for what it is seen to reiterate about national identity and the nation state.<sup>114</sup>

The importance of history education should certainly not be underestimated, if one considers Marc Ferro’s position that, ‘Our image of other peoples, or of ourselves for that matter, reflects that history we are taught as children.’<sup>115</sup> It is not simply through entering the history classroom and listening to the teacher that one can be said to gain a sense of historical consciousness. Rather, it is through the tools of the history classroom, the artefacts, the textbooks, the testimony and words of others, that popular consciousness is formed. Henry Rousso has described school history and the texts and books that are used within history lessons as ‘le mode de transmission social par excellence’ in terms of transmitting historical consciousness of the

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<sup>112</sup> Laville. C, ‘Historical Consciousness and Historical Education’, in *Theorizing Historical Consciousness*, Seixas. P (ed), pp. 165-182, p. 166

<sup>113</sup> Ibid.

<sup>114</sup> Pearce. A, *The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain 1979-2001*, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway University, 2010) p. 57

<sup>115</sup> Ferro. M, *The Use and Abuse of History or How the Past is Taught*, (London, Routledge, 1984), p. vii; Resnik. J, ‘Sites of Memory of the Holocaust: Shaping National Memory in the Education system in Israel’, *Nations and Nationalism*, Vol. 9, No. 2. (April 2003), pp. 297–317

past.<sup>116</sup> On the one hand it can certainly be acknowledged that 'textbooks reflect a society's prevailing attitudes and opinions. It is also possible to view them as agents that play an important role in the socio-cultural processes taking place in the schools.'<sup>117</sup> Equally, however, not only can a consideration of the textbook or the resources used within the classroom, reflect society's prevailing interests and opinions, in addition, through a consideration of both the materials and the students who consume the information within them, one can discern how historical consciousness is formed and the very nature of that historical consciousness itself.

Arguably, even more so than the monument or the museum, the resources utilised within the classroom become the vehicles of memory through which one can interpret historical consciousness is being transmitted and mediated. Yair Auron has raised the importance of education in the formation of a nation's sense of historical consciousness stating that, '...schools are using two different languages: "the language of memory" and "the language of the classroom."' <sup>118</sup> This is certainly the case within the history classroom in British schools. Indeed, within the educational system, and within the classroom itself, constructed representations of the past are mediated and received by students all over Britain. The two languages do not always work independently, however, and the fact that the language of memory is used within the classroom does not render the language of the classroom obsolete in informing us about how historical consciousness is formed. Each language undoubtedly influences the other, as it is through the instruments of the classroom, the resources utilised in historical teaching, that one can see the language of memory and historical consciousness being developed.

Despite its influence, however, education is often overlooked by researchers in preference for an exploration of popular culture through vehicles such as television, film, museums and monuments, reflected in the lively debates surrounding Holocaust Memorial Day and museums as sites of Holocaust memory. School history, alongside wider school education, is a key player in the formation of historical awareness yet, far from being treated as such, education has oft been considered a purely political player in the formation of collective consciousness. In

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<sup>116</sup> Henry Rousso as cited in McCormack, J, 'Transmission of Memory in the Classroom: France and the Algerian War in the 1990s' in Kidd, W & Murdoch, B (eds), *Memory and Memorials in the Commemorative Century*, (Ashgate Publishing Ltd, Aldershot, 2004), pp. 245-260. For greater insight into the role of textbooks in the transmission of a sense of national identity and ideology please see: Bukh, A, 'Japan's History Textbooks Debate: National Identity in Narratives of Victimhood and Victimization', *Asian Survey*, Vol. 47, No. 5, (September/October 2007), pp. 683-704 and Podeh, E, 'History and Memory in the Israeli Educational System The Portrayal of the Arab-Israeli Conflict in History Textbooks (1948-2000)', *History & Memory*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (Spring/Summer 2000), pp. 65-100

<sup>117</sup> Auron, Y, *The Pain of Knowledge: Holocaust and Genocide Issues in Education*, (London, Transaction Publishers, 2005), p. 31

<sup>118</sup> *Ibid.* p. xvii

opposition to this perspective it is the position of this study that to view history education as simply a product of the political elite or government desire would be an error. It has been asserted by McCormack that, 'History classes are highly significant since they are an official memory and common public memory' and as such I believe that the history classroom is an environment in which so called "official" and "unofficial" forces coincide in a place of learning and a place in which historical consciousness is cultivated.<sup>119</sup> For what is discussed within the classroom will not only be what is prescribed by the National Curriculum, but will also reflect external influences that wider culture, such as films, outside of the classroom have had on the historical consciousness of the students, as memory consumers, within that classroom. Thus, the relationship between education and memory is not purely one of institutional enforcement and prescription. Popular culture or, more specifically, public sentiment as a result of popular culture, certainly has a considerable interest in, and influence on, what occurs within the classroom. The relationship between history education, wider culture and politics is not, therefore, quite as simplistic as one may initially assume, as Arthur and Phillips note, 'history teaching does not exist in a vacuum; it reflects many of the values and issues perceived to be important in society at large.'<sup>120</sup>

One of the ways to reflect upon education existing concurrently inside, and outside, of an elitist vacuum is to consider the way culture impacts on the students themselves, for, as Reynolds and Skilbeck state, whilst '...culture impinges upon the curriculum in many different ways, the teacher unavoidably and inescapably, is the bearer of meanings and values and these he mediates through his teaching. The pupils too live in a cultural works both outside and inside school.'<sup>121</sup> Pupils will, therefore, enter the classroom with preconceived ideas about history which have been formulated outside of the classroom through the media, the family unit and their own engagement with their external environment. The significance of this knowledge is also crucial to leading educators in the field who 'view students' prior knowledge as the edge of our students' knowing or as the point at which to begin the planning of new learning.'<sup>122</sup> Whilst education is an important facet in the creation of historical consciousness, one should not consider the relationship between classroom and culture to be one simply of dominance of the former over the latter but rather one of reciprocity and, at times, challenge. Indeed, highlighting the role of education in the memory making process should not suggest that it is purely within

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<sup>119</sup> McCormack. J, 'Transmission of Memory in the Classroom', p, 257

<sup>120</sup> Phillips. R, 'Government Policies, the State and the Teaching of History' in Arthur. J & Phillips. R (eds), *Issues in History Teaching*, (London, Routledge, 2001), pp. 10-23, p. 11

<sup>121</sup> Reynolds & Skilbeck. M, *Culture and the Classroom*, p. 64

<sup>122</sup> Edwards. C & O'Dowd. S, 'The Edge of Knowing: Investigating Students' Prior Understanding of the Holocaust', *Teaching History*, Vol. 141, (December 2010), pp. 20-26, p. 20

the classroom alone that historical consciousness is shaped and developed. This is too great and too all-encompassing a statement to make, as Wineburg et al assert, 'historical narratives cannot be contained by what goes on at school.'<sup>123</sup> When considering the formation of historical consciousness it is clear that one cannot treat any singular 'vector of memory' in isolation nor consider any vector to assume sole responsibility for the transmission of historical consciousness.<sup>124</sup>

It has been asserted that, 'The sphere of education is a simulacrum of the society it serves'<sup>125</sup> and in order to address the omission of previous studies to explore the representation of the Holocaust in education carried out by non-governmental institutions, and the significance of this representation in the formation of historical consciousness, this study will explore whether this is in fact the case or whether Holocaust education, which seeks to be transformative, actually challenges the society within which it was established. This will involve an analysis of whether the way in which Holocaust survivors, and Auschwitz-Birkenau, are represented by educational organisations can be situated within a domesticated, and politically acceptable, British narrative and whether these representations have contributed to the creation of a screen memory in British historical consciousness.

### Screen Memory and the Holocaust 'Myth'

The originator of the term screen memory, Sigmund Freud, considered screen memories to be those which, unconsciously or not, the individual used to hide, obscure or screen out other memories which were in some way undesirable.<sup>126</sup> Whilst this interpretation of the notion of screen memories concerns the individual and is used in a psychological sense it is the contention of this thesis that it is also possible to utilise the notion of screen memories when considering the historical consciousness of the Holocaust in Britain. Through her focus on the 'Wall' in Washington D.C., the memorial to the veterans of the Vietnam war, Marita Sturken explores the way in which the memory of the nation, channelled through and represented in, a memorial can act as a screen memory which not only cleanses or sanitises what is remembered but, through this, also screens the reality of the past. Viewed in this light historical consciousness can be

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<sup>123</sup> Wineburg. S, Mosborg. S, Porat. D & Duncan. A, 'Common Belief and the Cultural Curriculum: An Intergenerational Study of Historical Consciousness', *American Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 44, No. 1 (March 2007), pp. 40-76, p. 44

<sup>124</sup> Wood. N, *Vectors of Memory: Legacies of Trauma in Postwar Europe*, (Oxford, Berg, 1999), p. 6

<sup>125</sup> Davies. M, 'Education after Auschwitz: Revisited', in Davies. M & Szejnmann. C, *How the Holocaust Looks Now: International Perspectives*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2007), pp. 247-260, p. 253

<sup>126</sup> Freud's paper entitled 'Screen Memory' can be found in *The Standard Edition Of The Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud Volume III (1893-1899)*, (London, The Hogarth Press, 1995)

considered to be, what Sturken describes as ‘a narrative tangle’ as certain screen memories are utilised as a means of obscuring the past as much as they restore it.<sup>127</sup> Whilst Sturken offers the example of memorials and photography as acting as a form of screen memory, it is possible to look beyond this interpretation and consider other sites of memory, even historical events themselves, as being the focus of consolidated national memory and acting as a screen in and of themselves. The Holocaust has previously been considered as such, with Dan Stone asserting that the Holocaust has ‘acted as a screen memory of the darker side of Britain’s imperial past.’<sup>128</sup>

Rothberg has argued against the use of the term “screen memory” believing, as Vermeulen observes, that the term implies a ‘competitive notion of memory’ through the implication that one memory will seek to screen, and subsequently erase, another.<sup>129</sup> Rothberg also asserts that those who utilise the term believe that the dominant screen memory prevents ‘confrontation with more local problems’ due to the comfort that the dominant memory provides for those who engage with it.<sup>130</sup> Rothberg offers an alternative frame for considering memory suggesting that it should be viewed as ‘multidirectional: as subject to on-going negotiation, cross referencing and borrowing; as productive and not privative.’<sup>131</sup> Certainly some of Rothberg’s assertions have merit. The understanding of memory being subject to continual evolution and construction, cross referencing and borrowing is an extremely useful way to engage with the concept of historical consciousness and the formulation of collective memory. Within Rothberg’s thesis he claims that the increase in discussion of, and memory surrounding, the Holocaust, has actually enabled other stories of victimisation to be heard within national narratives whereas, previously, they would not have been granted such an opportunity.<sup>132</sup> Far from screening memories, therefore, Rothberg suggests that memories of different groups interact with each other in such a way so as to enhance, rather than subsume, each other.

Certainly debates surrounding one memory can allow greater visibility of other memories to occur. Bloxham describes how, as a result of discussions about the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day in Britain the ‘Armenian genocide also raised its head a fraction there, though

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<sup>127</sup> Sturken. M, *Tangled Memories: The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epidemic, and the Politics of Remembering*, (London, University of California Press, 1997), p. 44

<sup>128</sup> Stone. D, *History, Memory and Mass Atrocity: Essays on the Holocaust and Genocide*, (London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), p. 175

<sup>129</sup> Vermeulen. P, ‘Video Testimony, Modernity, and the Claims of Melancholia’, *Criticism*, Vol. 53, No. 4, (Fall 2011), pp. 549-568, p. 562

<sup>130</sup> Rothberg, *Multidirectional Memory*, p.12

<sup>131</sup> *Ibid.* p. 3

<sup>132</sup> Rothberg asserts that the establishment of a Holocaust museum in the USA subsequently provided the initiative for other museums, unconnected to the Holocaust, to open which gave other victim groups a voice. *Ibid.* p. 10-12

paradoxically because of protest against its expulsion from official notice.<sup>133</sup> Yet despite this greater visibility the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day has not encouraged any further engagement with the Armenian Genocide to take place. As Bloxham goes on to note, despite Holocaust Memorial Day momentarily highlighting the Armenian genocide it 'has yet to enter the collective consciousness of most non-Armenians.'<sup>134</sup> Rothberg's seeming rejection of the notion of screen memories existing, therefore, is surprising. For if the memory of the Holocaust can encourage other memories then surely the reverse could also be seen to occur. Whilst memories can, and do, exist in conjunction with each other Rothberg's reluctance to acknowledge that the dominance of one thread of a memory narrative can eclipse or overwhelm other memories within public imagination appears misguided, for what one memory can enhance it can also obscure.

The notion of screen memories does not have to imply the establishment of one dominant monolithic narrative, but it does imply that the constructed nature of historical consciousness ensures that it is subject to manipulation and a selective political, and popular, consciousness, which leads to certain aspects of an event being selectively remembered and other aspects selectively forgotten. The notion of a screen memory within my interpretation of it is that one memory obscures another from view at a particular time and does not suggest that the screen memory erases that which it, intentionally or otherwise, shields. The very notion of a screen memory infers that there is another memory which exists but which is being shielded by the more accepted memory at that moment. It does not suppose that there is only one dominant monolithic narrative and ignore other narratives which exist alongside it but acknowledges that certain aspects of historical consciousness are more publically available and, therefore, more accepted than others not out of a sense of competition but, often, constructed through political, and popular necessity and choice.

National myths tend not to develop around negative actions of the nation state and instead are shaped around the affirmation of positive self-identity through the assertion of supposed national traits such as heroic success, liberal democracy and tolerance and through positioning the perceived characteristics of the nation against the actions and characteristics of the "Other". It is certainly the case, as Bloxham and Kushner observe, that in 'Britain racism is often seen as someone else's problem - particularly the Germans since the Second World War - yet it does not

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<sup>133</sup> Bloxham, D, *The Great Game of Genocide: Imperialism, Nationalism, and the Destruction of the Ottoman Armenians*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2005), p. 6

<sup>134</sup> Ibid.

take a fascist regime for the proliferation and implementation of racism to take place.<sup>135</sup> Bloxham and Kushner have also documented their belief in the relative failure of the heritage industry 'to confront the basic humanity of minority groups, or to promote an understanding of the broader connotations of genocide.'<sup>136</sup> It is the position of this thesis that despite successfully campaigning to ensure that the Holocaust is now widely encountered both inside and outside the classroom, Holocaust education, as it exists in its current form, not only fails to confront the humanity of the Jewish victims of the Holocaust but also, as a result of this omission, fails to contextualise the Holocaust within either a wider frame of genocide and, of more immediate concern, fails to contextualise the Holocaust within an historical frame or narrative.

Holocaust educators may argue that their courses are not designed to confront questions of Jewish identity, Judaism or Jewishness. It is, nonetheless, the position of this thesis that when considering the Holocaust in the classroom such an omission not only distorts the historical realities of the Holocaust in the quest for universal applicability but that it also results in an abject failure in the rehumanisation of the victims, a major aim of Holocaust educators, and promotes an acceptable British narrative of the Holocaust situated within a liberal context in which the specificity of minority groups is subsumed under the umbrella of common humanity in order to more easily allow universal discourse, and the notion of universal "lessons", to be continued in both the classroom and popular culture. Thus both inside, and outside the classroom, the way in which the Holocaust is most frequently encountered acts as a screen memory for both British imperial actions and engagement with the realities of the relationship between the Jewish and non-Jewish communities.

Within the context of British historical consciousness of the Holocaust one can assert that the utilisation of a screen memory within historical consciousness actually contributes to the creation of a more mythical interpretation of the Holocaust which exists alongside the historical. Tim Cole differentiates between the Holocaust as it exists as an historical event and the development of the symbolic and mythical Holocaust perpetuated through the way in which it has been represented. As Cole is quick to articulate, this should not suggest that the mythical Holocaust has no basis in reality nor should the term imply that the Holocaust itself did not take place. Considered from this perspective, therefore, 'the myth of the "Holocaust" may have

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<sup>135</sup> Bloxham, D & Kushner, T, 'Exhibiting Racism: Cultural Imperialism, Genocide and Representation', *Rethinking History: The Journal of Theory and Practice*, Vol. 2, No. 3, (1998), pp. 349-358, p. 352

<sup>136</sup> Ibid.

drawn on the historical Holocaust, but it now exists apart from that historical event.<sup>137</sup> Certainly if one considers that a myth can be viewed as, 'a story which evokes strong sentiments and transmits and reinforces basic societal values,' one can see that set against anglicised constructs of Holocaust consciousness, the Holocaust articulated and remembered in Britain is invested with rather more meaning and significance than the Holocaust rooted in historical reality as a means of reinforcing basic values for British society through the utilisation of Britain's perceived past as moral authority and benevolent democratic sanctuary.<sup>138</sup>

As Cole highlights, when discussing the creation of the apparent myth of the First World War which sculpted the memory of the conflict as a "meaningful and sacred event" George Mosse articulated his belief that 'The Myth of the War Experience was designed to mask war and to legitimize the war experience; it was meant to displace the reality of war.'<sup>139</sup> Despite the relevance of Mosse's ideas for the theoretical framing of this study this should not imply that this thesis takes memory of the Holocaust as it is remembered in British society as being fashioned as a *deliberate* means displacing the reality of the Holocaust. To solely envisage the Holocaust as being remembered purely through the deliberate displacement of the historical Holocaust in preference for the mythological encounter with the historical event is too simplistic. Yet it cannot be ignored that there appears to be a continued preference and acceptance for one particular representation and understanding of the Holocaust over another and that the dominant memory to have emerged is that rooted in symbolism rather than an interpretation of the Holocaust rooted in historical context. It is the position of this study that the way in which the Holocaust has become absorbed into British historical consciousness, and within British Holocaust education is, in part, as a result of the fact that the Holocaust presented to the British people, and utilised within political and commemorative rhetoric has built upon existing preconceptions and understandings of what it means to be British which, in turn, has helped to influence the way in which the Second World War, and the Holocaust, have been understood in the wake of 1945 and, therefore, the way in which these two historical events have continued to be remembered as self-affirming history with contemporary pertinence for society.

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<sup>137</sup> Cole. T, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler How the Holocaust is Bought, Packaged and Sold*, (New York, Routledge, 1999), p. 4

<sup>138</sup> Liebman. C & Don-Yihya. E, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*, (London, University of California Press, 1983), p. 7

<sup>139</sup> Mosse. G, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1990), p. 7

When considered in this light, therefore, one can see that there are, to a certain degree, two Holocausts existing with a duality seemingly neither completely challenging nor fully disregarding the other but with the more dominant narrative screening the other and obscuring further exploration of it within the public arena. Whilst the Holocaust is arguably the most obvious example of the displacement of the historical for a more mythical and dehistoricised understanding of an event in historical consciousness, it is by no means the only example which can be used to illustrate popular acceptance of mythical symbols and interpretations of an event. For, as Gotesky has suggested, 'In terms of 20<sup>th</sup> century experience, the general thesis that all societies create "myths" seems highly plausible and, even without laborious evidence, convincing.'<sup>140</sup> If the embracing of myths was as significant and identifiable in the twentieth century as Gotesky suggests, then from the perspective of the twenty-first century, mythical interpretations and mediations of historical events appear even more significant. It can be asserted that, 'Every culture will create and value its own myths, not because it may not be able to distinguish between truth and falsity, but because their function is to maintain and preserve a culture against disruption and destruction.'<sup>141</sup>

Whilst some, such as Alvin H. Rosenfeld, have questioned the wisdom of Cole's 'repeated use of the easily exploitable phrase the myth of the Holocaust' the term will be harnessed by this study and considered as an extremely useful means by which to explore the complexities of Holocaust remembrance and understanding in Britain.<sup>142</sup> Cole himself acknowledges the dangers inherent in employing the term 'given that it has been used by those who suggest that the "Holocaust" is little more than war-time atrocity stories and post-war Jewish propaganda.'<sup>143</sup> Despite the appropriation of the term "myth" by those who seek to deny the extent of the Holocaust, or that the mass murder of the Jewish people of Europe did not occur, however, I do not feel that this renders the term obsolete for use in regards to the conceptualisation of the historical Holocaust and the Holocaust as it is represented and remembered in British society.

Given the move towards theories of transnational memory it may initially appear irrelevant to consider the role of myth and the creation of Holocaust consciousness within the somewhat more localised environment of the nation state. Certainly the concept of a dominant and

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<sup>140</sup> Gotesky, R, 'The Nature of Myth and Society', *American Anthropologist*, Vol. 54, No. 4, (October/December, 1952), pp. 523-531, p. 523

<sup>141</sup> *Ibid*, p. 530

<sup>142</sup> Rosenfeld, A.H, 'The Holocaust in American Life by Peter Novick; Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler - How History Is Bought, Sold, and Packaged by Tim Cole; Review Article', *The Wilson Quarterly*, Vol. 23, No. 4, (Autumn, 1999), pp. 124-125, p. 125

<sup>143</sup> Cole, *Selling the Holocaust*, p. 3

monolithic national narrative appears increasingly tenuous as a result of increased migration, decolonisation and a desire to tell the history and experiences of different memory groups thereby unravelling national consciousness, and national myths, from within. Yet it has also been argued that national memory is being assaulted from outside, as well as inside, the nation state. Levy and Sznajder have become leading proponents of, what they term, cosmopolitan memory, suggesting that through globalisation we are 'steadily dissolving the coordinates we have been using to make sense of experience.'<sup>144</sup> Thereby implying that there has been a gradual dissolution of the boundaries of the nation state in memory formation and in its place a new form of global memory and experience has been developed and maintained. From such perspectives it seems apparent that the nation is being 'undermined both from within and from outside.'<sup>145</sup> Whilst Levy and Sznajder's concept has merit, this study aligns itself with the notion raised by Jean Marc Dreyfus that 'Holocaust memory is in fact only superficially globalised. Each country actually renationalises it.'<sup>146</sup>

This is not to suggest that it is only within the realm of nation states that history and memory can be considered. As Levy and Sznajder state, 'To say that nations are the only possible containers of true history is a breathtakingly unhistorical assertion.'<sup>147</sup> Although this study focuses on the way in which the Holocaust has come to be understood and mediated in a British context it is clear that how this has developed cannot, and should not, be viewed as having emerged in isolation. It is apparent that certain symbols of the Holocaust transcend national boundaries and if Holocaust consciousness was considered through a comparative lens it is highly likely that certain transnational trends would emerge in terms of what is chosen to be remembered and how what is remembered is absorbed into cultural consciousness. Neither the rise of the survivor, nor of Auschwitz-Birkenau, as primary symbols of the Holocaust can be argued as being exclusive to Britain nor would this study seek to make this claim. Themes of rescue, articulated in Britain through the absorption of the Kindertransport into popular consciousness explored in the first chapter of this study, can be discerned in countries across the world, however, it is the position of this study that despite this trend the meaning of these acts of rescue will vary according to the role that each country played during the Holocaust. Equally,

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<sup>144</sup> Levy. D & Sznajder. N, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2006), p. 1

<sup>145</sup> *Ibid*, p. 35

<sup>146</sup> Dreyfus. J.M, 'Battle in Print: De-historicising the Holocaust: Remembrance and the Abandonment of History', (19 October 2010) available at: [www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2011/battles/5404](http://www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2011/battles/5404), (accessed 7 January 2014)

<sup>147</sup> Levy. D & Sznajder. N, 'Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory', *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (2002), pp. 87-106, p. 89

the way in which they have been absorbed and what they are seen to reveal about national identity would undoubtedly vary according to the society and culture in which they emerged.

To explore a specifically British engagement with these emotive symbols is not to disregard the influence of wider transnational themes, however, how these symbols are used and appropriated varies across nations and reveals much more about the society in which they are formulated than some may initially consider. For in just the same way that the ‘...curricula of the Holocaust are not transferable from one country to another. Every nation, every generation, and even every social and ideological group has its own problems of facing the Holocaust and its own way of integrating it into its life’ so too is it apparent that the representation and memory of the Holocaust varies according to the nation in which it is formulated.<sup>148</sup> This should not, however, imply a monolithic national memory, however; on the contrary, numerous narrative discourses exist alongside each other, yet one can oft note that a dominant narrative has emerged in spite of, and indeed in some instances, because of, the competing narratives which can be seen to exist.

### Thesis Outline

This is a study in two parts with each part consisting of two chapters. Each section will explore the role and representation of a particular symbolic “icon” of the Holocaust to have emerged in discourse surrounding the Holocaust. Each section will consider the role and representation of that “icon” in both British society and British Holocaust education and will explore the subsequent influence these representations have had on British historical consciousness of the Holocaust.<sup>149</sup>

The first section of the thesis explores the domestication of the Holocaust within an acceptable British narrative. This will be considered through an exploration of one of the most dominant Holocaust symbols to have emerged within Holocaust memory and representation, the Holocaust survivor. It has been asserted that, ‘In contemporary public discourse “survivor” refers to an extremely wide range of experiences’ and there has certainly been a proliferation of the

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<sup>148</sup> Schatzker. C, ‘The Teaching of the Holocaust: Dilemmas and Considerations’, *Annals of the American Academy of Political and Social Science*, Vol. 450, (July 1980), pp. 218 – 226, p. 220

<sup>149</sup> Stier. O.B, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust*, (Boston, University of Massachusetts Press, 2003)

use of the term in recent years.<sup>150</sup> Yet within popular British discourse the term “survivor” has come to be most frequently utilised in reference to those who experienced, yet survived, the Holocaust. Of all the icons to have emerged from the Holocaust it is the symbol of the Holocaust survivor which has emerged as one of the more emotive mediators of the Holocaust within both education and wider British society. Throughout the first section of this study, therefore, I will explore the position of the Holocaust survivor in the creation of a very particular British historical consciousness. Tracing the growing significance of the survivor in British Holocaust discourse, and highlighting their seminal importance in Holocaust education, this exploration will demonstrate that far from simply emerging as universalised symbols of crimes against humanity Holocaust survivors have been absorbed into a highly domesticated British narrative of the Holocaust which creates an increasingly dehistoricised interpretation of the Holocaust, and a decontextualised understanding of survivors, and which reinforces a particular kind of British identity.

The first chapter in this section will provide a contextual role and will consider the role and representation of the Holocaust survivor within British society. Reflecting on the changing position of survivors in Britain in 1995 Kushner observed that, ‘As the century draws to a close, British culture and society is getting used to the presence of Holocaust survivors.’<sup>151</sup> Given the centrality of the Holocaust within British consciousness at the current time, and the significant role that survivors play in the transmission of Holocaust memory this statement poses a number of intriguing questions about Britain’s relationship with survivors prior to, and since, this statement was made as well as gesturing towards a rather fractured relationship between Britain and the Holocaust in cultural imagination.

Situated within discussions surrounding the increasing prominence and universalisation of the Holocaust and tracing the evolution and construction of Holocaust memory in British society, this first chapter will show that, from the periphery of British historical narrative, Holocaust survivors have become increasingly visible in British commemoration and memory of the Holocaust. Beyond this interpretation, however, this chapter will demonstrate that whilst survivors have emerged as central to the mediation of the Holocaust narrative in Britain these survivors, and their experiences, are valued not only for what they reveal about the Holocaust but, also, what their very presence on British soil reveals and reinforces about Britain itself.

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<sup>150</sup> Orgad. S, ‘The Survivor in Contemporary Culture and Public Discourse: A Genealogy’, *The Communication Review*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (2009), pp. 132-161, p. 133

<sup>151</sup> Kushner. T, ‘Holocaust Survivors in Britain: An Overview and Research Agenda’, *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (Winter 1995), pp. 147-166, p. 150

Suggesting that survivors have emerged as a symbol of a very domesticated Holocaust narrative in which the British nation is viewed as a benevolent and heroic liberal democracy which both welcomed and supported Jewish refugees with open arms.

Yet, through an analysis of the way in which the Kindertransport is evoked and memorialised in contemporary culture, this chapter will argue that as Holocaust survivors have become more prominent they have also been adopted as a screen memory for the reality of Britain's relationship with refugees from Nazism. Through an analysis of the role and representation of Holocaust survivors within British discourse and remembrance this chapter will assert that this screen memory not only reinforces traditional British memory of the Second World War, but that it also contributes to the continuation of a British national identity rooted in interpretations of Britain as a welcoming sanctuary for those seeking asylum. Holocaust survivors, as the victims of Nazi persecution, have become an iconic symbol of the antithesis of what it means to be British which, in turn, raises interesting questions about what is chosen to be remembered and what is chosen to be subsumed within the narratives of British heroism and liberal democracy. Evans has claimed that, 'Propagating inaccurate myths about alleged British victories is no way to create a solid national identity' yet it is apparent that myths surrounding both Holocaust survivors, and the British involvement in the rescue and liberation of the Jewish population of Europe, have come to form a significant part of British identity.<sup>152</sup>

Within this opening chapter, and echoed within the second of the contextual chapters included in this study, newspaper articles form a significant part of the material consulted when exploring the way in which symbols of Holocaust atrocity have been absorbed into British imagination. For newspapers provide an enlightening insight into how society responds to, and remembers, certain events. The changing ways in which the Holocaust, and the educational initiatives designed to promote remembrance of the Holocaust, have been depicted within these media publications are therefore fundamental in ascertaining how society has sought to engage with the victims of the Holocaust and the Holocaust itself. Through utilising digital archives national daily newspapers such as *The Times*, *The Guardian*, *Daily Mirror* and *Daily Mail* have been consulted. Alongside national publications such as these local newspapers have also been considered particularly at times when educational initiatives promoted by the Holocaust Educational Trust have had an impact on local communities. The material included was chosen on the basis that was deemed to be most representative of the prevailing attitudes present in

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<sup>152</sup> Evans, 'Myth-busting'

the material consulted for particular periods of time. The utilisation of material accessed electronically on internet news sites also gestures to the shift away from material encountered in daily newspapers themselves and reflects the move towards greater emphasis on the internet as a forum for discussion and debate in the twenty-first century.

The second chapter in this section of the thesis continues to trace the representation of Holocaust survivors and their role in the mediation of Holocaust consciousness but within the sphere of Holocaust education carried out by non-governmental organisations. Whilst the preceding chapter will have explored the increasing prominence of the survivors within British culture within this chapter it will be argued that survivors have assumed an unrivalled position of seminal importance within the transmission of Holocaust teaching. Although survivor speakers themselves have emerged as powerful figures in Holocaust education this chapter will not focus specifically on the way in which they choose to present either themselves, or their testimony, in the classroom. For how survivor testimony is both mediated and encountered has been the subject of much discussion.<sup>153</sup> Given this previous research, and the fact that this study is specifically exploring the way in which educational organisations have elected to interpret and mediate the Holocaust, this chapter will focus on the way in which those such as the Holocaust Educational Trust choose to represent survivors in their educational resources and initiatives. This will provide a greater insight into how educational organisations not only view survivors but will also provide an illuminating insight into how they situate themselves and their work in British society and culture.

The focus on survivors, it will be shown, forms the basis of a mode of education aimed at the rehumanisation (a term frequently employed by educational organisations) of Holocaust victims and survivors through both the focus on individual experience and the considerable emphasis on the supposed commonality between Holocaust victims and the students who are learning about them. Given the universalisation and domestication of the Holocaust, and of the Holocaust survivor, in British historical consciousness, however, the close focus on the individual experience in education initially appears in opposition to the adoption of the universalised language of Holocaust commemoration and the domestication of memory in Britain today.

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<sup>153</sup> Greenspan. H, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony*, (2nd ed), (St Paul, Paragon House, 2010), Bernard-Donals. M & Glejzer. R, 'Between Witness and Testimony: Survivor Narratives and the Shoah', *College Literature*, Vol. 27, No. 2, (Spring 2000), pp. 1-20, Langer, L, *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory*, (London, Yale University Press, 1991), Trezise. T, 'Between History and Psychoanalysis: A Case Study in the Reception of Holocaust Survivor Testimony', *History and Memory*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (Spring/Summer 2008), pp. 7-47, Hartman. G, 'Learning from Survivors: The Yale Testimony Project', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (1995), pp. 192-207, Matthaus. J, *Approaching an Auschwitz Survivor: Holocaust Testimony and its Transformations*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009)

Considering the changing representation of Holocaust survivors and Holocaust victims against the development of British Holocaust education, this chapter will, therefore, seek to reflect upon whether British Holocaust education, which seeks to be transformative, challenges or reinforces the position of the survivor in British culture as a site of both universalisation and domestication. This will involve a discussion of the notion that Holocaust survivors are becoming gradually decontextualised or, as Levy and Sznajder would propose, deterritorialised from their Jewish identities and will demonstrate that the continual and consistent emphasis on identification and commonality promoted by educational organisations has a significant influence on this decontextualisation. By drawing on non-Jewish relationships with British Jewish communities before the outbreak of the Second World War, this chapter will then seek to suggest how we may come to understand the implications of this abstraction in a specifically British context.

Despite the prominence of survivors, and their experiences, within both education and wider culture it is increasingly apparent that, as the number of survivors continues to dwindle, sites of Holocaust memory are becoming ever more vital for the mediation of the Holocaust in British, and indeed, Western, society. If the landscape ‘can be “read” as a composite picture of the values of society’ then the changing landscape of British remembrance of the Holocaust reveals much about the increasing role and significance of the event as part of official British historical consciousness and the subsequent values celebrated in British society.<sup>154</sup> Over the last 25 years sites of Holocaust memory have become increasingly visible within the British landscape. The site of the Imperial War Museum houses an exhibition devoted to the Holocaust, the Holocaust Centre outside Nottingham exists as both a site of Holocaust remembrance and of education and despite the protracted process of gaining approval for it, and the fractured debates about its suitability, a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust was unveiled in Hyde Park in 1983. Sites alone are not in themselves particularly revealing, as Young asserts, ‘By themselves, monuments are of little value, mere stones in the landscape. But as part of a nation’s rites or the objects of people’s national pilgrimage, they are invested with national soul and memory.’<sup>155</sup> The way in which these sites of Holocaust remembrance have become increasingly invested with national significance reveals much about British understanding of the Holocaust. As survivors inevitably become older and the “direct link” to the Holocaust inches ever further away these sites will remain in Britain in a bid to ensure that the Holocaust is not forgotten and that the messages which it is said to impart are remembered.

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<sup>154</sup> Cooke, S, *The Hidden Landscapes of the Holocaust in Late Twentieth Century Britain*, (Unpublished PhD thesis, University of Bristol, 1998), p. 15

<sup>155</sup> Young, *Texture of Memory*, p. 2

The prevalence of Holocaust sites in Britain should not be surprising for, as Charlesworth and Addis state, 'Holocaust history, like war history, is a part of the landscape almost everywhere in Europe.'<sup>156</sup> Despite Holocaust history being increasingly embraced as part of the British narrative in terms of sites of Holocaust memory being constructed on the British landscape there are no historical Holocaust sites per-se in Britain. These spaces of Holocaust memory which have been constructed can be considered as places which both mediate and solidify different and evolving Holocaust narratives to the British people. Nevertheless, these are significantly different to Holocaust sites themselves. Numerous studies about the role and impact of the representation of the Holocaust within the museum context have been carried out both in terms of museums in Britain and also worldwide but, as William Miles states, '...there is a difference between sites *associated with* death, disaster and depravity and sites *of* death, disaster and depravity.'<sup>157</sup> The role that sites of death play within the construction of historical consciousness are in some ways similar to those sites associated with death play in the construction of consciousness, yet, in many significant and important ways they are also fundamentally different and, as such have played, and continue to play, a very singular role in British understanding and memory of the Holocaust.

Rather than exploring sites of memory within Britain itself the second part of this study will explore the way in which these "sites of death" have been absorbed into British cultural memory and how they have been treated, and represented, within educational spheres suggesting that whilst survivors have been used to domesticate the Holocaust within a British context the way in which Holocaust sites have been absorbed into British historical consciousness suggests a distancing of the Holocaust in popular imagination as a means of reinforcing the Holocaust, and other crimes against humanity, as being committed by the "Other" as the very antithesis of what is imagined to be British. Sites of memory have become increasingly integral to the mediation of Holocaust education yet it is only possible to understand the complexities of their use within Holocaust teaching if we first attempt to understand their changing and developing role with British culture.

The opening chapter in this part of the study will trace the evolution of Holocaust sites in British imagination through the consideration of the role and representation of Bergen-Belsen in British historical consciousness and the increasing prominence of Auschwitz-Birkenau in British

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<sup>156</sup> Charlesworth, A & Addis, M, 'Memorialization and the Ecological Landscapes of Holocaust Sites: The cases of Plaszow and Auschwitz-Birkenau', *Landscape Research*, Vol. 27, No. 3, (2002), pp. 229-251, p. 229

<sup>157</sup> Miles, W, 'Auschwitz: Museum Interpretation and Darker Tourism', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (2002), pp. 1175-1178, p. 1175

memory, positing that, over time, Auschwitz has become the more dominant site in British Holocaust imagination. This chapter will also seek to understand to what extent atrocity sites have shaped the narrative of the Holocaust as it has come to be understood in British society. Reflecting on the notion explored in previous chapters that the Holocaust has become an event against which Britain defines itself through what it is not the move in commemorative culture towards evoking the memory of Auschwitz, rather than Bergen-Belsen, raises some significant questions. Not least, if the domestication of Holocaust memory is so apparent when representing the survivor how can we interpret the move away from Bergen-Belsen in British historical consciousness? This chapter will demonstrate that the evolving British Holocaust consciousness regarding Holocaust sites has developed in such a way so as to reinforce British perceptions of the Holocaust as an event “committed over there” establishing a distance between those who committed the Holocaust and the British people and, ultimately, reinforcing traditional assumptions about the Holocaust and a British sense of self. This chapter will also demonstrate that British culture, through a utilisation of the universalisation of the Holocaust and drawing on traditional understandings of the “Other”, is facilitating the move of the Holocaust “eastwards” against wider historical British engagement with Central and Eastern Europe.

Both reflecting, and sculpting, the move towards the utilisation of sites of remembrance within wider culture Holocaust educators are increasingly encouraging students to visit sites at which Holocaust atrocities took place, in particular, Auschwitz-Birkenau, on the premise that hearing is not like seeing. The final chapter of this section will, therefore, provide an analysis of the use of visits to sites of atrocity within Holocaust education. The Holocaust Educational Trust was at the forefront of the move towards utilising sites of memory within education and as such this chapter will focus on the Trust’s signature programme the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project, during which sixth-form students participate in a four part programme including a day visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau.

This chapter will be a departure from the chapters which have preceded it in that it will assume the form of a localised case study of the project, the most publically prominent educational initiative which exists in Britain today, and which I have been granted access to due to the collaborative nature of this research. This educational project, as will be illustrated, is symptomatic of the complexities of Holocaust education and its development in Britain and, as such, provides an ideal space within which to reflect on these complexities and their significance

for British historical consciousness. Educational visits to Holocaust sites have generated considerable debates in recent years with some, such as Kay Andrews, raising the question of whether 'short visits of a few days or less *should* take in places such as Auschwitz-Birkenau' at all.<sup>158</sup> Situated within these debates and tracing the path of the participants as they visit the site this chapter will illustrate and explore the contradictions which are inherent within the programme. Through both textual analysis of educational resources utilised during the visit and considered observation, this chapter will consider how sites of atrocity are utilised and represented within Holocaust teaching. This will also address the question of what such visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau reveal about wider British historical consciousness and how they may actually prevent, rather than assist, critical engagement with the Holocaust itself. Whilst also suggesting that despite the expectations of those who participate on the course visits to such sites are not framed in a neutral way and that the politicisation of the sites visited during the course of these projects is indicative of the increasing politicisation of both wider Holocaust education and the way in which both the site of Auschwitz, and the Holocaust itself, are manipulated by political sentiment within wider British society.

Throughout the study, when considering the symbol of the Holocaust survivor and Auschwitz-Birkenau, it will be shown that, far from global narratives obliterating national ones, the symbols and iconic images which have emerged as dominant within global Holocaust imagery and interpretation have been absorbed and adopted by Britain as a means by which to both domesticate, and distance, the Holocaust in British historical consciousness in such a way so as to reinforce unifying national ideals and interpretations of what it means to be British in contemporary society.

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<sup>158</sup> Andrews. K, 'Finding a place for the victim: building a rationale for educational visits to Holocaust-related sites', *Teaching History*, Vol. 141, (December 2010), pp. 42-49, p. 43

## Section 1: Holocaust Survivors

### Chapter 1: A 'Very British' Holocaust Memory: Domesticating the Survivor Experience in British Culture

Margaret Taft asserts that, 'The "Holocaust survivor" as cultural figure now inhabits a central place within the public consciousness.'<sup>1</sup> Certainly it is the case that, in the twenty-first century, survivors have emerged as the main mediators of the Holocaust in British commemorative culture. Following a discussion of the treatment of survivors and their testimony in the immediate post-war years this chapter will then consider the current prominence of Holocaust survivors within British culture and the role of Holocaust education within this shift. It will be demonstrated that, alongside the universalisation of the Holocaust in popular consciousness, the symbol of the survivor has been increasingly utilised as a domesticated symbol within a British narrative of the Second World War.

This domestication will be illustrated through an analysis of the role of the survivor in maintaining a particular, and politically acceptable, interpretation of the Kindertransport in British imagination which reinforces British pride in both their treatment of refugees and in liberal democracy. Yet this chapter will go on to suggest that popular interpretations of the Kindertransport do not reflect their reality and will explore this fissure between popular imagination and historical reality. Thus, illustrating that the survivor has emerged not only as a venerated witness of the Holocaust but that this prominence, and the very presence of the survivor on British soil, has also come to act as a form of cultural camouflage, and politicised screen memory, in British cultural understandings, not only of the Holocaust, but also of Britain's own complicated relationship with Jewish refugees of Nazism.

#### *Holocaust Survivors in Post-war Britain*

Irrespective of the arguments surrounding its inception it is clear that the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001 helped to propel Holocaust survivors into a highly visible position in both political, and public, arenas. A day devoted to Holocaust memory provided greater political validity to the importance of remembering the Holocaust and also provided a forum in which Holocaust survivors could recount their experiences to the British public and political audiences. As Bloxham observes, 'Naturally it would be absurd and distasteful to have

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<sup>1</sup> Taft, M, *From Victim to Survivor the Emergence and Development of the Holocaust Witness 1941-1949*, (London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2013), p. 121

HMD [Holocaust Memorial Day] without survivors, a crime without victims.’<sup>2</sup> Yet whilst from the perspective of the twenty-first century this seems to be apparent this should not suggest that the voice of the survivor has always been valued to this extent. For, whilst the previously dominant narrative of a silence regarding the Holocaust existing in the post war years is now being challenged, it cannot be denied that survivors’ voices were often excluded from historical narratives of the Holocaust, due to concerns about the validity of testimony and the problems intrinsically associated with the fallacies of memory.<sup>3</sup> Alongside this historical reluctance to engage with survivor testimony, on a more than supplementary level, some survivors were also reluctant to speak about their experiences either through a desire to move on from what they had experienced or because they were unsure of how to articulate what had occurred.<sup>4</sup>

Those survivors who were willing or able to articulate their experiences were often faced with an unwillingness to listen by those, non-Jews and Jews alike, who were residing in the countries in which they sought refuge. Kitty Hart-Moxon describes how upon arrival in England her uncle told both her and her mother that, ‘on no account are you to talk about any of the things that happened to you. Not in my house. I don’t want my girls upset and I don’t want to know.’ As Hart goes on to note ‘we who had been pursued over Europe by the mutual enemy, and come close to extermination at the hands of that enemy, were not supposed to embarrass people by saying a word.’<sup>5</sup> Despite the prevalence of examples such as these, however, they should not be seen to overstate the notion of an apparent post-war silence. For whilst the Holocaust as we recognise it today cannot be discerned to have existed in public consciousness in quite the same way in the immediate post-war years, survivors were speaking about their experiences during this period. A number of memoirs were published in English in the initial post-war period which, as Waxman notes, ‘demonstrates that there was a market for this type of literature, although it was of course very different from the huge market that exists today.’<sup>6</sup>

Alongside the publication of such memoirs the Wiener Library in London also began collecting testimony, both during the war, and then from 1954 onwards. Founded by Alfred Wiener, who was himself Jewish, in 1933, the Wiener Library was initially no more than a collection of

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<sup>2</sup> Bloxham, D, ‘Britain’s Holocaust Memorial Days: Reshaping the Past in the Service of the Present’, *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol.21, No.1-2, (2002), pp.41-62, p. 46.

<sup>3</sup> For greater discussion into recent interpretations of the supposed ‘post-war silence’ please see Cesarani, D & Sundquist, E (eds), *After the Holocaust: Challenging the Myth of Silence*, (London, Routledge, 2011)

<sup>4</sup> Wiesel, E, ‘An Interview Unlike Any Other’ (trans Wiesel, M), *A Jew Today*, (New York, Vintage Books, 1978), p. 15

<sup>5</sup> Hart, K, *Return to Auschwitz*, (London, Grafton Books, 1983), p. 14

<sup>6</sup> Waxman, Z, *Writing the Holocaust: Identity, Testimony and Representation*, (Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2006) p. 100. Waxman also notes that many memoirs were originally written in Yiddish providing another explanation as to why they were not widely read within a British context.

documents collected by Wiener in Amsterdam as a means of documenting antisemitism in Nazi Germany, although the collection soon increased in size to form a significant and valuable amount of information. After being forced to flee Amsterdam in 1939 Wiener brought his collection to London where it remains to this day. When discussing the collection of such testimony at this time Kushner has observed that, 'The marginality of such projects should not be understated' due to the lack of economic funding they received and the lack of interest shown in them from mainstream publishers yet, conversely, nor should the importance of this documentation actually existing be underestimated.<sup>7</sup> For, whilst not as well-known as the American led David Boder interviews which were carried out with Jewish survivors in Europe in 1946, as one of the first British based initiatives to interview survivors the importance of the Wiener Library interviews cannot be overstated, not only for academic research about the changing language of Holocaust testimony but, also, for gaining an increased understanding of the way in which survivors were engaged with during the immediate post-war period. As Barkow has noted, the *Jewish Survivor Reports*, as they were to become known, were 'the first attempt to capture eye-witness accounts of the Holocaust' in Britain.<sup>8</sup>

Even whilst conducting these interviews, however, the Wiener Library appeared wary of using survivor interviews as a form of providing consistent factual knowledge of the Nazi crimes. In 1947 the *Wiener Library Bulletin* published a brief report entitled 'Concentration Camps to be investigated by Social Science' in which it discussed the value of the different approaches which could be assumed when exploring and analysing such a topic. When discussing the value of survivor reports the report states that whilst, 'the stories of survivors are of course of great importance, but they too, in their own way interpret many things and tend to produce or reproduce errors which from the psychological point of view are only too easy to understand.'<sup>9</sup> Despite acknowledging their value, concern about the validity of testimony as a result of the historical accuracy, or inaccuracy, of memory remained central to any engagement with survivor testimony and whilst such testimony was documented the reports themselves were never published by the Library. Even today when testimony is such an integral aspect of Holocaust remembrance and research, the *Jewish Survivor Reports* are stored only on microfilm. The purposes of collecting this information, therefore, was seemingly not to demonstrate to the public what had happened to individual survivors but to record what had happened for the purposes of the Library and as a future testament to what occurred.

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<sup>7</sup> Kushner, T, 'Oral History at the Extremes of Human Experience: Holocaust Testimony in a Museum Setting', *Oral History*, Vol. 29, No. 2, (Autumn, 2001), pp. 83-94, p. 84

<sup>8</sup> Barkow, B, *Alfred Wiener and the Making of the Holocaust Library*, (London, Vallentine Mitchell, 1997), p. 123

<sup>9</sup> *Wiener Library Bulletin*, Vol.1, No.3-4 (March-May 1957), p. 15

Whilst such testimony was not utilised in the way in which one may anticipate, due to the way in which Holocaust survivors are considered today, it is apparent that survivors were speaking about their experiences in the immediate post war years and that some organisations were attempting to document the crimes against the Jews at this time. The questions around silence should, therefore, not be focused on whether there was a silence or not, but rather, who survivors were speaking to in the post-war years, what they were saying and who was choosing to listen. What becomes increasingly apparent is that whilst those in Britain were speaking about their experiences they were not necessarily being listened to in the sustained way in which we conceive of today and that, when they were listened to, their testimony was not being disseminated in a way which was always easily accessible for the wider British audience. It is also crucial that the prominence of the Holocaust survivor in British culture today, and the way in which survivors are understood at the current time, does not obscure the reality of what was taking place not only in the immediate post-war period but also during the war itself. As Taft suggests;

‘the status attained by survivors and the attention afforded to their testimony in recent decades has largely eclipsed the prodigious efforts made by victims and survivors to record, collect and preserve vast amounts of testimony both during and immediately after the Holocaust giving rise to the popular notion that witnesses remained dormant or were inconsequential, passive and powerless until non-survivor audiences were ready to engage and listen.’<sup>10</sup>

Seen through this lens it is apparent that, whilst survivors had not achieved the iconic status that they have assumed in British society today, they were talking about their experiences. Additionally, if their experiences were not absorbed into popular consciousness this can be viewed as being more as a result of a lack of popular interest at that time as opposed to a monolithic silence on the part of the survivors themselves.

This relative lack of engagement with survivors can also be seen to be indicative of British liberal culture despite the initial assumption that a liberal culture would invite consideration of individual experiences. Seen through this lens, by diminishing the specificity of Jewish suffering, the experience of suffering is absorbed into wider narratives of suffering and victimisation so as not to overemphasise the suffering of one group at the expense of another. The deliberate absence of any consistent reference to the Jewish suffering during the British reports of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen appears to be a testament to this desire not to focus more than was

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<sup>10</sup> Taft, *From Victim to Survivor*, p. 3

necessary on the suffering of the Jewish people. It also alludes to the relative failure of British liberal culture to conceive that a specific group could be targeted in such a sustained way. Yet whilst the sense of Jewish suffering may have been downplayed it wasn't completely disregarded. The particularity of the Jewish suffering was acknowledged within the publication proudly entitled *The Victory Book* which was published at the cessation of hostilities in Europe. Containing 320 pages *The Victory Book* seeks to document the defining moments of the Second World War and the actors who participated in them. Within the final pages of the publication the book turns to the 'Victims of the Nazis' in which the 'the systematic extermination of the European Jews' is explicitly referred to.<sup>11</sup> Nevertheless, despite making reference to the Jewish specificity the extremely limited information about, and space accorded, to the victims of Nazism within this publication (only two pages) highlights the relative relegation of the Jewish experience to the periphery of the British interpretation of the wider war narrative.

Seemingly far from the periphery, the concentration camps were at the heart of the *Daily Mail* publication *Lest We Forget* which was also published in the immediate aftermath of the war. Containing graphic images of the mass butchery committed by Hitler and the Nazis, this book also references the specific suffering of the Jewish people but, again, this appears to be expressed purely so as to form a background against which the readers are encouraged to cast judgement on the actions of Nazi Germany and to take pride in British responses to fascism. As the publication states, creating such a document for public consumption was designed to be, 'a constant reminder to the British people of the menace they have beaten but must never forget [and] may well play a useful part in the re-education of the Germans.'<sup>12</sup> Despite being depicted in suffering and in death, and likely constituting the majority of the victims represented within this book, the Jewish people are used mainly as an illustrative device to reinforce a sense of British moral superiority over the Nazis which is reflected by the fact that it was hoped that the book would help "re-educate" the Germans. The seeming universalisation of the Jewish experience does not, however, initially appear too great as Jewish suffering is mentioned and their suffering is referred to. Nevertheless, the image which closes the book and which appears to illustrate some redemption to those who have suffered is that of former prisoners kneeling in prayer under the sign of the cross in Bergen-Belsen. The dominance of Christian religious imagery not only subsumes the specificity of the Jewish experience but also reinforces a Christian imagery of redemption and salvation brought about by Allied intervention in German

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<sup>11</sup> *The Victory Book*, (London, Odhams Press Ltd, 1945), pp. 308-309

<sup>12</sup> *Lest We Forget: The Horrors of Nazi Concentration Camps Revealed for All Time in the Most Terrible Photographs Ever Published*, (London, Daily Mail, 1945), p. 5

crimes. Whilst the Jewish experience is noted it is not consistently considered and is instead subsumed within a wider narrative of suffering recognisable for a predominantly non-Jewish audience.<sup>13</sup>

Whilst both of these publications utilise witness testimony it is apparent that the testimony used is that of liberators and those who witnessed the aftermath of the atrocities rather than those who had experienced them directly. Whilst seemingly the centre of concern, especially within the *Daily Mail* publication, in reality those who had endured and survived the camps were not being directly engaged with and their testaments to what had occurred were being filtered and mediated through those who liberated the camps and those who reported on the liberation rather than being expressed by the victims themselves. As *The Victory Book* and *Lest We Forget* appear to indicate the 'universalist liberal framework that dominated British society and culture was resistant to the particularity presented by the Holocaust.'<sup>14</sup> Both the victims and their experiences were considered more as an example of German 'sub-human cruelty' and within the context of an expression of the Allied righteousness rather than as a separate aim of Nazi policy itself.<sup>15</sup>

### *From Periphery to Prominence*

Despite the occasional gesture towards engaging with the experiences of those who were victimised by the Nazi regime, therefore, it is seemingly from a position situated on the relative periphery of historical understanding and, for the most part, subsumed within a narrative of liberalism that those who survived the Holocaust have become one of the foremost mediators of the Holocaust experience within British society and British culture. Not only can these 'survivor-witnesses' to whom Bernstein refers be seen as being treasured but they have become the leading authorities on the way in which the Holocaust is remembered today.<sup>16</sup> As the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust asserts, 'Testimonies of Holocaust and genocide survivors give us a unique insight into the experience of those who have suffered exclusion and persecution.'<sup>17</sup> As

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<sup>13</sup> For a greater analysis of the role Christianity has played in the formulation of the memory of the Holocaust please see: Lawson, T, 'Shaping the Holocaust: The Influence of Christian Discourse on Perceptions of the European Jewish Tragedy', *Holocaust and Genocide Studies*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (Winter 2007), pp. 404-420

<sup>14</sup> Kushner, T, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History*, (Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 277

<sup>15</sup> *Victory Book*, p. 308

<sup>16</sup> Bernstein, M, 'Victims in Waiting: Backshadowing and the Representation of European Jewry', *New Literary History*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (1998), pp. 625 – 651, p.638

<sup>17</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'Life Stories', available at [www.hmd.org.uk/resources/life-stories](http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/life-stories), (accessed 24 January 2014)

Wollaston has observed, 'the testimony of victims and survivors is granted privileged status, for only those who were there can truly know.'<sup>18</sup> This sense of reverence is not, however, limited to Britain, indeed, it can be discerned that what Henry Greenspan has referred to as a 'celebratory discourse' has come to surround Holocaust survivors across the globe.<sup>19</sup> When discussing the position of survivors in the United States, for example, Mintz has observed that there appears to have become a certain 'moral prestige associated with survivorhood' as survivors became increasingly 'sought after authorities even culture heroes.'<sup>20</sup>

Such privileging of survivor testimony and its utilisation as a means of imparting words of wisdom for humanity, whilst reflecting its emotiveness, is arguably not necessarily the best way to engage with survivors' words or their experiences. As a result of their experiences, survivors have, as Greenspan asserts, been increasingly 'Thrust into the role of teachers and guides' for humanity despite the reality that these witnesses 'are supposed to be bearers of knowledge that, sadly enough, they possess nor more than anyone else.'<sup>21</sup> Regardless of this reality, however, within Britain the survivor witness has been treated with increasing reverence as they have become ever more prominent in cultural understanding of the Holocaust and commemorative events. Survivors who made their home in Britain have been present at each Holocaust Memorial Day service since its inauguration in 2001. During each ceremony one or more of these survivors has given their testimony in the presence of politicians, religious leaders, the Mayor of London and a select group of students. As well as the annual national service survivors are also invited to speak at locally organised events which are increasingly taking place across the country. Reports of survivor speakers at memorial events receive regular coverage in both the national, and local, media both before and after the day itself. The *Daily Mail* reported that Holocaust survivors 'gave moving accounts of their experiences' during the national Holocaust Memorial Day event in 2002 whilst a more localised paper, the *Birmingham Mail*, reported that, 'A Holocaust survivor will be giving a touching account of how she survived the horrors of Auschwitz.'<sup>22</sup> So integral have survivor speakers become to such commemorative

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<sup>18</sup> Wollaston. I, *A War Against Memory? The Future of Holocaust Remembrance*, (London, SPCK, 1996), p. 50

<sup>19</sup> Greenspan. H, 'On Testimony, Legacy and the Problem of Helplessness in History', *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (Summer 2007), pp. 44 – 56, p. 45

<sup>20</sup> Mintz. A, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*, (Washington, University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 21, p. 3

<sup>21</sup> Greenspan, 'On Testimony', p. 49; Wieviorka. A, *The Era of the Witness*, (London, Cornell University Press, 2006), p. 133

<sup>22</sup> Blunkett. D, 'The Bigotry that Exists in Britain', *Daily Mail*, (28 January 2002); Authi. J, 'Harrowing Tale from Auschwitz Survivor', *Birmingham Mail*, (18 January 2008); 'Holocaust Memorial Day: Survivors with a message lest we forget Nazi genocide', *The Guardian*, (27 January 2006); Bates. S, 'Not forgotten', *Western Daily Press*, (21 January 2006); 'Survivor's Grim Tale', *The Sun*, (28 January 2009); 'Memorial to Victims', *Hull Daily Mail*, (28 January 2014); Garner. R, 'A Living History Lesson', *The Independent*, (23 January 2014)

events that now, in the eventuality that a survivor is not able to attend a memorial service, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust provides detailed information about alternative and appropriate testimony and readings which could be used in place of a survivor speaker stating that, 'It's not possible for a survivor to attend every HMD event that is held in the UK, so organisers may wish to consider inviting a local community or faith leader or young people from their area to read extracts from the survivor stories we supply.'<sup>23</sup>

Not only are survivors a visible aspect of British commemorative practice but they have, in part, also provided the justification for the establishment of a day of Holocaust reflection due to their increasing age. Certainly the proximity to a time in which survivors would no longer be present within British society was frequently articulated as a reason for the establishment of a day of Holocaust remembrance with one MP noting that, 'Each day, the link with the holocaust through its survivors is weakened as they pass away or their memories fade.'<sup>24</sup> When confirming the date that the first Holocaust Memorial Day would take place, the then Prime Minister Tony Blair reinforced this sense of urgency by stating that, 'As the Holocaust survivors age and become fewer in number, it becomes more and more our duty to take up the mantle and tell each generation what happened and what could happen again.'<sup>25</sup> Without the physical presence of survivors in Britain to be able to share their experiences, it was felt that there must be a more concerted effort to remember the Holocaust within British society. Thus utilised as one of the main justifications for creating a national day of remembrance, Holocaust survivors have assumed a prominent role within British culture as it is increasingly felt that, in order to gain a greater understanding of the Holocaust, it is increasingly important to engage with those who experienced the events as it is believed that they can impart messages for humanity due to what they have experienced. As the opening line of a documentary aired on Holocaust Memorial Day in 2013 articulated, 'there are only a few hundred survivors of the Holocaust still alive and living in Britain.'<sup>26</sup> As such the imperative to listen to, and take heed from, the words and experiences of survivors has continued to be promoted as being at the forefront for the need for Holocaust remembrance before the 'era of the witness' comes to a natural cessation.<sup>27</sup>

The presence of survivors can also be felt within another institutionalised site of Holocaust memory found in the Holocaust exhibition which is housed within the Imperial War Museum in

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<sup>23</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'Life Stories.'

<sup>24</sup> Dismore. A, *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, Holocaust Remembrance Day, (30 June 1999), Vol. 334, Col. 362-364

<sup>25</sup> Travis. A, 'Blair sets date for Holocaust Memorial Day', *The Guardian*, (27 January 2000)

<sup>26</sup> *Britain's Holocaust Survivors*, Directed by Daisy Asquith, (Channel 4, 27 January 2013), 00.11s

<sup>27</sup> Wieviorka, *Era of the Witness*, p. xv

London. Intended to exist as a 'museum within a museum' the Holocaust exhibition was opened to the public in June 2000 to widespread praise.<sup>28</sup> Despite fears to the contrary survivor testimony, which had often been disregarded within museum settings, formed a notable and consistent part of the Holocaust exhibition. As Lawson observes, 'One thing even the absent-minded visitor could not fail to notice is the prominence of the Holocaust's victims' within the exhibition itself.'<sup>29</sup> That the victims and survivors will play an integral role within the exhibition is immediately apparent upon entering the opening enclave of the exhibit. Twenty-six pictures of Jewish men, women and children in recognisable family scenes adorn the wall whilst two videos, one utilising survivor testimony, the other video footage of pre-war Jewish life, continually loop to ensure visitors engage with life before the Nazi destruction. The use of video-testimony provided by, mainly Jewish, survivors continues on screens throughout the exhibition and whilst, as Kushner states, the testimony 'complements rather than leads the narrative of the exhibition' it is also a fundamental aspect of putting a human face on an inhuman act.<sup>30</sup> This appears to have been an integral aim of those who both interviewed the survivors, and edited the video testimony, and who stated that it was their hope that they would encourage visitors to 'remember who these individuals were: ordinary human beings like us, living ordinary lives in, for the most part, ordinary unremarkable towns and villages across the length and breadth of Europe.'<sup>31</sup>

Putting a human face on the Holocaust was a crucial aim of those designing the exhibit as Martin Smith, advisor to the Holocaust exhibition, noted during the creation of the exhibition, 'I do know that the Advisory Committee and especially myself are most concerned that Jews and other victims should not be seen as homogenous group or simply as victims and corpses.'<sup>32</sup> Such was the impact of the use of survivor testimony within the exhibition that, within reports of the exhibition's opening, it was frequently observed that, 'One of the most poignant parts of the exhibition is the filmed testimony of survivors of the Holocaust' whilst others described the 'intensely moving' use of personal stories throughout.<sup>33</sup> As Suzanne Bardgett, Director of the exhibition, has asserted, 'witness testimony is, needless to say a particularly effective tool for

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<sup>28</sup> Samuelson. M, 'Holocaust exhibition will be silent and understated', *The Financial Times*, (5 March 1996)

<sup>29</sup> Lawson. T, 'Ideology in a Museum of Memory: A Review of the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol.4, No. 2, (2003), pp. 173-183, p. 174

<sup>30</sup> Kushner. 'Oral History', p.91

<sup>31</sup> Dodds. A & Barker. J, 'Holocaust Exhibition Proposal for an Introductory Film', *IWM Archives: File: October Films April 1997-February 1998*, (23 October 1997)

<sup>32</sup> Memo from Martin Smith to Robert Crawford, Suzanne Bardgett and Penny Ritchie-Calder re Holocaust Exhibition Rough Cuts, *IWM Archives: File: October Films December 1998-February 1999*, (24 February 1999)

<sup>33</sup> Johnston. J, 'Queen to open permanent Holocaust exhibition', *The Scotsman*, (5 June 2000) 'The Imperial War Museum', *The Guardian*, (20 January 2004)

examining the intricacies of human behaviour' and as such survivor testimony has been effectively utilised within the exhibition through filmed and recorded testimony throughout.<sup>34</sup>

Explanations for this increased engagement and veneration have varied in academic debate, and these debates shall be discussed below, although it is clear that no individual factor can account for this development. As illustrated, despite previous historical assumptions about a supposed post-war silence enveloping those who came to Britain, survivors were articulating their experiences even if they had not yet constituted a fundamental part of a wider British narrative of World War Two. Neither survivors, nor their experiences, were as prominent or as significant as they are at the present time, in part, because the Holocaust as it is understood today was not recognised in the same way in the immediate post-war period. As Cesarani observes, when considering this period, 'we are mistaken if we look in the past for representations of what we recognise today as the Holocaust.'<sup>35</sup> Yet the gradually changing perception of oral testimony, and of oral history, during the 1960s and 1970s was to contribute to an environment in which survivor testimony and, more importantly, survivors themselves were slowly becoming recognised as valuable, not only in academia, but also in more public arenas as 'historical interest in the construction of Holocaust narratives based on victim testimonies gathered pace in the 1980s' and 1990s.<sup>36</sup>

Alongside this increased engagement with oral history it has been suggested that the 1961 trial of Adolf Eichmann held in Israel, during which 111 Holocaust survivors were called to testify, gave a prominent place to the words of survivors within the legal system which, during the Belsen and Nuremberg Trials held in the immediate aftermath of the cessation of hostilities, had previously considered survivor witnesses as being somewhat supplementary. Wieviorka asserts that, 'The Eichmann trial freed the victims to speak' and certainly their presence in the courtroom prompted greater engagement with the Jewish experience during the Holocaust itself.<sup>37</sup> Yet as Taft suggests, 'the explosion of interest in the Holocaust witness that came with the Eichmann trial signalled the creation of a more receptive broad based audience rather than a sudden willingness and desire on the part of the witness to testify.'<sup>38</sup> Within the newly established State of Israel in particular, 'survivors were constantly told...that they should turn

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<sup>34</sup> Bardgett, S, 'Memorandum to the Director General of the IWM', *IWM Archives: October Films April 1997-February 1998*, (21 November 1997)

<sup>35</sup> Cesarani, D, 'How Post-war Britain Reflected on the Nazi Persecution and Mass Murder of Europe's Jews: A Reassessment of Early Responses', in Kushner, T & Ewence, H (eds), *Whatever Happened to British Jewish Studies?*, (Middlesex, Vallentine Mitchell, 2012), pp. 99-135, p. 102

<sup>36</sup> Taft, *From Victim to Survivor*, p.3

<sup>37</sup> Wieviorka, *Era of the Witness*, p. 87

<sup>38</sup> Taft, *From Victim to Survivor*, p. 181

their faces forward, not backward; that it was in their interest, insofar as possible, to forget the past and proceed to build new lives' for the dehumanised victim of the Holocaust inferred weakness, not the strength that the new nation wished to project.<sup>39</sup> As such the victimised survivors of the camps were not viewed in the light of heroism but in the victimised language of the eternally downtrodden diaspora Jew and, subsequently, their experiences were rarely welcomed or articulated within a public sphere. Whilst the trial and 'the eye-witness accounts heard in the Jerusalem courtroom, transformed the public perception of the survivor community' within Israel, in the words of Kushner the Eichmann trial, 'may have put in the British public domain the historical details of the Holocaust, but its longer term impact was no more than a minor ripple.'<sup>40</sup> As Karpf has argued, 'though survivors testimony played an important role in the trial, there was an enduring fascination with Nazi evil' in Britain, which surpassed any significant desire to listen to the experiences of survivors.<sup>41</sup> Rather than creating a new or sustained awareness of either the Holocaust or survivors to any particular degree in Britain, therefore, 'by presenting a mass of new information in a new format the trial catalysed consciousness and crystallized certain trends' in collective imagination.<sup>42</sup> In and of itself, however, the trial has perhaps permeated public awareness and assumed a greater place in public consciousness today than it did at the time.

Within the United States engagement with the Holocaust and with survivors was to significantly increase in the period following the Eichmann trial, as Novick asserts, the trial 'effectively broke fifteen years of near silence on the Holocaust in American public discourse.'<sup>43</sup> Given the turn in historical debate towards a universalised and transnational interpretation of how the Holocaust has come to figure so prominently in the Western world it could be argued that the shift in American engagement with the Holocaust is reflective of the way in which the subject was treated in Britain. Whilst it is tempting to associate the growing prominence of the Holocaust, and survivors, in the United States with the position of survivors in Britain during this time it is clear that a divergence occurred in the development of Holocaust consciousness in these countries and, subsequently, the way in which survivors were considered and encountered. For as Pearce observes, 'Whereas in North America, Israel and other parts of Western Europe the

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<sup>39</sup> Novick, P, *The Holocaust and Collective Memory*, (London, Bloomsbury, 2000), p. 83

<sup>40</sup> Yablonka, H, 'The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Israel: The Nuremberg, Kapos, Kastner, and Eichmann Trials', *Israel Studies*, Vol. 8, No. 3, (Fall 2003), pp. 1-24, p. 19; Kushner, T, 'Too Little, Too Late? Reflections on Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day', *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture*, Vol. 23, No.1, (2004), pp. 116-129, p. 117

<sup>41</sup> Karpf, A, *The War After: Living with the Holocaust*, (London, Minerva, 1997), p. 206

<sup>42</sup> Cesarani, D, *After Eichmann: Collective Memory and the Holocaust since 1961*, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2005), p. 3

<sup>43</sup> Novick, *Collective Memory*, p. 144

presence of the Holocaust could be measured in terms of a growing body of published historiographical works or cultural “products” very much the opposite was true in Britain.’<sup>44</sup>

Novick advanced the view that within American historical consciousness ‘American gentiles have for the most part been consumers not producers of talk about the Holocaust’ suggesting that ‘The evolution of Holocaust memory in the United States has been, in the main, the result of a series of choices made by American Jewry about how to deal with that memory.’<sup>45</sup> Yet as Pearce astutely observes, despite the usefulness of Novick’s study, ‘Simply applying or transposing Novick’s thesis onto Britain is both futile and erroneous.’<sup>46</sup> Certainly British historical consciousness can be seen to have been influenced by the growth of engagement with the Holocaust in America. The exportation of the film *Schindler’s List* is just one example which will be discussed below. Yet during the period between the Eichmann trial and the release of the film in 1993 the growth of Holocaust awareness in Britain did not follow the same trajectory as that of the United States. As Kushner observes, the ‘continued marginality of survivors both inside and outside the Jewish community’ in Britain reflects the inherent differences between the way in which both survivors, and the Holocaust, were treated and engaged with in nations which many consider to have followed the same path of remembrance.<sup>47</sup> Whilst survivors such as Wiesel and Wiesenthal were becoming household names in the United States in Britain survivors were still, in the main, disregarded by both non-Jewish communities who did not see the Holocaust as an historical event with relevance to Britain and established Jewish communities who either did not wish to draw undue attention to the Holocaust or did not want to be reminded of it. As Berman notes, there has been an ‘ambiguous relationship between commemoration of the Holocaust and Anglo-Jewish unity’ with attempts by some within Jewish communities to commemorate the Holocaust meeting apathy and, at times, resistance from within the British Jewish community itself.<sup>48</sup> Within this fractured environment it is apparent that neither the Holocaust, nor survivors, were as of yet invested with the same prominence and prestige as was increasingly being bestowed on survivors within America.

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<sup>44</sup> Pearce. A, ‘Britain’s Holocaust Memorial Day: Inculcating ‘British’ or ‘European’ Holocaust Consciousness’, in Sharples. C & Jensen. O (eds), *Britain and the Holocaust: Remembering and Representing War and Genocide*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), pp. 190-211, p. 193

<sup>45</sup> Novick, *Collective Memory*, p. 279

<sup>46</sup> Pearce. A, *The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain 1979-2001*, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway University, 2010), p. 14

<sup>47</sup> Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, p. 250

<sup>48</sup> Berman. J.E, ‘Holocaust Commemorations in London and Anglo-Jewish (Dis-)Unity’, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, Vol. 3, No. 1, (2004), pp. 51-71, p. 54

Some have gestured towards the role of television documentaries in the 1970s as illustrating that the Holocaust was increasingly permeating British consciousness and encouraging an encounter with survivors. Certainly these documentaries, most notably the “Genocide” episode featured in Jeremy Isaacs’s 1973 *The World At War* series and *Kitty: Return to Auschwitz* in 1979, were broadcast but, as Kushner describes, they were somewhat ‘isolated events’ and how far they can be said to have influenced a turn towards the Holocaust in popular imagination appears debateable.<sup>49</sup> Compounding the relative isolation of these documentaries, with the exception of *Kitty: Return to Auschwitz*, it is clear that survivor testimony was rarely utilised within documentaries produced at this time. Despite facing a critical reception from some, the transmission of the dramatized mini-series *Holocaust* in 1978 did bring ‘the subject of the Holocaust closer to the consciousness of people in Britain.’<sup>50</sup> Portrayed through the lens of dramatization, as opposed to historical documentary, the Holocaust became more easily accessible to the British audience. In a similar vein, as Britain moved into the 1980s, the Holocaust was to slowly feature more heavily in both public consciousness and political debate following the controversial enactment of the War Crimes Act in 1991 and the equally controversial debates surrounding the position of the Holocaust as a mandatory aspect of the National Curriculum in the same year.

Yet despite the gradual increase in awareness of the Holocaust due to the way in which these factors permeated British consciousness survivors were not nearly as prominent or respected as they are in contemporary Britain. Due to the impact of Steven Spielberg’s *Schindler’s List* upon British popular consciousness previous explanations for the increased visibility of survivors, and the Holocaust, in British culture have attributed this shift to the film itself suggesting that the success of the film accounts for the seeming transformation of the Holocaust survivor from a position of obscurity to one of prominence. Certainly the film, and the subsequent establishment of the Shoah Foundation by Spielberg in 1994, had a considerable influence on the way in which the British public chose to engage with the Holocaust and, in turn, with Holocaust survivors. Survivors themselves are often keen to attribute their increased visibility in British society at this time to the success of the film. As survivor Mala Tribich reflected on the 20<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the release of *Schindler’s List*, as a result of the films’ popularity, ‘The surge in public interest gave Holocaust survivors strength. We found the courage to speak about what had happened to us and our families, and people were ready to listen. When they heard us

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<sup>49</sup> Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, p. 254

<sup>50</sup> Berman, ‘Holocaust Commemorations’, p.56

speaking as British citizens, they felt that the Holocaust was part of this country's history too.<sup>51</sup> Yet whilst 'Spielberg's narrative has become central to the popularisation of the Holocaust' and how the historical event has come to be understood in British historical consciousness, as this study has shown, the film alone cannot be seen to account for the either the increased, or continued, reverence attributed to the survivor in British life, although it certainly contributed to an upsurge of interest in the Holocaust in the early 1990s.<sup>52</sup> Its role in the continuation of British historical engagement with the Holocaust, however, has waned in recent years as other films, most notably *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas*, come to take greater prominence in British cultural engagement with the event itself, most notably amongst younger audiences.<sup>53</sup>

### Encountering Survivors

Whilst dramatic representations of the Holocaust certainly made an impact in the public arena the release of *Schindler's List* also encouraged greater engagement with the Holocaust in educational spheres. The Holocaust Educational Trust, for example, a lobbying turned charitable organisation formed in 1988 in the wake of the establishment of the All Party Parliamentary War Crimes Group as a means of 'promoting research, supporting Holocaust education, producing resources and advancing the teaching of the Nazi genocide in educational institutions' utilised the popularity of the film by sending an abridged copy of the film, suitable for those in Key Stage 3, to schools across the country.<sup>54</sup> Whilst the film may have allowed survivors to feel as if their testimony would be more welcomed in wider society it is clear that the release of the film facilitated greater engagement with both the Holocaust and survivors within the educational sphere. As Trude Levi reflected, *Schindler's List*, 'opened the doors for us into schools' and, over the course of the mid 1990s, these "open doors" and the organisations who facilitated them were to help transform the way in which the field of Holocaust education was to frame its educational initiatives and, ultimately, to define itself.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Tribich, M, 'Schindler's List has freed us to bear witness', *The Times*, (8 April 2013)

<sup>52</sup> Lawson, *Shaping the Holocaust*, p. 24

<sup>53</sup> The cultural legacy of Schindler's List amongst the school age children can be seen to be waning. During an outreach session given by the Trust to sixth form students on 16 November 2011 the author saw the educator ask those assembled to raise their hands if they had seen *Schindler's List* and not one students' hand went up. When she asked if any of them had seen *The Boy in the Striped Pyjamas* the majority of the students present raised their hands.

<sup>54</sup> Pearce, *Development of Historical Consciousness*, p. 72; Short, G & Reed, C, *Issues in Holocaust Education*, (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p. 59

<sup>55</sup> Levi, T, 'The Survivors Right to Reply', in Haggith, T & Newman, J (eds), *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, (London, Wallflower Press, 2005), pp. 243-258, p. 244

The role of the Holocaust Educational Trust in encouraging greater engagement between the general public and the Holocaust, particularly survivors, should not be underestimated. For the landscape of Holocaust education in Britain prior to the implementation of the National Curriculum can be described as fragmented at best. As one teacher observed in 1980 whilst, 'most textbooks include the subject...usually the coverage is far too brief.'<sup>56</sup> The sentiment that there was an engagement with the Holocaust within school textbooks but that the material provided was not sufficient to support teachers is reinforced by Geoffrey Short who has asserted that the Holocaust enjoyed only a 'limited coverage in textbooks' during the time immediately prior to the formation of the National Curriculum.<sup>57</sup> When analysing the answers of those teachers who responded to questions posed by the Yad Vashem report into British Holocaust education conducted in 1987, it was concluded that, 'the general impression gained is that many educators consider the subject of the Holocaust to be unworthy of any more time and detailed study.'<sup>58</sup> This statement leads one to consider that it was a lack of will from within the educational system itself which resisted the inclusion of the Holocaust in the teaching syllabus. It is worth noting, however, that when a working group, headed by Clive Lawton, was established in 1980 with the aim of creating a resource in order to encourage and facilitate Holocaust teaching, its members were met with the reality that, whilst supportive of the concept of a Holocaust specific resource, many teachers felt that, '...at the present time the teaching of the Holocaust as a single entity is curtailed' both as a result of Modern History Syllabuses and the lack of time available to teach something which was not generally assessed in examinations.<sup>59</sup> What is apparent is that despite the gesture towards the inclusion of the Holocaust in education at this time, a lack of engagement from inside the educational arena was compounded by a relative lack of understanding of the subject, in part, as a result of an absence of easily accessible resources and guidance about how teachers should approach this emotive and complex subject. These issues seemingly entwined to create an environment in which the Holocaust as a serious subject of study was relegated to the margins of discussion in the classroom.

Given the complexities inherent in teaching the Holocaust it is unsurprising that many teachers simply chose to avoid teaching the subject altogether. Yet, during the 1980s, some limited guidance was produced and made available for teachers. The Inner London Education Authority (hereafter referred to as the ILEA) helped to establish an exhibition about the Holocaust for

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<sup>56</sup> Letter from Mike Paris to Clive Lawton, *Board of Deputies of British Jews Archive*, ACC-3121-E5-009, (4 July 1980)

<sup>57</sup> Short & Reed, *Issues in Holocaust Education*, p. 16

<sup>58</sup> Polonsky. A, 'Introduction' in Fox. J., *Teaching the Holocaust: The Report of a Survey in the United Kingdom*, (Yad Vashem Charitable Trust & University of Leicester 1987) p. 3

<sup>59</sup> Letter from T.R.Pattison to Clive Lawton, *Board of Deputies of British Jews Archive*, ACC-3121-E5-009, (2 November 1980)

students and members of the public to visit in 1983. Alongside this an educational video about the Holocaust and a resource book, entitled *Auschwitz Yesterday's Racism*, were created to accompany the exhibition and were designed to help support those teachers who wished to teach about the Holocaust within the classroom. As Russell notes, 'The ILEA produced materials that would encourage and support teachers to teach about the Holocaust so that students would have the opportunity to learn about this event and discuss the issues arising from it.'<sup>60</sup> These resources were to be followed by the *Anne Frank in the World* touring exhibition which was run by the Anne Frank House in Amsterdam which came to Britain in 1986. As a result of this exhibition the Anne Frank Trust was established and continues its commemorative and educational work to this day. This material was, however, fragmentary, and it was not readily or widely available, meaning that access to it was limited.

Despite this rather limited educational engagement with the Holocaust until this point with the consolidation of the National Curriculum the Holocaust became a mandatory part of British history education. Nonetheless, the mandatory position it was to assume should not imply that the place of the Holocaust on the new curriculum was secured automatically. For when the History Working Group, an advisory group consisting of both teaching professionals and academics recruited to assist in the creation of the National Curriculum, submitted their *Interim Report* to the Department of Education and Science in 1989, they had included neither the Holocaust nor the rise and fall of Nazism within their teaching recommendations. Despite being considered an 'interesting' aspect of European history, John Roberts, a member of the History Working Group with an academic background based in history, stated that the Holocaust, 'did not change history or have the same impact, for example, as the Chinese revolution.'<sup>61</sup> In a time constricted syllabus the Holocaust was not viewed as an essential area of study for the formulation of students' historical knowledge and understanding. After extensive debate, the expression of such sentiments led to the Working Group reaching the conclusion that, 'a curriculum for the twenty-first century did not absolutely require the inclusion of the rise and fall of Nazi Germany.'<sup>62</sup>

Despite the publication of the Working Group's *Interim Report*, however, those involved in its creation remained divided on the omission of the Second World War with some feeling that to

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<sup>60</sup> Russell. L, *Teaching the Holocaust in School History: Teachers or Preachers?* (London, Continuum, 2006), p. 66

<sup>61</sup> Letter from John Robert (Member of History Working Group) to Carrie Supple, (12 October 1989) as cited in Russell, *Teaching the Holocaust*, p. 91

<sup>62</sup> Prochaska. A, 'The History Working Group: Reflections and Diary', *History Workshop Journal*, Vol. 30, (1990), pp. 80-90, p. 87

omit the War, and associated topics such as the Holocaust, from historical education would be a mistake. Such feelings were echoed outside of the Working Group and political pressure to include the Second World War as an integral part of the new curriculum was increasing as discussions became increasingly volatile and emotively charged. The *Interim Report* itself acknowledged that ‘there exist many, often strongly-held and divergent, opinions about school history’ and the strongly held views surrounding the significance of the Holocaust were about to be voiced by influential political figures.<sup>63</sup> The Board of Deputies of British Jews wrote numerous letters of protest to the government whilst a cross party campaigning group of MPs headed by Greville Janner who had recently formed, and become Chairperson of, the Holocaust Educational Trust, constructed a detailed document entitled the *Submission on the Teaching on the Second World War*, in which they categorically stated that;

‘We regard the omission of the Second World War and the rise and fall of Nazi Germany from the National Curriculum as totally unacceptable; without logic; educationally insupportable; and offensive to all those who fought in or suffered from the Nazis or the Second World War. It is also a sad signal for the future if our educational curriculum chooses deliberately to ignore key aspects of Britain’s recent past.’<sup>64</sup>

The decision to frame concern over the omission of the Holocaust from the *Interim Report* within wider concerns over the omission of the Second World War was to prove extremely influential. As will be discussed further in this chapter British awareness of the war was considerably stronger than that of the Holocaust at this point. As *The Times* reported, ‘MPs rallied round the flag at question time, pressing for the inclusion of the Second World War “our finest hour” in the history syllabus of the national curriculum.’<sup>65</sup> After considerable lobbying from interested parties and political and, increasingly, public debate the Holocaust and the rise and fall of Nazi Germany were eventually included on the curriculum.

Despite the success of Janner and the Board of Deputies to ensure the place of the Holocaust on the first National Curriculum it soon became apparent to those now working within the Trust that the relative lack of engagement with the Holocaust in education before 1991 had also extended to a lack of engagement with Holocaust survivors. Whilst it was acknowledged in 1993

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<sup>63</sup> Department of Education and Science, ‘National Curriculum History Working Group Interim Report’, *Board of Deputies of British Jews Archive*, ACC-3121-C8-2-016

<sup>64</sup> Janner. G, Marshall. J, Rhodes-James. R & Rooker. J, ‘Submission on the Teaching of the Second World War and the Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany in the National Curriculum’, *Board of Deputies of British Jews*

*Archive*, ACC-3121-C8-2-016, (September 1989)

<sup>65</sup> ‘Call for lessons on ‘England’s heroes’, *The Times*, (15 November 1989)

that, 'Some schools have taken the initiative by introducing a teaching programme and inviting speakers, including Holocaust survivors' into the classroom, the fact that many teachers did not take this initiative is understandable.<sup>66</sup> The educational potential, and emotional impact, of the survivor speaker had yet to be realised and with no mechanism in place to facilitate contact with a survivor Holocaust education continued to be a somewhat fragmentary affair in which the experience of the victims was often obscured in preference to discussions about perpetrators.<sup>67</sup>

Such reluctance to engage with either the Holocaust, or survivors, within the educational sphere was not encountered solely within Britain. Motivated by a poll conducted by Swedish schoolchildren, which appeared to demonstrate that students were increasingly doubtful as to the truth about the annihilation of the Jewish population of Europe, urgent concern was expressed by the former Swedish Prime Minister Göran Persson as to the importance of ensuring that the Holocaust was both taught and remembered across the globe.<sup>68</sup> As a result of the articulation of these concerns the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, an international conference involving 46 countries and a number of intergovernmental departments which took place in 2000 concerning a worldwide need to remember and educate about the events of the Holocaust took place. This forum, and the resulting IHRA organisation it subsequently established and of which Britain was to be a founding member, was to also play an influential role in the solidification of a victim centred approach to both education and Holocaust commemoration and remembrance. Crucially within the 8 point pronouncement known as the Stockholm Declaration which was announced in light of the conference, and which forms the foundation for the IHRA, victims and survivors were orientated at the very centre of Holocaust education and remembrance with the pronouncement stating that, 'We empathize with the victims' suffering and draw inspiration from their struggle...Our commitment must be to remember the victims who perished, respect the survivors still with us, and reaffirm humanity's common aspiration for mutual understanding and justice.'<sup>69</sup> In addition, a number of Holocaust survivors, including Kitty Hart-Moxon, played what was described as a 'prominent role' in the conference proceedings, whilst Elie Wiesel became the Honorary Chairman of the conference.<sup>70</sup>

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<sup>66</sup> Wingate. J, 'Letter: Holocaust Denial', *The Times*, (1 July 1993)

<sup>67</sup> The changing role and representation of survivors in education will be explored in the following chapter.

<sup>68</sup> International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 'History of the IHRA', available at [www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/history-ihra](http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/about-us/history-ihra), (accessed 7 January 2014)

<sup>69</sup> *Proceedings of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust: A Conference on Education, Remembrance and Research*, 28-29 January 2000, (Stockholm, Graphium Norstedts, July 2000), p. 3

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, p. 7

Despite this international move towards recognising and embracing survivor testimony this notion of a more survivor centred approach towards education and remembrance was already being utilised in Britain by the Holocaust Educational Trust which had realised the potential educational value of students encountering not only survivor testimony, but also the survivor, in the classroom. In light of the success of *Schindler's List*, the Trust had begun their *Outreach Project* which encouraged schools to invite survivors into the classroom in order to allow students to hear the testimony of someone who had experienced the Holocaust themselves. As Mala Tribich observed, in the wake of greater awareness of the Holocaust survivors 'began to speak about their experiences in schools through organisations such as the Holocaust Educational Trust. I know from the reaction of the students the impact that it has on them to listen to a survivor of the Holocaust, an eyewitness to that dark chapter.'<sup>71</sup> Nor was the *Outreach* programme initiated by the Trust a short lived initiative. The concept of survivor speakers in public arenas was soon adopted by organisations such as the Holocaust Centre, the Jewish Museum and the London Jewish Cultural Centre, all of whom run educational projects which involve survivors giving their testimony to student audiences either in situ at the organisation or, in the case of the Holocaust Educational Trust, within the school environment itself. In the late twentieth, and early twenty-first centuries, on a daily basis in Britain, either independently or through organisations dedicated to continuing the memory of the Holocaust, survivors continue to participate in *Outreach* projects in schools, giving their testimony and reliving their story in the hope that, through education and remembrance, the events of the Holocaust will not be forgotten and that the "lessons" which it is believed can be learnt from it will encourage people towards tolerance and an appreciation and understanding of difference.

As Karen Pollock, Chief Executive of the Holocaust Educational Trust, says 'bearing witness to the Holocaust' is at the very heart of the Trust's work yet whilst organisations seek to bear witness to the Holocaust it is the survivors themselves who are considered to be the real link to the Holocaust.<sup>72</sup> As such their role in the transmission of the Holocaust's legacy for contemporary society is paramount. As one student noted after hearing a survivor speak, 'It made the whole thing much more personalised and real' whilst another stated that they 'had never met anyone that had been through the Holocaust, and I felt that meeting him created a tangible link between the present and the past.'<sup>73</sup> The significance of a survivor speaker, and of being in the

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<sup>71</sup> Tribich, 'Schindler's List'

<sup>72</sup> Pollock, K as cited in Shepherd, J, 'Words cannot express: How can students who've visited Auschwitz convey what they have seen and felt to friends back home?' *The Guardian*, (25 November 2008)

<sup>73</sup> Respondent 39, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: Glasgow Visit 2011', (5 December 2011) accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 12 December 2012); Respondent 13, 'Lessons from Auschwitz

physical presence of someone who had experienced the horrors of the Holocaust, seemingly makes a powerful impression on those who hear survivors give their testimony. As the power of survivor testimony became increasingly expressed in the classroom so too its emotional value became increasingly recognised, and utilised, by wider British culture and within commemorative events.

The form of education promoted by these organisations within their outreach programmes has certainly helped to propel the survivor witness into the public eye by ensuring that they are increasingly accessible to the public. Certainly the sentiment that exists in contemporary British education that, 'nothing can compete with a survivor testimony' in the transmission of Holocaust education, has come to reflect the fact that survivors have emerged as a dominant mediator of Holocaust consciousness in popular understandings of the historical event, not least, due to the success and popularity of educational initiatives which have entered public consciousness and influenced Holocaust memorial practices.<sup>74</sup> The success of the *Outreach Project* undoubtedly influenced the decision by those instigating Holocaust Memorial Day to include survivor speakers within the commemorative service. Through the introduction of such initiatives Holocaust survivors are no longer viewed as abstract figures only to be encountered in books or on film but real people who can be seen and heard in a public environment and who are willing to answer questions about their experiences. Whilst educational initiatives cannot account alone for the greater interaction with survivors what is clear, however, is that whether through a culmination of the influence of media representations, the desire of aging survivors to tell others about their experiences and educational initiatives, 'By the end of the twentieth century Holocaust survivors had consolidated a social position as authoritative witnesses to the truth' in British society and culture.<sup>75</sup>

### *The Politicisation of Holocaust memory*

Despite the increasing prominence of Holocaust survivors within British education and commemoration however, it is clear that neither survivors, nor the way in which they are represented and treated within British society, can be separated from the wider context in which the Holocaust is remembered. For, as the Holocaust has become more visible within British society, so too have survivors emerged more fully within the narrative of the Holocaust

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Online Evaluation Survey: South East 2011', (23 November 2011), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 14 December 2012)

<sup>74</sup> Pollock, K, 'How to Keep Holocaust Memory Alive', *BBC Radio 4 Today Programme*, (2 January 2011)

<sup>75</sup> Taft, *From Victim to Survivor*, p. 121

within British culture. Yet alongside this increasing prominence of Holocaust survivors there has also seemingly been a move towards a more universal mode of Holocaust remembrance and a sense that British liberal culture, whilst now acknowledging Jewish specificity, is also seeking to encourage an understanding of the Holocaust “accessible to all” through the construction and transmission of meanings of the Holocaust applicable to all humanity.

Holocaust consciousness now appears to be indelibly associated with the universal by ensuring the transmission of the relevance of the Holocaust to everyone through the meanings ascribed to it which transcend historical specificity. It had always been envisaged that, in order to appeal to wider society, Holocaust Memorial Day would involve more than simply commemorating those who perished at the hands of the Nazis. As was noted in 2000, ‘Holocaust Memorial Day is not just about the awful events before and during the Second World War. It could indeed become a symbol of our common aim to build a tolerant and dignified society.’<sup>76</sup> In its statement of commitment the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust states that the Holocaust ‘will always hold universal meaning’ for society and whilst not articulating exactly what this universal meaning is the implication that contemporary society has an obligation to fight the “evils” of ‘Genocide, anti-Semitism, racism, xenophobia and discrimination’ is expressed.<sup>77</sup>

These aims have seemingly been encouraged by both national, and local, popular press, as one local paper acknowledges, ‘National Holocaust Memorial Day highlights the values of a tolerant and diverse society, based upon the notions of universal dignity, equal rights and responsibilities for all of its citizens.’<sup>78</sup> As Jeffrey Alexander asserts, when considering Holocaust memory at the current time, ‘a specific and situated historical event has become transformed into a generalised symbol of human suffering a universalised symbol whose very existence has created historically unprecedented opportunities for ethnic, racial and religious justice for mutual recognition and for global conflicts becoming regulated in a more civil way.’<sup>79</sup> Thus broadening the messages that the Holocaust is said to impart as a means of encouraging a more inclusive Holocaust consciousness and ensuring that the Holocaust can in some way apply to everyone in contemporary society. The meaning of the Holocaust in some instances can, therefore, be interpreted to be one of constant vigilance and a reminder of what could happen when nations

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<sup>76</sup> Norris. D, ‘Order! - Order!’, *Bristol Evening Post*, (30 March 2000)

<sup>77</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, ‘Statement of Commitment’ available at [www.hmd.org.uk/page/about-hmd-and-hmdt](http://www.hmd.org.uk/page/about-hmd-and-hmdt), (accessed 14 January 2014)

<sup>78</sup> Rees. J, ‘Catastrophe for Humanity’, *Western Mail*, (27 January 2005)

<sup>79</sup> Alexander. J, ‘On the Global and Local Representations of the Holocaust Tragedy’, in Alexander. J & Jay. M, *Remembering the Holocaust: A Debate*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2009), pp. 173-193, p. 177

fail to act whilst at other times the Holocaust is imbibed with messages for contemporary society about citizenship, tolerance or notions of common humanity.

Certainly the frequent utilisation of the Holocaust within political rhetoric acts as a means by which to justify British acts in the present through the utilisation of the Holocaust as a symbol of what happened when the world did nothing. When discussing governmental proposals for Holocaust Memorial Day Tony Blair stated that, 'I am determined to ensure that the horrendous crimes against humanity committed during the Holocaust are never forgotten. The ethnic cleansing and killing that has taken place in Europe in recent weeks are a stark example of the need for vigilance.'<sup>80</sup> Referring to events taking place inside Kosovo, it is easy to see how Blair was using the memory of the Holocaust to justify intervention in more contemporary affairs.<sup>81</sup> Thus universalised the Holocaust can incorporate any meaning ascribed to it and any form of oppression can be considered under its banner and whilst, as Mark Levene notes, this is all 'good universal stuff, and who could possibly demur' there is, however, concern amongst some that the Holocaust being commemorated through a predominantly universal lens, with meaning for contemporary society, could dilute the historical understanding of the Holocaust itself.<sup>82</sup> Not only this but there is also a sense that as it becomes increasingly universalised and de-historicised the memory of the Holocaust is being utilised more for contemporary concerns than it is for commemorating or understanding the past. For, as Alexander notes, increasingly 'rather than being presented as specifics and particulars these now proverbial events are abstracted and generalized' as a means of imparting whatever messages those delivering them choose to promote.<sup>83</sup>

If the Holocaust has increasingly become a universal icon in both political and educational discourse and as Holocaust consciousness continues to place increased importance on commemoration and warnings for humanity then Holocaust survivors, as the foremost mediators of this iconic event, can also be seen as becoming increasingly universalised too. Carolyn Dean has suggested that survivors and their experiences are becoming 'increasingly universalised and homogenized' as a means to reinforce seemingly universal messages

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<sup>80</sup> Blair, T, *Government Proposal for a Holocaust Remembrance Day* (London, HMSO, 1999), p. 2

<sup>81</sup> For a greater discussion of British intervention in Kosovo please see Blair, T, *Tony Blair: A Journey*, (London, Hutchinson, 2010), pp. 223-253. Despite carefully sculpting his answers to any questions regarding the use of ground troops the British Prime Minister was himself an advocate of sending troops into Kosovo. Nonetheless, British troops were ultimately only to enter Kosovo as part of a NATO peacekeeping force.

<sup>82</sup> Levene, M, 'The Political Misuse of Holocaust Memorial Day', *The Independent*, (25 January 2005)

<sup>83</sup> Alexander, 'On the Global and Local Representations of the Holocaust Tragedy', p. 174

applicable to all.<sup>84</sup> Certainly how survivors experiences are interpreted has become increasingly tied in with the Holocaust's legacy, as the then Archbishop of Canterbury noted in 2010, 'We must surely attend not only to the survivors and their stories but also to what is to be their legacy. Will their legacy be a world in which such things no longer happen because we and our children have learned the lessons and acted on them?'<sup>85</sup> The testimony and experiences of Holocaust survivors have, therefore, not only prompted the moral imperative for remembering the Holocaust but also for ensuring that a more tolerant world is created as a result of their experiences.

Yet whilst it is a widely explored notion that the representation and memory of the Holocaust, mediated through Holocaust survivors, is being utilised as a means of providing universal messages for humanity it can also be seen that Britain has 'tamed Holocaust memory.'<sup>86</sup> This memory is tamed through the way in which politicians and institutions of memory have appropriated, and domesticated, the meanings that the Holocaust is thought to convey. For the context in which many survivors involved in British remembrance processes have formulated their testimony is within a British context either as survivors who came to Britain at the end of the war or as those who fled to Britain before the outbreak of war in September 1939. For as Noy, Cohler & Schiff assert, despite their increasing prominence and veneration;

'Survivors are not saints, sanctified through the fire of the Holocaust, but real people who have suffered through extreme circumstances during one of this century's defining events. We should consider survivors' words in the same light as the words of other human beings. We also need to consider their treatment within the context they are being considered. They are recountings of past events that are fashioned, in part, by the context in which they are created.'<sup>87</sup>

This context, however, is rarely considered despite the fact that testimonies, 'express the discourse or discourses valued by society at the moment the witnesses tell their story as much as they render an individual experience.'<sup>88</sup> As such the testimonies of survivors given within Britain, either as a part of commemorative events or as part of educational initiatives, are

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<sup>84</sup> Dean. C, *Aversion and Erasure: The Fate of the Victim after the Holocaust*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2010), p. 15

<sup>85</sup> Williams. R, 'Archbishop's Holocaust Memorial Day Statement 2010: The Legacy of Hope' (27 January 2010), available at [www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/937/archbishops-holocaust-memorial-day-statement-2010-the-legacy-of-hope](http://www.archbishopofcanterbury.org/articles.php/937/archbishops-holocaust-memorial-day-statement-2010-the-legacy-of-hope), (accessed 14 August 2012)

<sup>86</sup> Dreyfus. J.M, 'Battle in Print: Deshistoricising the Holocaust: Remembrance and the Abandonment of History', (19 October 2010) available at: [www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2011/battles/5404](http://www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2011/battles/5404), (accessed 7 January 2014)

<sup>87</sup> Noy. C, Cohler. B & Schiff. B, 'Collected Stories in the Life Narratives of Holocaust Survivors', *Narrative Inquiry*, Vol. 11, No. 1, (2001), pp. 159-194, p. 190-191

<sup>88</sup> Wieviorka, *Era of the Witness*, p. xii

imbibed with discourses which are considered important to, and are valued within, British society. Far from being contextualised as the survivor becomes increasingly visible within British culture so too can the survivor experience be seen to become increasingly more abstract and, therefore, more malleable within contemporary culture.

Whilst the discourse surrounding the role of survivors as a form of universal icon for humanity certainly has some pertinence there is more to explain the prominent role of survivors in British culture than simply as a means of providing messages with global meaning. Rather than playing a universal role in the transmission of a universal Holocaust consciousness, survivors in Britain have become an integral element of a very specific, and very British, Holocaust remembrance. This has been achieved, in part, through how they, and the British people, have been represented within commemorative events, the political arena and the popular press as their experiences are filtered through a lens which both reflects and shapes British historical consciousness of the Holocaust. For the development of the British survivor symbol emerged as a result of a complex interplay of narratives which can be interpreted and understood through the universalisation of the Holocaust, Jewish/non-Jewish relations, the perpetuation of a sense of British liberalism and multiculturalism and the continuing political investment in the legacy of British memory of World War II.

Significantly, Holocaust consciousness in Britain is invested with considerable political value. For the 'tendency to turn survivors into symbols of the Holocaust' whilst seemingly providing the opportunity to engage with the historical understanding of the Holocaust not only results in survivors being universalised but, increasingly, results in them also being utilised by both politicians and popular culture as a means of ensuring domestically acceptable Holocaust messages are being mediated.<sup>89</sup> As was observed, 'The Holocaust and the other genocides are drenched by tides of sanctimonious political rhetoric.'<sup>90</sup> When articulating the benefits of, and reasons behind, establishing an official day of Holocaust commemoration in Britain Andrew Dismore MP, who proposed the establishment of a day of Holocaust remembrance, stated that, 'It will provide a national focus for promoting a democratic, tolerant and respectful society. It will emphasise the positive values of Britain and of civilisation and draw attention to the consequences of the alternative.'<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>89</sup> Greenspan, H, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors: Beyond Testimony*, 2nd ed, (Minnesota, Paragon House, 2010), p. 30

<sup>90</sup> Keane, F, 'Survivors of Genocide: Living in a World that is so Quick to Forget', *The Independent*, (8 February 2003)

<sup>91</sup> HC Deb, 'Holocaust Remembrance Day', Col. 362

Viewed in this light, therefore, Holocaust Memorial Day appears designed to provide a direct link in the public understanding between the Holocaust, the crimes of Nazi Germany and the sanctity of British liberal values. Far from simply commemorating the Holocaust, or even, from promoting universal messages it seems apparent that the day was designed to reiterate to those in Britain, and abroad, not only the values of democracy but, also, of the positive attributes of British ideals. It was also apparent, from the fierce debates which were carried out within the pages of the national press, that Holocaust Memorial Day was not simply about remembering the Holocaust but that it was also seen to have much to do with British identity and British historical consciousness of the Second World War to the extent that the two now appear to have become inextricably intertwined. British memory of the Second World War is of key importance to a sense of British identity and British pride. Whilst Connelly has asserted that, 'British society [...] is now force-fed the history of Nazism and the holocaust from a very young age. With this has come a distinct lessening of knowledge of the British role in the war which has been replaced by a near obsession with Nazism' in some respects the prominence of Holocaust memory has in fact reinforced engagement with the Second World War if only on a commemorative, as opposed to an educationally instructive and historically accurate level.<sup>92</sup>

It is certainly difficult to separate the memory of the Holocaust, and the perils of Fascism, from the memory of the British defeat of Nazism and the prevailing of democratic ideals. As a member of the House of Lords declared during a debate to discuss the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the end of hostilities, 'After many years of fighting and after much travail the Allies succeeded in defeating a determined, efficient and dedicated enemy and it is right and fitting that we recall that feat of arms. Secondly, for us and for many of our allies the end of the war represented a triumph for democracy and for democratic ideals.'<sup>93</sup> It certainly seems the case that, as John Ramsden notes, 'the war has not faded from prominence in the national mind as one would have expected.'<sup>94</sup> It can also be seen that, 'tabloid newspapers have contributed heavily to the national myth of the Second World War.'<sup>95</sup> The *Daily Mirror's* recreation of Neville Chamberlin's declaration of war against Nazi Germany during the 1996 European Football Championship in which it was announced that the, 'Mirror declares football war on Germany' is just one example of the way in which the popular press reinforces the memory of the war and, through it, a sense

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<sup>92</sup> Connelly, M, 'We Can Take It: Britain and the Memory of the Home Front in the Second World War', in Echternkamp, J & Martens, S (eds), *Experience and Memory: The Second World War in Europe*, (London, Berghahn Books, 2010), pp. 53-69, p. 67

<sup>93</sup> Lord Richards, *Hansard*, House of Lords Debate, Fiftieth Anniversary of the End of World War II, (25 April 1995), Vol. 563, Col. 790

<sup>94</sup> Ramsden, J, 'Myths and Realities of the People's War in Britain', in Echternkamp & Marten, *Experience and Memory*, pp. 40-53, p. 50

<sup>95</sup> Ramsden, 'Myths and Realities', p. 44

of shared British history and identity.<sup>96</sup> The decision by those involved in the creation of the *Submission on the Teaching on the Second World War* to frame their outrage at the decision not to include the Holocaust in the National Curriculum through the lens of the importance of the Second World War to Britain in itself illustrates both an awareness, and manipulation of, of the political and emotive value of the war in British national memory.

Since the debate over the curriculum, however, the Holocaust has become ever more entwined within popular consciousness and its increased prominence now reinforces the memory of the war itself. Subsequently, there now appears to be an indelible association between Britain, the Second World War and the Holocaust in British cultural imagination. As Dismore noted, 'The need to commemorate the Holocaust applies in Britain as much as anywhere. Our country made terrible sacrifices to defeat Hitler. The period of Nazism and the Second World War remain a defining episode in our national psyche.'<sup>97</sup> When asked about the importance of Holocaust Memorial Day the newly appointed United Kingdom Envoy for post-Holocaust issues stated that Holocaust commemoration was crucial for Britain, observing that, 'We, of course historically, we were the country that stood up to Nazism, and in the early days of the war... And I think we have a lot of good things to, not to preach to other people, but there's good practice in the UK and so if we're active we can spread that good practice around Europe.'<sup>98</sup> The association of Nazism as being fundamentally set against British values today through the evocation and recall of British values during the Second World War, thus allows politicians, and the British public, to maintain a position of moral superiority within the global arena.

Commemorating a genocide committed by others reinforces a domestic narrative which allows politicians and the British public to disassociate themselves from past atrocities and articulates a sense of British identity defined by what it is not. The implication of this relationship is articulated by Stone who states that, 'by commemorating the evil consequences of those of the past in a mendacious act of disassociation: we are not as bad as they were, therefore we are morally innocent' and, subsequently, do not have to consider our own actions either in the past or the present.<sup>99</sup> As such Britain is not only able to reinforce traditional assumptions of British identity but can also be seen to continue the sense of British identity being defined through what it is deemed not to be. The interpretation of the Holocaust currently being projected thus

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<sup>96</sup> 'Mirror Declares War on Germany', *The Daily Mirror*, (24 June 1996)

<sup>97</sup> HC Deb, 'Holocaust Remembrance Day', Col. 362

<sup>98</sup> Burns, A, 'Sir Andrew Burns: Post Holocaust Envoy - Podcast for the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust', available at [www.hmd.org.uk/resources/podcast/sir-andrew-burns](http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/podcast/sir-andrew-burns), (accessed 13 August 2013)

<sup>99</sup> Stone, D, 'Day of Remembrance or Day of Forgetting? Or, Why Britain Does Not Need a Holocaust Memorial Day', *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 34, Vol. 4, (2000), pp.53-59, p. 57

allows politicians and the wider population to make moral judgments on the actions of other people and other nations rather than encouraging them to look introspectively whilst honestly approaching the past complete with Britain's own history of racism and antisemitism.

The interpretation that Holocaust remembrance is being used to 'promote or justify immediate goals' rather than simply commemorating those who perished is not only gaining increased currency but, also, increased criticism.<sup>100</sup> When discussing the reasons behind his reluctance for a Holocaust Memorial Day the son of one survivor observed that, 'I suspect that it is because remembering the Holocaust has become an official ritual that allows every sanctimonious politician and public figure to put their superior moral virtues on public display.'<sup>101</sup> Increasingly, therefore, the political value of the Holocaust is not only to be found in the messages of tolerance the attempt to create good citizens but also as an opportunity for politicians to be seen to demonstrate their own moral superiority through promoting their own role in the commemorations themselves. Every year politicians are invited by the Holocaust Educational Trust to sign a Holocaust Memorial Day Book of Commitment designed to illustrate each politician's commitment to the day of remembrance and their pledge to remember those who died. MPs are said to be "speaking out" against prejudice and intolerance by signing the books of remembrance, however, whilst undoubtedly there appears to be sincerity amongst some, the framing of this action as a politically valuable asset can also be observed.

The lucid and carefully sculpted entries of the Prime Minister of the time which often contain messages for common humanity such as 'Humanity survived our descent into evil and if we recommit today to remembrance and to resistance to evil, then that is the legacy of hope' obscures the reality that they receive a briefing pack from the Trust offering carefully constructed, and politically safe, suggestions as to what they could write within the book.<sup>102</sup> Whilst backbench MPs who sign the memorial books often express sentiments which sound emotive but which never seek explain or to justify a reason as to why 'We must always remember what happened' or define exactly why 'Each new generation needs to know what happened.'<sup>103</sup> The political value inherent in these actions, however, can be seen within the photographs taken of those members of Parliament signing the book which are then placed on

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<sup>100</sup> Shafir. M, 'Denying the Holocaust Where it Happened: Post-Communist East Central Europe and the Shoah', in Lentin. R, *Re-Presenting the Shoah for the Twenty-First Century*, (Oxford, Bergahan Books, 2004), pp. 195-226, p. 212

<sup>101</sup> Furedi. F, 'The Holocaust should not be for sale', *Daily Telegraph*, (26 January 2006)

<sup>102</sup> Brown. G (MP), *Holocaust Memorial Day Book of Remembrance 2010: The Legacy of Hope*, (Unpublished); Holocaust Educational Trust, *Briefing Pack for the Prime Minister 2012*, (Unpublished)

<sup>103</sup> Brooke. A (MP), *HMD Book of Remembrance 2010*; Goodwill. R (MP), *Holocaust Memorial Day Book of Remembrance 2007: The Dignity of Difference* (Unpublished, January 2007)

each individual MPs constituency website as proof of their actions and of their dedication to remembering what happened. The assumption is that by illustrating their commitment to ensuring the Holocaust is never forgotten they have demonstrated their willingness to be a part of the moral imperative to remember and demonstrate their own position as good citizens whilst using the memory of the Holocaust to encourage others to act likewise.<sup>104</sup> Or, as one commentator noted, Holocaust Memorial Day and actions such as these allows 'politicians to act like clerics, asking us to reflect, to atone, to share pain, to remember, to learn lessons and so on. This is not what politicians are elected to do. Sermons belong in places of worship.'<sup>105</sup> Whilst this is not to suggest that the commitment of some is not sincere it is not hard to consider the reality of the view that 'Holocaust Memorial Day is becoming a Victorian religious rally to which the audience is urged to subscribe and those who don't are cast as uncivilised.'<sup>106</sup>

### Domesticating Survivors

When considering the role of survivors in British culture and society the perceived relationship between Holocaust memory and expressions of national identity become increasingly more acute as survivors are such a vital aspect of Holocaust remembrance in Britain at the current time. This is, however, not simply a situation which has emerged organically but one which has been constructed in such a way so as the remembrance of the Holocaust becomes intrinsically tied to the presence of survivors on British soil. That 'commemoration is highly mediated' should not be considered as too surprising, organic commemoration is rare and national days of memory are of course dictated by the meaning that the government or organisation arranging them choose to impart.<sup>107</sup> The speech given by Tony Blair at the inaugural Holocaust Memorial Day event at City Hall which stated that, 'Tonight we remember the Holocaust's victims and we honour the survivors, some of whom are with us here. It was to Britain, amongst other places, that they came to rebuild their lives. Their memories have become part of our memories, our

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<sup>104</sup> For examples of Members of Parliament detailing their role in Holocaust remembrance please see: Blomfield. P, 'I've signed the Holocaust Memorial Day Book of Commitment to 'speak out' against prejudice', (18 January 2012), available at: [www.paulblomfield.co.uk/news/news-story/article/ive-signed-the-holocaust-memorial-day-book-of-commitment-to-speak-out-against-prejudice.html](http://www.paulblomfield.co.uk/news/news-story/article/ive-signed-the-holocaust-memorial-day-book-of-commitment-to-speak-out-against-prejudice.html), (accessed 29 January 2013); Lee. P, 'Local MP 'Speaks Out' Against Prejudice by Signing Holocaust Memorial Day Book of Commitment', (20 January 2012), available at [www.phillip-lee.com/social-responsibility/local-mp-speaks-out-against-prejudice-by-signing-holocaust-memorial-day-book-of-commitment/](http://www.phillip-lee.com/social-responsibility/local-mp-speaks-out-against-prejudice-by-signing-holocaust-memorial-day-book-of-commitment/), (accessed 28 January 2013)

<sup>105</sup> Buruma. I, 'Yes, acts of barbarism should be remembered, but I'm still against Holocaust Day', *The Guardian*, (29 January 2002)

<sup>106</sup> Hamilton. A, 'Keep the Politicians out of Holocaust Day', *The Independent*, (26 January 2006)

<sup>107</sup> Stier. O.B, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust*, (Boston, University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), p.188

history' is, therefore, extremely significant.<sup>108</sup> For the continued presence of the survivors creates an indelible link between them and Britain, a link which has become a significant facet of Holocaust commemoration and remembrance since the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001.

For, as unpalatable as it may first appear, the political use of the Holocaust in popular imagination can also be seen to extend to the survivors themselves. To consider that survivor testimony, and more importantly, survivors themselves are free of political value due to the reverence with which they are treated within the commemorative, and public, arena is to underestimate the emotive value the Holocaust and survivors have in British society. For whilst it has been stated that, 'The political capital of survivor testimony is often calculated in terms of its efficacy in combating the anti-Semitic denial of the Holocaust' it is also possible to interpret the political capital of both the survivor and their testimony as being heavily connected to what their presence in, and treatment by, Britain is felt to reveal and say about Britain itself.<sup>109</sup> Of all of the symbols to have emerged from the 20<sup>th</sup> century it is perhaps the Holocaust which has emerged as one of the most emotive, and consistently utilised, symbols within the political arena and the emergence of the symbol of the survivor within this arena has ultimately meant that they too have become increasingly manipulated and utilised within the domestic political sphere.

As a report produced by the Institute of Education observes, 'Twenty-first century Britain comprises a rich and complex multicultural, social and political landscape. Issues of "social inclusion", "community cohesion" and "managing diversity" are high on the British Government's domestic agenda.'<sup>110</sup> It is apparent that Holocaust survivors, as authority figures in British discourse have increasingly become the means by which these issues are addressed, in part, due to their willingness to 'relive the most harrowing moments of humanity every day to preserve the memory of what happened and teach others' about the Holocaust and what can be learnt from it but also due to the prevailing discourse which has come to surround both them and their experiences.

Despite the seeming prominence of survivors within British commemorative events the survivors themselves have become almost, 'imagined figures within a continually evolving narrative of the

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<sup>108</sup> Blair, T, Speech delivered at Holocaust Memorial Day Inaugural Ceremony, *Perspectives: A Journal of the Holocaust Centre Beth Shalom*, (27 January 2001)

<sup>109</sup> Noy et al, 'Collected Stories', p. 163

<sup>110</sup> Institute of Education, *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools: An Empirical Study of National Trends, Perspectives and Practice*, (London, Institute of Education, 2009), p. 14

Nazi crimes against the Jews.<sup>111</sup> As with the notion of a mythical Holocaust explored within the introduction to this study, this is not to suggest that survivors themselves do not exist or that their experiences have been imagined or invented. This in fact suggests that whilst survivors are increasingly more prominent mediators of the Holocaust their role in British cultural memory is more complex than initially may be understood. For the idea of “imagined figures” reflects an integral aspect of the role of survivors in the increasing abstraction, and increasing domestication of the Holocaust narrative. For whilst survivor experiences are more visible in society not only are survivors experiences often not engaged with as individual stories in their own right but they are frequently transposed alongside other testimonies so that they form, what Wollaston describes as the ‘composite survivor’ encompassing all the experiences “expected” from a Holocaust survivor with little differentiation.<sup>112</sup>

Greenspan has written at length about the need to establish a true dialogue with survivors claiming that the current insistence on utilising their experiences has formalised and ‘ritualized our relationship with survivors.’<sup>113</sup> Greenspan also claims that a lack of contextualisation when considering their words and experiences ensures that, ‘we tend to take a part for a whole. We mistake the made story for the full story, the tragedy recounted for the atrocity endured.’<sup>114</sup> As such survivors can become imagined figures and through this become mediators of a recognisable Holocaust. Whilst survivors are seemingly an integral aspect of the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, for example, the way in which observers interact with them could be seen to be somewhat more fragmentary than the number of recorded survivor speakers initially suggests. For whilst Bardgett is eager to suggest that, ‘survivors play a crucial role in the telling of the story’ it can also be seen that, whilst their testimony provides an important accompaniment to the main narrative, as the ‘Survivors cease to be identified on video, their stories blend into each other.’<sup>115</sup>

Given the vast amount of testimony being provided within the exhibition it is unlikely that the average visitor will have the means or inclination to listen to all the testimony which is given and, as they progress around the museum, it is difficult to see, especially as those giving testimony are no longer identified by name, that visitors will be able to trace an individual’s

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<sup>111</sup> Rosenfeld. A, *The End of the Holocaust*, (Indiana, Indiana University Press, 2011), pp. 1-2

<sup>112</sup> Wollaston. I, ‘Negotiating the Marketplace: The Role(s) of Holocaust Museums Today’, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, Vol. 4, No. 1, (2005) pp. 63-80, p. 69

<sup>113</sup> Greenspan, *On Listening to Holocaust Survivors*, p. 211

<sup>114</sup> *Ibid*, p. 209

<sup>115</sup> Bardgett. S, ‘Holocaust Survivors Tell Their Stories at the Imperial War Museum’, *Jewish Care Magazine*, (2002) ; Wollaston, ‘Negotiating the Marketplace’, p. 69

experience throughout the entire exhibition therefore resulting in the survivors experiences merging to form a recognisable composite survivor. This imagined figure of the survivor, therefore, symbolises the way in which the survivors, and survivor experience, have become mediators of a rather more domesticated Holocaust consciousness through becoming the imagined figures of popular Holocaust imagination by not engaging specifically with one survivor experience but by consolidating survivors experiences into a recognisable, and increasingly abstract, narrative with messages for today and meaning for the future. The role of survivors in British culture and memory can be seen to hinder rather than encourage a close analysis of British actions as their physical presence within Britain acts as proof of Britain's position as a global moral guide rather than allowing introspective analysis and debate. Seen within this context the domestication, or taming, of Holocaust consciousness could be considered to have resulted in the formulation of popular and pervading domesticated screen memories of the Holocaust within British society for which survivors provide the ultimate symbol.

More than their words or experiences, however, it is the very presence of Holocaust survivors on British soil which reinforces a domesticated interpretation of Britain and the Holocaust as survivors are utilised as symbols of the positive attributes of Britain's liberal democracy. Yet it is also the case that 'symbols only reflect perceived reality' and when one considers the role and utilisation of the symbol of the survivor in British culture one can see that their prominence is, in part, reflecting only the perceived domesticated reality of the Holocaust.<sup>116</sup> For the taming of the Holocaust, and more significantly, the utilisation of the increased visibility of the Holocaust survivor, does not simply act as a means to reinforce the British narrative of the Second World War or simply as a means of demonstrating political piety. The prominence of both the Holocaust, and the survivor within this narrative, can also be seen to act as a screen in British historical consciousness obscuring the realities of both historical events and their implications for understandings of British society and culture. Whilst a journalist at the *Los Angeles Times* claimed that, with the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day, Britons 'are taking a closer look at their own history of anti-Semitism and at how much Britain knew about the Holocaust during the war' in reality, the increased visibility of survivors, in the context of an increasingly de-historicised Holocaust consciousness, has actually allowed the dilution and distortion of British engagement with the British past.<sup>117</sup>

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<sup>116</sup> Liebman, C & Don-Yihya, E, *Civil Religion in Israel: Traditional Judaism and Political Culture in the Jewish State*, (London, University of California Press, 1983), p. 140

<sup>117</sup> Miller, M, 'Britain Devotes a Day to Holocaust Victims', (27 January 2001), available at <http://articles.latimes.com/2001/jan/27/news/mn-17732>, (accessed 14 August 2012)

Representation of the Kindertransport: Heroism, Rescue & Screen Memories

The continuation of a domesticated historical consciousness of the Holocaust, and the role of the survivor as a screen within this, has taken place most acutely within the remembrance of the Kindertransport. Referred to by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust as a 'unique humanitarian programme' the Kindertransport was largely forgotten in British collective consciousness until the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the transports took place.<sup>118</sup> Since then, however, the Kindertransport has become one of the more influential elements of British Holocaust memory. As Sharples observes, the Kindertransports have become, 'a source of great national pride within the British historical imagination.'<sup>119</sup> The British scheme to allow approximately 10,000, mostly Jewish, children into Britain following Kristallnacht on 9 November 1938 and the increased threats against the Jewish population from Nazi Germany has been seen as Britain 'securing the future' of those Jewish children who came to Britain.<sup>120</sup> Given that the Holocaust, with the oft forgotten exception of the deportation of Jews from the Channel Islands, did not take place on British soil it is perhaps not surprising that one of the most significant roles of survivors in maintaining and reinforcing a notable British connection to the Holocaust is through the memory of, and engagement with, those who came to Britain.

That the Kindertransport has become synonymous in British cultural imagination as an example of the British government rescuing thousands of innocents in a time of adversity is unsurprising. The murder of 1.5 million children solely because they were Jewish, of course, carries a considerable amount of emotional weight within popular consciousness. Patterson has claimed that those within the Nazi party 'set out to destroy death' yet through the systematic murder of children they were also attempting to destroy the very future of the Jewish community.<sup>121</sup> The sight of children's clothes exhibited at Auschwitz-Birkenau is often referred to within media reports as being one of the more upsetting sights when visiting the camp.<sup>122</sup> Just as the murder of children has assumed a prominent position within Holocaust consciousness so too the rescue of children has become an equally dominant theme in British historical understanding. This was

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<sup>118</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'The Kindertransport' available at <http://hmd.org.uk/genocides/kindertransport-refugees>, (accessed 13 August 2012)

<sup>119</sup> Sharples, C, 'The Kindertransport in British Historical Memory' in Hammel, A & Lewkowicz, B (eds), *The Kindertransport to Britain 1938/39 New Perspectives: The Year Book of the Research Centre for German and Austrian Studies*, Vol. 13, (2012), pp. 15-27, p. 21

<sup>120</sup> Öpik, L, *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, Holocaust Memorial Day, (29 January 2009), Vol. 477-501, Col. 488

<sup>121</sup> Patterson, D, *Along the Edge of Annihilation: The Collapse and Recovery of Life in the Holocaust Diary*, (Seattle, University of Washington Press, 1999), p. 250

<sup>122</sup> Callan, P, 'Return to Auschwitz', *The Express*, (26 January 2005); Kingstone, P, 'I don't know how I should react: Sixth-form students learn the harrowing lessons of the Holocaust at Auschwitz', *The Guardian*, (4 April 2006); Wright, E, 'Seeing shoes that were taken off the prisoners makes you so emotional', *Hull Daily Mail*, (15 March 2011)

enhanced by the decision to make the 'Children of the Holocaust' the theme of Holocaust Memorial Day 2003 allowing even greater reflection on the contrast between the position of Jewish children in Nazi occupied territories and the relative safety of those who had been permitted entry into Britain just before the outbreak of war. As the Wiener Library has noted, 'the story of the Kindertransport has lost none of its impact.'<sup>123</sup>

The popular British understanding of the Kindertransport, mediated through politicians, the media and organisations such as the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust and the Imperial War Museum, is, to varying degrees, one of prevailing pride in the British rescue of thousands of Jewish children from the clutches of Nazi aggression. In this popular interpretation, as depicted by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'On 25 November, after discussion in the House of Commons British citizens heard an appeal for foster homes on the BBC Home Service. Soon there were 500 offers, and RCM volunteers started visiting these possible foster homes and reporting on conditions.'<sup>124</sup> The implied rallying support of the British people in order to help these unaccompanied children is a powerful image which reinforces a sense of a British identity based on a willingness to assist those in need. This understanding is reinforced by those sentiments expressed by many who participated in the Kindertransports that, 'There were many differences between England and Germany, but at the time the biggest one for me was there were no Gestapo or SS here and it felt safer.'<sup>125</sup> Whilst this is perhaps an obvious statement to make, the contrast of the safety of England set against the danger of Germany adds to the impression of Britain as a haven for refugees. This is further enforced by the images depicting the Kindertransport which frequently involve pictures of small children accompanied by smiling policemen.<sup>126</sup>

One of the most publicised commemorative events to have taken place which has reinforced this domesticized screen memory of Britain as a place of refuge, and in which survivors appeared to play an integral part, was the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary re-enactment of the journey carried out by hundreds of children from Czechoslovakia to Britain in what has become known as the Winton Train, or the Czech Kindertransport. Independent of the Kindertransport operation, but often considered in conjunction with it, the rescue of 669 children by Nicholas Winton has become a significant part of British historical consciousness of the Holocaust. During a visit to Prague 29-

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<sup>123</sup> Wirwohl. S, 'Kindertransport Revisited', *Wiener Library News*, (Summer 2006), p. 4

<sup>124</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'The Kindertransport.'

<sup>125</sup> Blomfield. W, 'Life Stories Wolf Blomfield: Holocaust Memorial Day Trust Resource' available at, <http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/stories/wolf-blomfield>, (accessed 24 August 2012)

<sup>126</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'The Kindertransport'.

year-old stock broker Winton visited refugee camps which were full of Jews who had fled the Sudetenland after the German invasion in October 1938. After visiting the camps Winton grew increasingly more concerned about the danger posed by Hitler and the Nazi party and began the task of co-ordinating the escape of approximately 669 Jewish children from Czechoslovakia to Britain. Despite the initial reluctance of the British Government to accept more Jewish refugees, the heightening of hostilities meant that Winton, upon return to London, was granted permission to begin the process of moving children to Britain as long as they met the restrictions imposed by the Home Office. Now working with the Refugee Children's Movement in London Winton was, therefore, permitted to bring children under the age of 18 to Britain as long as he found suitable homes for them and could ensure that each child had a guarantor to ensure that they would have 50 pounds for the return journey home.

On 1 September 2009, in order to commemorate this act, a train carrying 170 people, including twenty two of the child evacuees who were originally involved in this transport, and their descendants, left Prague and followed the route taken by the original Winton Trains. They were met in London on 4 September by Nicholas Winton himself with the words, widely reported at the time, 'It's wonderful to see you all after 70 years. Don't leave it quite so long until we meet here again.'<sup>127</sup> Yet despite being present at the commemorations and despite twenty two of the original Winton transports retracing their steps through the re-enactment of their original journey in 1939 how can we interpret survivors' roles in the remembrance of this event? Obviously on the one hand their presence was vital. Without the survivors the journey could not have been relived and the memory would undoubtedly have been somewhat more marginalised within the public, and the media's, imagination. Yet conversely whilst the survivors were necessary to the remembrance process their experiences were somewhat supplementary to the commemorations themselves. The same is also true within popular consciousness of the Kindertransport and, indeed, within wider commemoration of the Holocaust. For whilst the prominence of survivors indicates an increased engagement with them, it can also be seen to reveal the use of the survivors themselves as symbols of British actions and of British heroism. Rather than using the opportunity to analyse the survivor experience and challenging the assumptions which seem to prevail about the implementation of the policy and treatment of refugees the media preferred to simply echo traditional assumptions and beliefs upon arrival in Britain.

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<sup>127</sup> 'WWII Rescue Train Recreated', BBC News, (4 September 2009), available at: <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8238104.stm>, (accessed 30 July 2012)

The press contribute considerably to the perpetuation of this dominant narrative which emphasises the salvation provided to the children who were admitted into Britain, many of whom remain here to this day. British newspapers reported that whilst those Kindertransport refugees taking part in the re-enactment were waiting at Prague Station they unanimously 'hailed his compassion and determination' at helping so many to escape.<sup>128</sup> Whilst the BBC discussed the enactment under the heading, 'Czech evacuees thank their saviour.'<sup>129</sup> So dominant is the memory that the man who organised the transports from Czechoslovakia is often referred to in the British media as the 'British Schindler.'<sup>130</sup> This image of Winton as the "British Schindler" was further reinforced later that year when, after a campaign initiated by the Holocaust Educational Trust, British MPs drafted an Early Day Motion calling for 'Recognition for British Heroes of the Holocaust' in honour of those who had performed acts of rescue. Whilst a number of those had been named as Righteous among the Nations in Israel the campaign highlighted the fact that none of those who had participated or initiated acts of rescue had been honoured within Britain itself. Despite this omission, as the *Jewish Chronicle* reported, 'The Holocaust Educational Trust believes that such individuals embody all that is best about Britain - and deserve formal recognition, not only to acknowledge their deeds but to serve as an example to future generations about the importance of making a stand against racism, discrimination and other forms of injustice.'<sup>131</sup>

Traditional interpretations of rescue are reinforced by the expressions of gratitude articulated by survivors themselves. One survivor, Bronia Snow, is reported as stating that in Britain she quickly became 'an Anglophile...I became appreciative of this wonderful country, its toleration, and its good manners.'<sup>132</sup> Sentiments such as this expressing appreciation towards the British government, and the British people, are frequent and are extremely important when considering the role of survivors in British understanding of the Holocaust and of Britain's role within it. For survivor's political value does not only lie in the messages of humanity politicians want to promote but also in the relationship they appear to have with the country in which they found refuge. Perhaps understandably, the overwhelming sentiment expressed by survivors is one of gratitude for British actions. One survivor, Martin Stern, articulates this gratitude explicitly

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<sup>128</sup> McLaughlin, D, 'Survivors gather to pay tribute to British Schindler', *The Independent*, (2 September 2009)

<sup>129</sup> Hall, R, 'Czech Evacuees Thank Their Saviour', BBC News, (4 September 2009), available at, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk/8237231.stm>, (accessed 1 August 2012)

<sup>130</sup> McLaughlin, 'Survivors gather to pay tribute'

<sup>131</sup> Rosen, R, 'Gordon Brown Honours British Holocaust Heroes', *The Jewish Chronicle*, (8 March 2010), available at [www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/29169/gordon-brown-honours-british-holocaust-heroes](http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/29169/gordon-brown-honours-british-holocaust-heroes), (accessed 28 July 2012)

<sup>132</sup> Adams, S, 'Schindler Train: 'I didn't talk to a soul. I was traumatised'', (4 September 2009), available at [www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/6138764/Schindler-train-i-didnt-talk-to-a-soul.-i-was-traumatised.html](http://www.telegraph.co.uk/history/world-war-two/6138764/Schindler-train-i-didnt-talk-to-a-soul.-i-was-traumatised.html), (accessed 4 July 2012)

stating that he is, 'very grateful to have been given British nationality, to be a British citizen....they called me stateless, so it's the British; it's Britain that's given me a real home.'<sup>133</sup> When discussing the 70<sup>th</sup> anniversary celebration a member of the Kindertransport Committee, Erich Reich, described that the commemorations had been planned '...as an event to celebrate and thank those involved in obtaining permission from the then British Government to allow as many vulnerable children into the UK as possible.'<sup>134</sup> When discussing a previous celebration of the Kindertransport programme in 1988 it was announced within Parliament that, 'this will be a memorable and moving occasion to commemorate a time when Britain responded to its traditional obligation to look after refugees.'<sup>135</sup>

Gratitude, and the sense of British pride which evolves from this, has also been harnessed within other sites of memory in Britain, even in the House of Commons where, as one newspaper revealed, in 1999, 'A plaque will be unveiled [...] to commemorate the Kindertransport of the Thirties. Just before the Second World War, nearly 10,000 Jewish children came to Britain under this system, and the plaque will express their gratitude towards the government that allowed them to flee from Nazi persecution.'<sup>136</sup> As one British MP noted in 2012, 'There is a bronze plaque to the Kindertransport in the House of Commons, and whenever I do the "Graham Evans tour of the House," I never fail to take my visitors to see the plaque.'<sup>137</sup> A plaque which articulates a sense of gratitude thus reinforces positive interpretations of British actions and British identity. This gratitude is not confined to those who came to Britain prior to the outbreak of war, however. When speaking to two survivors who came to Britain at the cessation of hostilities one newspaper report quoted them as saying that, 'I just love England, listen, I came from hell to paradise. The British people you were the future, different from other nationalities. You were kind, fair and you liked justice. I have grandchildren and I'm grateful. Mayer said: You offered freedom and hospitality. We are very grateful to Great Britain and the people.'<sup>138</sup> Of course this is not to contend that survivors cannot, and should not, articulate their gratitude towards Britain for the fact that an act of rescue did take place nor that those who participated

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<sup>133</sup> Stern. M, 'It's Britain that's given me a real home: Holocaust Memorial Day Trust Resource', available at, [www.hmd.org.uk/resources/stories/martin-stern](http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/stories/martin-stern), (accessed 21 August 2012)

<sup>134</sup> Reich. E, 'Letters to the AJR', (January 2009) available at, [www.ajr.org.uk/journal/issue.Jan09/letters](http://www.ajr.org.uk/journal/issue.Jan09/letters), (accessed 20 July 2012)

<sup>135</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, Kindertransport Group, (15 December 1988), Vol. 143, Col. 1077

<sup>136</sup> Walter. N, 'No Haven for Young Refugees', *The Independent*, (14 June 1999)

<sup>137</sup> Evans. G (MP), *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, Holocaust Memorial Day 2012, (19 January 2012), Col. 364WH

<sup>138</sup> Hersch. M & Aisenberg. J quoted in Chapples. C, 'Transfixed by the Holocaust Story', *The North West Evening Mail*, (23 November 2008), available at [www.nwemail.co.uk/news/barrow/transfixed-by-the-holocaust-story-1.204240?referrerPath=home](http://www.nwemail.co.uk/news/barrow/transfixed-by-the-holocaust-story-1.204240?referrerPath=home), (accessed 22 August 2012)

in the organisation of the transports should not be commended for their actions. Nevertheless, how these sentiments have been absorbed into British historical consciousness through the utilisation of the survivor and the adoption of a screen memory by politicians has distorted an understanding of the reality of British actions and prevents a more introspective understanding of those actions today.

Due to the emotiveness of the subject, the expressions of gratitude expressed by survivors and the political pride expressed in these actions during commemorative activities, both the Kindertransport and the Winton train have, therefore, been solidified within British historical consciousness as acts of rescue which are seen to be representative of tolerance and liberalism at a time when other nations were embracing fascism. Indeed, they are remembered as amongst some of the most compassionate, and nation defining, acts in modern British history. Through replicating the journey of the Winton Train the notion of British rescue, an already powerful story, became firmly entrenched in Britain's Holocaust consciousness. Despite being the victims of Nazi persecution it was the British man who rescued the Jewish children who, if unwillingly, took centre stage during the commemorative events. Within the media reports surrounding them he was of prime importance. Without these survivors, however, the story would not have such a prominence in British consciousness. They are necessary to the story not because of what their experiences reveal about Holocaust but because of what their presence in Britain reinforces about British identity and a British past. For their very presence contributes to the notion of British benevolence and the sustained gratitude of those who were a part of these schemes, in turn, contributes to the sense of pride the memory of them instils. This of course should not suggest a belittling of Winton's achievements, nor the achievement of the Kindertransports, but rather that to consider them critically would create a more grounded historical consciousness and place British attitudes both in the past and in the present within a more contextualised and historically nuanced understanding. For, the increased visibility of survivors does not necessarily mean listening to or engaging with what they have to say nor does it mean that they allow greater analysis of the British Holocaust narrative. It is the British narrative rather than the experiences of the survivors themselves which comes to dominate British remembrance as the survivors, thus domesticated, act as a screen which prevents this narrative being critically explored.

The prominence of Britain taking centre stage during events supposedly commemorating those who were victims was also discernible in 2006 when a memorial to the Kindertransport was

unveiled outside Liverpool Street Station. A previous memorial had been placed in the same location merely three years previously but mementoes belonging to the members of the Kindertransport, housed within a glass cabinet which formed a part of the monument, were found to be deteriorating. The new memorial itself consists of five life size statues of children in bronze standing with their luggage at the end of a railway line symbolising the end of their journey and their arrival into Britain. Whilst seemingly depicting and memorialising the experience of the children, who are now referred to as Holocaust survivors, when one considers the inscription on the accompanying plaque one can see that in reality the presence of the children in the memorial is simply to reinforce and express Jewish gratitude and therefore a very British remembrance of the act of rescue. The inscription on the plaque reads, 'Children of the Kindertransport: In gratitude to the people of Britain for saving the lives of 10,000 unaccompanied, mainly Jewish, children who fled from Nazi persecution in 1938 and 1939.'<sup>139</sup>

The depiction of Jewish children, many of whom remained in Britain in adulthood and still reside in Britain today, and the expression of gratitude revealed within the memorial at Liverpool Street reveals not only the way in which British historical consciousness is maintained but also illustrates how the role and symbol of the survivor expressed either through their physical presence, or in bronze, can allow the continuation of an interpretation of an event to continue seemingly unchallenged. It is the "people of Britain" and the act of rescue itself, not the experiences of the children which actually assume centre stage in this memorial despite the initial interpretation in which the children themselves would appear to be the most prominent part of it. This can be seen to reflect the dominant narrative of British consciousness in which the role of the survivor assumes a somewhat background position in historical consciousness whilst simultaneously being a prominent part of formulating and sculpting it. Whilst survivors are valued they, and their experiences, are, in many ways, secondary to what they, and their experiences, say about Britain.

The previous memorial at Liverpool Street Station which had to be replaced did have a greater connection to the Kindertransport children themselves through the personal articles it contained yet the sentiments the plaque expressed were strikingly similar. As the Association of Jewish Refugees reported, after the unveiling of the memorial in 2003, 'Some 65 years after the event, the rescuer of several hundred Czech Kinder, Sir Nicholas Winton, now in his 94th year, unveiled a plaque expressing gratitude to the people of the United Kingdom for offering a home, thereby

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<sup>139</sup> The Association for Jewish Refugees (AJR) and Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief (CBF) are responsible for the inscriptions and plaques from which this quote is taken.

saving the lives of 10,000 children whose parents desperately wanted to protect them from Nazi persecution in Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia.<sup>140</sup> The survivors here are represented primarily as the recipients of British heroism and as the British people as providers of liberty. Yet these statements and the utilisation of this gratitude contribute to a somewhat more mythical memory of these British acts.

### Deconstructing the Kindertransport

The representation of these events within sites of popular culture indicate that a somewhat distorted, and domesticated, Holocaust consciousness is being cultivated in Britain. As Ruth Barnett, herself a member of a transport of children from Berlin to Britain in 1939 observes, 'selected images from news reels of the time telling a romanticised story of rescue, selected clips of smiling children carried by or holding the hands of kindly policemen, that has entered the factual history of the Holocaust.'<sup>141</sup> This use of images of the Kindertransportees enhances the perception of Britain as a benevolent nation, however, it also transcends the historical reality of the Kindertransport and of British national sentiment and can thus provide a screen memory through which Britain seeks to define itself. For the reality of the Kindertransport, both in terms of discussions surrounding its inception and the experience itself, was not as simple as commemorative representations would suggest.

The reality was that Jewish immigration, including the proposed acceptance of Jewish children into Britain, was fiercely contested within political, and public, arenas. During political debates whilst articulating support for, what would become known as the Kindertransport, politicians were at pains to highlight the fact that this would not impact upon the British population. Sir Samuel Hoare, the then Home Secretary, stated that, 'I believe that we could find homes in this country for a very large number without any harm to our own population.'<sup>142</sup> Yet even with an awareness of the growing hostilities towards the Jewish people in Germany those concerned about the apparent influx of Jewish children into Britain continued to question the Government about the refugee situation to ensure that, when reaching adult age, those children who had entered Britain would be forced to leave with Parliament discussing the question surrounding 'the duration of time that Jewish refugee children are to be allowed to remain in this country;

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<sup>140</sup> Channing, R, 'Kindertransport Statue Commemorates pre-war Arrival at Liverpool Street Station', *Association of Jewish Refugees Journal*, Vol. 3, No. 11, (November 2003), p. 2

<sup>141</sup> Barnett, R, 'The Acculturation of the Kindertransport Children: Intergenerational Dialogue on the Kindertransport Experience', *Shofar: An Interdisciplinary Journal of Jewish Studies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (Fall 2004), pp. 100-108, p. 101

<sup>142</sup> Hoare, S, *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, Racial Religious and Political Minorities, (21 November 1938), Vol. 341, Cols. 1428-8, Col.1474

and whether he will see that steps are taken to keep trace of the children and arrange for their leaving the country at a fixed age?’<sup>143</sup> In this instance the Jewish children were viewed with concern, not for their welfare, but because of the threat they may pose for the economic stability of Britain and the British people in the present and in the future. The image of the hospitable and compassionate government which is perpetuated within remembrance of the Kindertransport, and of British treatment of refugees is lacking as Hoare was forced to continually reassure those who expressed concerns about the immigration of Jewish children that he had satisfied himself that ‘the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany has taken proper steps to set aside a sufficient sum to meet all its liabilities in respect of children under its care, including money for their emigration.’<sup>144</sup>

Repeated reference within Parliament towards protecting the British population from harm reflects the resistance amongst some politicians towards offering significant support or sanctuary to those who sought refuge in Britain. This concern articulated in Parliament about the potential economic strain absorbing these children into the national economy could have also been reflected in the popular press. When announcing the arrival of 46 Jewish children in Southampton, *The Times* was quick to reassure readers that, ‘Every child has a sponsor’ and that ‘The older ones will be given vocational training to prepare them for settlement overseas.’<sup>145</sup> A month later *The Times* again sought to reassure readers that, ‘The central committee will maintain a system of inspection and will guarantee to the Home Office that the children will not become a public charge and will either be emigrated in due course or be absorbed in this country in ways approved by the Government.’<sup>146</sup>

When representing the Kindertransport within the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum, the accompanying text does note that, ‘As the war approached, the number of Jews emigrating from Nazi Germany increased dramatically. Britain responded by agreeing to take in Jewish children, provided they would not be a burden on the state.’<sup>147</sup> Whilst this is an acknowledgement that Britain considered the children to be a potential burden and, therefore, that they were not eager to admit as many children as possible and not behaving in a purely benevolent way any further analysis of British immigration policy is not expanded upon. Considering that the Holocaust exhibition resides within the Imperial War Museum, a place in

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<sup>143</sup> *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, Refugees, (24 November 1938), Vol. 341, Cols. 1928-32, Col. 1928

<sup>144</sup> Hoare, S, *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, Refugees, (25 May 1939), Vol. 347, Cols. 2536-2537

<sup>145</sup> ‘Children from Germany’, *The Times*, (31 December 1938)

<sup>146</sup> ‘Hospitality to Refugees: Finding Homes for Children’, *The Times*, (6 January 1939)

<sup>147</sup> Imperial War Museum, *The Holocaust: The Holocaust Exhibition at IWM London*, (2000), p. 15

which houses exhibitions dedicated to wars associated both with British pride and British sorrow, there appears to be little engagement with the British narrative of the Holocaust within the exhibition for, as Suzanne Bardgett noted within an internal memorandum, 'we have always made it clear, however, that the subject would be dealt with as a subject of international or world history rather than from the narrow point of view of Britain.'<sup>148</sup> The decision to frame the exhibition from an international perspective is understandable. Not only did the Holocaust take place in a geographically international space but it is also seen as an event which has global implications. Yet even from the outset there were 'concerns from some quarters as to whether a national museum would be free to comment critically on British official attitudes' towards Nazi Germany and the Jewish people.<sup>149</sup> More so than the ability to comment critically on official attitudes, however, would an exhibition in a national museum be able to reflect critically on the attitude of the British people themselves.

Some, such as Roman Halter a survivor whose testimony forms a part of the exhibition, feel that the museum offers 'a superb historical document, free of nationalism and sentiment.'<sup>150</sup> Whilst there may not be any overtly British nationalism expressed, the inference of many things which are absent from the exhibition implies a distinctly British narrative. For whilst it is the stated aim of the Imperial War Museum that, 'historical exhibitions are intended chiefly to inform people – in an engaging way, exciting in them a curiosity to find out more for themselves and giving them an appreciation of how a museum both preserves and reinterprets the past' as Wollaston notes, '...museums are complex, carefully scripted performance sites, playing a range of different roles.'<sup>151</sup> Museums are not neutral and therefore nor is what is displayed within them. From the moment of their conception museums imbibe the sentiments those designing the exhibition want to project. Indeed, when Bardgett asked Martin Gilbert's opinion about the British angle within the exhibition it was noted that he 'thought that showing the "instinct of the negative was too pronounced" and that more material showing what was done should be introduced.'<sup>152</sup> Therefore, more critical analysis of British actions were rejected in favour of a more neutral, and at times, more positive portrayal of British actions before, and during, the Second World War.

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<sup>148</sup> Bardgett. S, 'Note on the Proposed Coverage of Britain and the Holocaust', *IWM Archives: File: News Reaches Britain: Historical Balances News Reaches (3)*, (8 October 1999)

<sup>149</sup> Bardgett. S, *The Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum*, (2000, Material courtesy of the Imperial War Museum), p. 2

<sup>150</sup> Greenberg. S, 'Visual Art: A Salutary History Lesson for us All - Holocaust Exhibition Imperial War Museum', *The Independent on Sunday*, (11 June 2000)

<sup>151</sup> Bardgett. S, 'The Imperial War Museum and the History of War', available at [www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/IWM.html](http://www.history.ac.uk/makinghistory/resources/articles/IWM.html), (accessed 20 August 2012); Wollaston, 'Negotiating the Marketplace', p. 63

<sup>152</sup> Bardgett. S, 'Note of a Telephone Conversation between Sir Martin Gilbert and Suzanne Bardgett', *IWM Archives: File: News Reaches Britain*, (8 October 1999)

Despite this, albeit brief, acknowledgement about British concern surrounding the Kindertransport, in recent popular press which, in turn, contributes to British historical consciousness of the events, one popular newspaper described how, 'The British Government swooped into Germany as well as Nazi occupied Austria, Czechoslovakia and Poland for nine months from 1938 to rescue 10,000 Jewish children.'<sup>153</sup> The image of the British Government "swooping" into Nazi Germany is specifically designed to be evocative installing the image of Britain as a nation defying the might of Nazi power to save thousands of children from their clutches. Yet despite the government allowing Jewish children to enter the country it is apparent that, in reality the British government did very little in the activation of the Kindertransport programme and that both the inception and carrying out of the programme was organised by Jewish charities and independent bodies. Indeed, it was the persistent efforts of those within the British Committee for the Jews of Germany and the Movement for the Care of Children from Germany, who not only secured political agreement for the permitting of children into the country but also carried out the practical process of finding homes and funds for the children when they arrived. In reality, aside from eventually giving the Kindertransports the seal of approval, the British government had very little involvement in the Kindertransport process itself.

The question of Jewish immigration into Britain was a prevalent one at this time, as the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust observes, 'By 1939, Britain was host to over 60,000 refugees some 50,000 of whom settled permanently. After liberation from the Nazi concentration camps, many survivors came to Britain and re-built their lives here.'<sup>154</sup> The number of refugees present within Britain and the continued presence of survivors in Britain after the war imply contentment in British life. It is this image and this physical presence of survivors, and of the interpretation that Britain was happy and willing to accept these refugees, many of whom live here today, which contributes to the understanding of the Kindertransport as a "humane initiative" for which the British government were responsible. Yet the way in which the Kindertransport and British attitudes towards immigration are remembered and the way in which they were described at the time circumvent difficult questions and risk turning a complex and multifaceted event with a simple redemptive narrative for British sense of self. As London suggests, 'a gulf exists between the memory and history' of British engagement with its past when considering this period and, in particular, the notion of providing a safe haven for all those

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<sup>153</sup> Jackson, K, 'My parents knew they had to get me out...anywhere - just away from the Nazis', *The Sun*, (24 November 2008)

<sup>154</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'All Year Round: World Refugee Day', available at, <http://hmd.org.uk/page/all-year-round>, (accessed 24 August 2013)

who required it.<sup>155</sup> For if they were relatively conservative in their response to the Kindertransport the British government were extremely reluctant to allow more widespread immigration.

In response to the observation by one opposition MP that Britain could easily absorb the Jewish population of Germany, including adult men and women, the Prime Minister Neville Chamberlin refused to be drawn into debate about the subject, attempting to reduce the sense of British responsibility to helping those in need and putting the responsibility onto the German government stating that, 'That is not a matter for the British Government, as the right hon. Gentleman realises, but I have no doubt we shall be taking into consideration any possible way by which we can assist these people.'<sup>156</sup> The question of the Kindertransport therefore, has to be considered alongside wider British immigration policy which, in turn has to be considered against Jewish/non-Jewish relations as it could be construed that the dominant and mythical narrative of the Kindertransport and, therefore of British democratic rescue, has been constructed in such a way as to obscure a somewhat fractured Jewish/non-Jewish relationship. Yet the presence of survivors and the action of rescue through the Kindertransport and other refugees who entered Britain prior to the Second World War also encourages the perception of the mythical Holocaust to continue. For, if there was concern about the admission of children into the country due to concern about the potential strain on the public purse, concern over Jewish adult immigration was nothing short of rife. Samuel Hoare acknowledged in Parliament that, 'In this country we are a thickly populated industrial community with at the present moment a very large number of unemployed. Competition is very keen with foreign countries, and it is difficult for many of our fellow-countrymen to make a livelihood at all and keep their industries and businesses going. It is quite obvious that there is an underlying current of suspicion and anxiety, rightly or wrongly, about alien immigration on any big scale.'<sup>157</sup>

Previous cultural representation of the Kindertransport, or of wider Jewish immigration, however, within popular consciousness has failed to force an analytical confrontation with the rather more difficult questions surrounding the historical event and its implications. As London notes, whilst 'Admission saved the children's lives. Exclusion sealed the fate of many of their parents' greater engagement with this issue within the public arena is frequently omitted or

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<sup>155</sup> London. L, *Whitehall and the Jews, 1933-1948: British Immigration Policy, Jewish Refugees and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 13

<sup>156</sup> Chamberlin. N, *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, 'Secondary Schools in Lancashire', (14 November 1938), Vol. 341, Cols. 504-506

<sup>157</sup> Hoare, *Hansard*, 'Religious and Political Minorities', col. 1468

overlooked.<sup>158</sup> It is acknowledged that, 'The dramatic rescue of children from Germany, Austria and Czechoslovakia involved unimaginable parental sacrifice' yet the question as to why parents were not permitted to accompany their children is rarely asked and even more rarely addressed within contemporary representations.<sup>159</sup> Whilst the theme paper accompanying Holocaust Memorial Day 2003 included the observation that, 'British generosity in granting refuge did not extend to the parents of these children' this knowledge sits alongside an understanding that whilst it was not enough, the act of rescue should not be diminished due to what it did not achieve.<sup>160</sup> Nor does it encourage a greater introspective consideration of British attitudes and policy towards immigration. Even when critical of the Kindertransport programme, or British immigration policy, it appears hard for people to express negativity towards the Kindertransport to any significant degree or to encourage a deeper introspective analysis of the reasons behind British actions. When discussing the experience of one Kindertransport refugee one commentator notes that, 'Of course, Britain could have done more. It could have allowed not just those 10,000 children to enter, but also their parents, who were instead, for the most part, deported and murdered. It could have allowed many more children than those 10,000 to enter. But it did something. It saved Laura Selo's life and those of her sisters, among others, and gave them a home here for ever.'<sup>161</sup>

Whilst acknowledging that Britain could have done more the legacy of survivors "having a home in Britain forever" is an extremely powerful image and acts as a cultural screen through which British acts during a time of increased persecution of the Jews of Germany are obscured. This interpretation, however, echoes a continuation of the shaping of representation of the Kindertransport which was used at the time at which the transports were taking place in which the plight of the parents were referred to but, equally, ignored. As *The Times* reported, 'Heart-breaking though the separation is, almost all the Jewish parents...wish to send their children away, even if they can find no refuge for themselves and there is no hope for them in Germany.'<sup>162</sup> That Britain could have actually provided refuge for the parents of those children arriving in England at this time is not discussed. As in contemporary representations the inference that somehow parents were unable to accompany their children through some regulation imposed by Nazi Germany rather than through British restrictions is pronounced. The *Daily Herald* went even further in reinforcing the sense of Germany, not Britain, dictating the

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<sup>158</sup> London, *Whitehall and the Jews*, p. 118

<sup>159</sup> Association of Jewish Refugees, 'Kindertransport Survey - Making New Lives in Britain', (2005-2009), available at, [www.ajr.org.uk/kindersurvey](http://www.ajr.org.uk/kindersurvey), (accessed 23 August 2012)

<sup>160</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, *Children and the Holocaust: Theme Paper*, (London, HMDT, 2003)

<sup>161</sup> Walter, 'No haven for young refugees'

<sup>162</sup> 'Child Refugees from Germany', *The Times*, (25 November 1938)

terms under which refugees were able to leave, emotively recording how, 'Three hundred children will to-day say good-bye to their parents, themselves unable to leave Germany, and get ready to sail to England, new homes and liberty...These 300 are the advance guard of the scores of hapless Jewish children who are to be brought out of Germany, where there is no hope for their future.'<sup>163</sup> The implication that the parents to whom these 300 children are saying goodbye are "themselves unable to leave Germany" fails to acknowledge the reality of why this was.

Whilst the severity of the situation was clear, that there was "no hope" for the children's future is demonstrative of this knowledge, the idea of adults being admitted into an already economically stretched country was seemingly not entertained by the popular press at the time. Sentiments such as these which acknowledged the absence of the parents but failed to engage with the particularities of it were also expressed within Parliament. Hoare announced that he 'could not help thinking what a terrible dilemma it was to the Jewish parents in Germany to have to choose between sending their children to a foreign country, into the unknown, and continuing to live in the terrible conditions to which they are now reduced in Germany.'<sup>164</sup> That the dilemma was imposed by British restrictions, again, was overlooked, an action which is reflected in more modern interpretations of the Kindertransport and of British refugee policy within the commemorative arena.

When meeting survivor Trude Levi during Holocaust Memorial Day 2011, the British Prime Minister David Cameron claimed that, 'It's a huge honour to meet someone who has been through all that and is determined through your presence to remind people. 'Living examples like you are incredibly important.'<sup>165</sup> The reality is, however, that survivors are not simply valued due to what they can tell the British public about the Holocaust but that they, and their presence, are also important in terms of what they say about Britain. For the survivors are proof of British tolerance and a sense of British liberal responsibility. British politicians and remembrance sites appear to agree that more could have been done in support of refugees at this time, as one politician acknowledged, 'It is true that our country did not do enough, of course, and that it could have done more, and sooner, but no one can deny that when other countries were rounding up their Jews Britain provided a safe haven. It was British troops, as we have heard, who liberated the concentration camps, rescuing tens of thousands of inmates from almost certain death and enabling many of those to go on and prosper under the democratic

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<sup>163</sup> Easterman. A, 'Parents' Good-Bye to 300 Children, *Daily Herald*, (28 November 1938)

<sup>164</sup> Hansard, 'Racial, Religious and Political Minorities'

<sup>165</sup> 'PM signs Holocaust Book of Commitment', (24 January 2011), available at [www.number10.gov.uk/news/pm-signs-holocaust-book-of-commitment](http://www.number10.gov.uk/news/pm-signs-holocaust-book-of-commitment), (accessed 18 August 2012)

values of the UK.<sup>166</sup> Due to the shield which those survivors who went on to 'prosper' within British democracy can provide both political, and popular, consciousness can counter these sentiments with the knowledge that, but for British actions, 10,000 potential victims may have fallen victim to the Nazi regime in the gas chambers of Auschwitz-Birkenau.

As such, the emotive investment in British historical consciousness and the position of survivors in British commemorative culture allow any negativity surrounding this subject to be subsumed. What emerges through the current mode of remembrance of the Kindertransport, therefore, in spite of the presence of survivors, is that the historical consciousness created is not one primarily about the survivors or their experiences but, increasingly, about the British pride which can exist because of the survivors who are present. Yet whilst resistance to immigration may not feature to any significant degree within the image of British liberal benevolence which has emerged within popular culture and which has been sculpted through political rhetoric, as Mazower has noted, despite Britain 'Priding itself on its tolerance and liberalism, it has in fact only accepted Jews on certain conditions and requires their conformism and assimilation.'<sup>167</sup> For whilst the position of the survivor in Britain allows a reduced engagement with the reality of British actions during the war it also enhances a somewhat distorted consideration of the Jewish/non-Jewish relationship and fails to encourage an introspective analysis of this thereby allowing the continuation of a somewhat mythical remembrance both of the Holocaust and of British treatment of the "Other." Ultimately resulting in the fact that, 'because we won the war and were on the side of right, we feel little need to confront our own latent anti-Semitism.'<sup>168</sup>

### *The Survivor as Cultural Camouflage*

Kushner claimed that, in the immediate post-war years, 'the British public was given little chance by its state to consider the Jewish catastrophe in general or the plight of the survivors in particular.'<sup>169</sup> At the present time, despite the occasional gesture, the British public is given, and has taken, few of the chances offered to consider the Holocaust within a British historical context. For the use of the presence of the survivor and the seeming engagement with them can also be seen as providing an even greater screen memory for Jewish/non-Jewish relations prior to and following the Second World War itself. For the dominance of the traditional British narrative eclipses the reality of the continuation of a more complicated Jewish/non-Jewish

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<sup>166</sup> Austin. I, *Hansard*, 'Holocaust Memorial Day 2012', Col. 342

<sup>167</sup> Mazower. M, 'England, Liberalism and the Jews', *The Jewish Quarterly*, Vol. 167, (1997), pp. 33-38, p. 33

<sup>168</sup> Hutton. W, 'We all have blood on our hands', *The Observer*, (21 January 2001)

<sup>169</sup> Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, p. 237

relationship than is presented within traditional narratives of British liberalism and continued through the embracing of the survivor. Despite the interpretation of Britain as a place of sanctuary both before, and after the Holocaust, as Kushner notes, despite commonly held assumptions, 'Britain was not necessarily the easiest place for survivors either to enter or to repair damaged lives.'<sup>170</sup>

For whilst a sense of British pride in their tolerance and acceptance of the "Other" situated against National Socialist rhetoric of the "survival of the fittest" and racial eugenics articulated within Nazi propaganda films such as *Alles Leben ist Kampf* (All Life is Struggle) and *Der Ewige Jude* (The Eternal Jew), as Todd Endleman states, 'The belief in innate racial differences was well entrenched in Western science by the start of the twentieth century.'<sup>171</sup> Despite the interpretation that social-Darwinism and eugenics were the remit purely of the Nazis it must be considered that it was also a considerably popular discussion amongst the British, if not even more so. As has been illustrated this is rarely, if ever, acknowledged within British collective memory despite the fact that, as MacKenzie notes, the eugenics movement 'flourished' in early twentieth-century Britain.<sup>172</sup> The surge of pseudo-scientific thought which classified the Jewish population as a socially and biologically distinct race had ensured that traditional methods of assimilation were becoming denied to the Jewish people as even conversion to Christianity was now no longer deemed acceptable to those who accorded considerable significance to eugenic theories. As one initial advocate of racial antisemitism claimed, the Jewish question would still exist 'even if every Jew were to turn his back on his religion and join one of our major churches.'<sup>173</sup>

When documenting the gradual development of the Holocaust, however, social-Darwinism is considered as being a predominantly, if not completely, a phenomenon encountered in Nazi Germany. Yet, as one British report into Jewish immigration in the early twentieth century noted, 'The whole problem of immigration is fundamental for the rational teaching of national eugenics. What purpose would there be in endeavouring to legislate for a superior breed of men, if at any moment it could be swamped by the influx of immigrants of an inferior race,

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<sup>170</sup> Kushner. T, 'Holocaust Survivors in Britain: An Overview and Research Agenda', *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (Winter 1995), pp. 147-166, p. 148

<sup>171</sup> Endelman. T, 'Anglo-Jewish Scientists and the Science of Race', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 1, (Fall 2004), pp. 52-92, p. 52

<sup>172</sup> Mackenzie. D, 'Eugenics in Britain', *Social Studies of Science*, Vol. 6, No. 3-4, Special Issue: Aspects of the Sociology of Science, (September 1976), pp. 499-532, p.499

<sup>173</sup> Duehring. K.E, 'The Question of the Jew is a Question of Race', (1881), in Mendes-Flohr. P & Reinhartz. J (eds), *The Jew in the Modern World: A Documentary History*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Ed, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1995), pp. 333-334, p. 333

hastening to profit by the higher civilisation of an improved humanity?’<sup>174</sup> Sentiments such as these were expressed and explored profusely by British racial scientists and eugenicists yet popular representations of British society at this time in contemporary Britain omits any discussion of this aspect of British society. Again, this illustrates another avoidance of difficult questions relating to Britain within popular consciousness through the pursuit of an uncontroversial narrative. The Holocaust Exhibition is illustrative of this approach which, intentionally or otherwise, obscures a British narrative through the focus on the National Socialist acts. With the part of the exhibition entitled ‘The Racial State’ British engagement with the notions of racial science are obscured. Whilst it is mentioned that Francis Galton, an English eugenicist related to Charles Darwin, was the originator of the concept of race science this is not expanded or explored beyond this brief reference. As such, racial science is portrayed as being exclusively pursued by keen Nazi “race scientists”.

Echoing this relative lack of engagement with British encounters with social-Darwinism, within an educational resource created by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust devoted to the T4 Euthanasia programme, no mention of European or American involvement in the development of racial eugenics is mentioned. Within this resource it is stated that the Nazi party, ‘took a Social Darwinist approach towards humanity but then adapted it to suit their own purposes. The result was a sinister system of deliberate selection and exclusion. They wanted to select those they believed to be the most “perfect” human beings and through them develop what they saw as a “pure” and “untainted” group of people. They used a false science of race to support their ideas.’<sup>175</sup> As illustrated, however, these ideas were not confined to Nazi Germany and are in fact extremely reminiscent of those articulated in the British report into Jewish immigration discussed above. The growing presence of this visible racial and cultural “Other” in Britain during this period of immigration fed into the existing anxieties concerning British degeneration. With the newly arrived immigrants being viewed, as one commentator at the time described, as ‘dirty and disreputable’ the newly arriving immigrant population were considered as being a similar racial threat to that which was being discussed in Nazi Germany.<sup>176</sup>

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<sup>174</sup> Pearson. K & Moul. M, ‘The Problem of Alien Immigration into Great Britain: Illustrated by an Examination of Russian and Polish Jewish Children’, *Annals of Human Genetics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (October 1925), pp. 5-24, p. 7

<sup>175</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, ‘Untold Stories of Stolen Lives: The T4 Euthanasia Programme’, available at, [www.hmd.org.uk/education/case-study-t4-euthanasia-programme](http://www.hmd.org.uk/education/case-study-t4-euthanasia-programme), (accessed 22 August 2013)

<sup>176</sup> Russell. C & Lewish. H, ‘The Jew in London: A Study of Racial Character and Present Day Conditions’, (1900), in, Englander. D (ed), *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920*, (London, Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 100-102, p. 101

Settling mainly in inner city areas, such as the East End of London, the Jewish communities often ended up living in overcrowded conditions. As one report described, 'The foreign Jews, who for many years have been flocking to the East-end of London, are so numerous that their presence seriously affects the social and sanitary condition of this part of the metropolis.'<sup>177</sup> Whilst another observed that, 'We can sympathise with a man who has suffered hard treatment, but that in itself is not an adequate eugenic reason for granting him citizenship in a crowded country. For that citizenship we demand physical and mental fitness; we need the possibility of an ultimate blending and we need full sympathy with our national habits and ideals.'<sup>178</sup> This health requirement was at the crux of British resistance to Jewish immigration into Britain. So much so that some considered that immigration had made London 'the diseased heart of an imperial organism threatened by potential attacks from rival powers' and being subsumed from within by those of foreign blood and inferior racial characteristics.<sup>179</sup>

Given the popular British consciousness of the Holocaust as part of World War II, and the embracing of survivors within British culture, however, one would not have considered that any tension or unease had existed in the Jewish/non-Jewish relationship in the past, or that any existed in the present. Situating the Holocaust, and the relationship between Britain and Jewish refugees, within a narrative of British liberalism and generosity allows established Jewish/non-Jewish relations to be overlooked and thus provides a mythical screen memory through which complicated narratives are simplified for ease of transmission whilst the representation of racial eugenics within Holocaust remembrance and commemoration continues the notion that the implications of the Holocaust need not be discussed within a more localised context.

When discussing Holocaust Memorial Day one member of the public noted their objection to the proposal stating that, 'Despite the fact that antisemitism has never been a major problem in Britain, as it has been on the continent, and that British Jews were not killed in the Holocaust, the Government is going ahead with a special Holocaust Memorial Day.'<sup>180</sup> The perception of British tolerance towards the Jewish community, illustrated in sentiments such as these, reflect the depth of feeling surrounding the belief in tolerant treatment of Jews in Britain. As another angry member of the public noted, 'Holocaust Day planners intend to castigate us British for our

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<sup>177</sup> 'Report of the Lancet: Special Sanitary Commission on the Polish Colony of Jew Tailors', (3 May 1884), pp.817-819, in Englander, 'A Documentary History', pp. 85-90, p. 85

<sup>178</sup> Pearson & Moul, 'The Problem of Alien Immigration', p. 8

<sup>179</sup> Feldman, D, 'The Importance of being English: Jewish Immigration and the Decay of Liberal England', in Feldman, D & Stedman-Jones, G (eds), *Metropolis, London: Histories and Representations Since 1800*, (London, Routledge, 1989), pp. 56-83, p. 57

<sup>180</sup> Ingram, R, 'Vile Exploitation', *The Observer*, (26 November 2000)

supposed historic “Anti-Semitism” in failing to rescue enough Jewish refugees, conditioning us into perennial repentance and reparation, second only to the Germans themselves.’<sup>181</sup> Whilst not all of the concern over Jewish refugees was antisemitic it is clear that the treatment of the Jews both before, and during the war, was not as sanguine as its citizens would like to believe or the image of the survivor in Britain would suggest.

The memory and representation of the Kindertransport and the near veneration of Holocaust survivors combined with the continued definition of British identity as being situated against fascist ideology and within a liberal narrative means that to discuss British-Jewish relationships within Britain today may not appear relevant to contemporary concerns. Yet questions surrounding Jewishness and the perception of the Jewish community within Britain today remain pertinent. The Community Security Trust recorded 929 anti-Semitic incidents in Britain in 2009 and 640 incidents in 2012.<sup>182</sup> Despite the number of incidents which have taken place, the reaction, or lack of reaction, to them illustrate the tensions which exist at the heart of the Jewish/non-Jewish relationship. It might be argued that the increasing visibility of the Muslim “Other” has come to eclipse traditional concerns about the Jews as foremost outsider within. Equally, however, the fact that, frequently, antisemitic attacks are not be deemed worthy of report outside of the communities in which they take place is, in itself, extremely revealing. As one commentator has observed, despite the increase in antisemitic incidents there is a distinct sense that ‘...in today’s Britain, to be anti-anti-Semitic is to invite scorn, as if no problem existed.’<sup>183</sup> This sense of British society as being anti-anti-Semitic is in part attributable to British historical consciousness and the increasingly visible relationship with Holocaust survivors which has evolved through a continual interaction between what is remembered and what is forgotten within historical consciousness. Even when Jews are submitted to antisemitic acts in Britain, it seems that the public believe it to be the work of the far right as opposed to considering the more social antisemitism which permeates Britain and which continues to encourage a lack of visibility. The prominence of the Holocaust and the role attributed to survivors as universal moral authority figures acts as a screen to any real significant debate within Britain about antisemitism existing and does not encourage any significant engagement with the historic Jewish experience in Britain whilst allowing the British people to pass judgement on the way in which the Jewish community has been treated in other nations.

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<sup>181</sup> Watson. C, ‘Should Holocaust Day Go Ahead?’, *Daily Mail*, (24 November 2000)

<sup>182</sup> Community Security Trust, *Antisemitic Incidents Report 2012*, (London, CST, 2013), p. 10

<sup>183</sup> MacShane. D, ‘Why does Britain Ignore Anti-Semitism?’, *The Guardian*, (25 July 2009), available at: [www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jul/25/antisemitism-britain](http://www.guardian.co.uk/commentisfree/2009/jul/25/antisemitism-britain), (accessed 13 August 2012)

This sense of identity is certainly reinforced by the heroic memory of Britain's role in the Second World War and as heroic "liberator" in the Holocaust. As Kansteiner has observed, '...the heroic memory of the Second World War is still a dominant theme in British official and popular culture.'<sup>184</sup> This memory, as with so much cultural identification, is based as much on that which Britain has chosen to forget as it is on what we have chosen to remember. Britain takes comfort in its tradition of liberalism, and the influence its political sensibilities have on the world around us. British belief in what Tony Blair called the, 'natural urges of our democracy towards peace' ensure that the British public can believe themselves at odds with the dictatorships of today or the fascist regimes of yesterday and take pride in democratic values and believe that their position in the world allows British politicians to pursue British liberal ideals.<sup>185</sup> It is, I believe, this very sentiment which, in part, explains and defines the role and visibility of Holocaust survivors in British culture which, in turn, influences their increasing significance within British historical consciousness. For the presence of survivors as a venerated part of British society provides indisputable proof of the value of British actions on the international stage and acts as a screen which not only projects the image of Britain which is engrained in cultural consciousness but also resists open discussion about the reality of British life.

As one MP declared in Parliament when discussing Holocaust Memorial Day;

'when other countries were rounding up their Jews and herding them on to trains to the gas chamber, Britain provided a safe haven for tens of thousands of refugee children. Think of Britain in the thirties. The rest of Europe was succumbing to fascism...but, here in Britain, Mosley was rejected. Imagine 1941: France invaded, Europe overrun, America not yet in the war and just one country standing for liberty and democracy, a beacon to the rest of the world, fighting not just for our freedom, but for the world's liberty.'<sup>186</sup>

Given the treatment of the Jewish population and the subtle, if not always explicit, antisemitism which exists in British society today that this statement should have been made as recently as Holocaust Memorial Day 2012 is astonishing. As the reality is of course, that Britain did not go to war for the liberty of the Jewish people and whilst Mosley was indeed rejected antisemitism was still a potent, if less violent force in British society. Whilst the Kindertransport memory is one in which Britain takes solace, as has been illustrated, restrictions were fierce and concerted resistance towards further Jewish immigration both before, and during, this time was rife. Yet

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<sup>184</sup> Kansteiner. W, 'Sold Globally: Remembered Locally: Holocaust Cinema and the Construction of Collective Identities in Europe, Israel, and the US' in Berger. S (ed.), *Narrating the Nation* (New York, Berghahn, 2008), pp. 153-180, p. 169

<sup>185</sup> Blair. T, 'Opening Speech to Parliament: Iraq Debate', (18, March 2003), available at; [www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2003/mar/18/foreignpolicy.iraq1](http://www.guardian.co.uk/politics/2003/mar/18/foreignpolicy.iraq1), (accessed 15 June 2012)

<sup>186</sup> Austin, *Hansard*, 'Holocaust Memorial Day 2012', col. 342

through emotive rhetoric such as this and the continued presence of survivors on British soil, which is emphasised during commemorative practices or in political debates, whether it be those who entered Britain through the Kindertransport or those who came to Britain at the cessation of hostilities, has proven to be a powerful symbol of British benevolence which is situated within collective consciousness as the very antithesis of National Socialist Fascism against which Britain defines itself.

Alongside the role of the survivors to impart universal messages appropriate to humanity, therefore, one can see that it has also become the political utilisation of the role of the survivors to act as a symbol for British identity. The position of the Holocaust considered in isolation from historical British antisemitism and treatment of the “Other” reinforces the significance of the Holocaust and survivors in the continuation of British memory and sense of self. Certainly, as Schaffer notes, ‘Britain’s self-image as war warrior and war victim has left scant room for introspection’ and through embracing Holocaust survivors as a symbol of the Holocaust, including those who Britain protected prior to the outbreak of war, liberated towards the end of hostilities or welcomed after the war and giving them a place of prominence in British commemoration not only enhances this war image but also continues to cultivate an image of liberal tolerance and moral guide.<sup>187</sup> Due to the lack of consistent and thorough engagement with either Jewish/non-Jewish relations or a sense of Jewish identity in Holocaust education or wider culture means that survivors, as the “imagined figures” encountered within Holocaust remembrance, can be conveniently placed, by both the non-Jewish, and certain factions of the Jewish, community, within this narrative of British liberalism and heroism.

When discussing the position of some academics, such as Cesarani and Kushner, Mitchell B. Hart has questioned why there needs to be any significant British engagement with the Holocaust asking whether ‘the British really need to do the sort of collective memory work,...that Germans, Poles, Austrians and others have engaged, or been urged to engage in?’<sup>188</sup> As a country which did not participate in the Final Solution of the Jewish question it could be felt that any deeper engagement with the Holocaust in Britain, or Britain’s response to the Holocaust whilst it was taking place, is fundamentally unnecessary as Britain does not have to atone for its actions in the same way perpetrator nations have done. Yet by failing to conduct consistent analysis of British actions in the past within commemorative practices British historical consciousness is failing to

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<sup>187</sup> Schaffer. G, ‘Re-Thinking the History of Blame: Britain and Minorities during the Second World War’, *National Identities*, Vol. 8, No. 4, (December 2006), pp. 401-419, p. 402

<sup>188</sup> Hart. M. B, ‘The Unbearable Lightness of Britain’, *Journal of Modern Jewish Studies*, Vol. 6, No. 2, (2007), pp. 145-165, p. 160

challenge the dominant mythical narrative of the Second World War and the Holocaust which is maintained through an emphasis on Britain's role as rescuer and sanctuary for refugees.

In recent years, particularly since the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001, the political and media driven interpretation and utilisation of Holocaust survivors has become an integral element of this narrative which, in turn, has provided the British population with a lack of impetus to engage with the complexities of the reality both of the Holocaust, and of the British relationship with the "Other". When explaining the value of Holocaust Memorial Day Cesarani claimed that, 'Installing Jewish memory within national memory and allotting public space to the commemoration of the Nazi genocide shatters the monolithic, mythic national story.'<sup>189</sup> Yet whilst the centrality of the survivor experience within this day of remembrance certainly provides an opportunity to shatter the monolithic and mythic national story one can see that, rather than destabilising this narrative, very little critical engagement has taken place. The survivors themselves, alongside political rhetoric applauding the liberal values of Britain, have become increasingly embraced as being illustrative of British benevolence rather than an opportunity through which Britain can analyse its past actions.

It is arguable that the adoption of a British historical consciousness, which is being understood through a screen memory of the mythical, rather than historically orientated interpretation, is not necessarily a negative thing for Holocaust survivors or Holocaust consciousness in Britain. The broadening of the Holocaust's message for contemporary humanity and the treatment of survivors as the primary mediators of experience has made the survivor experience more prominent both in historical representations within museums and within memorialisation. More than ever before the role of the survivor has been one of the focal points of Holocaust remembrance in Britain. The sculpting of a national memory of the Holocaust and the utilisation of the survivor within this as a mediator of this message has not only ensured increased appreciation and engagement with survivors but has also helped consolidate a sense of British pride and identity rooted in an historical consciousness of past valour, benevolence and pride. Yet despite this there is a danger in continuing along this path of memorialisation without critical engagement.

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<sup>189</sup> Cesarani, D. 'Does the Singularity of the Holocaust make it Incomparable and Inoperative for Commemorating, Studying and Preventing Genocide? Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day as Case Study', *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (Autumn 2001) pp. 40-56, p. 51

Howard Stein has cited the work of family therapist Edwin Friedman who observed that Jewish families often invoke the Holocaust as a form of 'cultural camouflage' in order not to examine painful family relationships.<sup>190</sup> The narratives which are currently being maintained within British culture through the memory of the Holocaust and the physical presence, and utilisation, of Holocaust survivors within Britain today certainly appear inclined to continue this sense of cultural camouflage. For the Holocaust, as it exists in British national memory alongside the veneration of those who participated in the Second World War, obscures attempts to discuss or understand the relationship between the Jewish, and non-Jewish, communities in Britain either past or present. By focusing on the Holocaust as the seminal event in both Jewish and British history, Holocaust memory eclipses any further discussion of possible tensions between the two populations existing either in the pre-war period or today. Antisemitic attacks are on the increase in Britain but, ironically, the 'safety net' that Holocaust consciousness provides means that it is easier to consider these attacks simply as right-wing extremism.

This is, of course, not to suggest that Holocaust commemoration encourages the perpetuation of antisemitism in Britain, nor should it suggest that survivors and their experiences are not emotionally powerful to listen to or highly valued in British society. Popular interest in Holocaust memoirs is considerable and the respect accorded to those who experienced the events is infinite. Yet to assume that survivors are simply valued due to the words they can impart would be to ignore the political investment in the Holocaust and the Second World War as significant parts around which British national identity and historical consciousness are cultivated and maintained. Whilst in the immediate post-war period the survivor was both deliberately, and unintentionally, ignored in twenty-first century Britain the role the survivor has assumed, and been given, in British culture is one which supports traditional assumptions and understandings of British national identity.

It has been stated that 'every culture is based on common remembrance and forgetting. However, this forgetting does not cause an irreversible deletion from memory but produces a latent memory that in principle can be reactivated.'<sup>191</sup> Certainly there are calls to challenge the assumptions which underlie British historical consciousness. Survivors themselves are not all overflowing with gratitude and, indeed, appear increasingly willing to speak out at the reality of

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<sup>190</sup> Friedman, E, 'Systems and Ceremonies: A Family View of Rites of Passage', In Carter, E, & McGoldrick, M, (eds), *The Family Life Cycle: A Framework for Family Therapy*, (New York, Gardner Press, 1980) pp. 429-460 as cited in, Stein, H, 'The Holocaust, the Uncanny and the Jewish Sense of History', *Political Psychology*, Vol. 5, No. 1, (March 1984), pp. 5 – 35, p. 9

<sup>191</sup> Funk, W, 'On a Narratology of Cultural and Collective Memory', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 33, No. 2, (Summer 2003), pp. 207 – 227, p. 215

their experiences within Britain. Yet whilst the will to challenge the screen memory which has been formed is gradually becoming increasingly discernible it is also apparent that it has yet to gain momentum within popular culture to the extent that the cultural camouflage to which Friedman refers will be adequately removed. Whether political investment in recovering these screen memories, particularly during a time in which national identity, fuelled by austerity and a weakening of British international influence in the post-colonial age, is uncertain and, therefore, appears to be something only time will reveal. As Huyssen notes, however, ‘...the fault line between mythic past and real past is not always that easy to draw...’ and the prominent role of survivors in British society, and the use and manipulation of their presence by both politicians and the popular press as a means of projecting a certain image of Britishness, has ensured that drawing this fault line between myth and reality has become even harder within British culture and popular British historical consciousness.<sup>192</sup> These ideas will be considered further within the following chapter as the role and representation of survivors in British Holocaust education is explored in greater depth.

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<sup>192</sup> Huyssen. A, 'Present Pasts: Media, Politics, Amnesia', *Public Culture*, Vol. 12, No. 1, (Winter 2000), pp. 21-38, p. 26

## **Chapter 2: The Representation of Holocaust Survivors in British Holocaust Education**

Since its inclusion on the National Curriculum in 1991 the landscape of Holocaust education has been fraught with complexities. Whilst seemingly promoting the same purpose educational organisations often appear at odds with each other in terms of the way in which they believe educational material about the Holocaust should be mediated. Yet whilst their approaches to it may be different the utilisation of survivor testimony in the classroom has emerged as a focal point around which Holocaust teaching in Britain has developed. For if survivors, and their testimony, have become increasingly more visible within the process of Holocaust memorialisation in Britain then it is apparent that they have emerged not only as central figures in the transmission of Holocaust education but, also, that they have become the very core around which this education has evolved.

This chapter will explore the changing way in which survivors, and Holocaust victims, have been represented within Holocaust teaching. It will also reflect on whether organisations committed to furthering knowledge and awareness about the Holocaust challenge, or reinforce, the position of the survivor in British culture as a site of universalisation and domestication, as outlined in the previous chapter. It will be argued that, despite the apparent focus on individual experience within education, survivors are in fact becoming increasingly decontextualised from their Jewish identities in the quest to create a sense of identification between student and victim and as a means of highlighting the continued relevance of the Holocaust to contemporary British society. By drawing on the history of non-Jewish relationships with British Jewish communities before the outbreak of the Second World War, this chapter will then conclude by suggesting how we may come to understand this decontextualisation whilst gesturing towards the implications of this abstraction for the future of Jewish identity within Holocaust education.

The perceived importance of witnessing and testifying to the past, which has come to enhance not only the way in which the survivor is viewed in British culture but also internationally, has even greater pertinence for the transmission and mediation of Holocaust teaching which, in turn, has fuelled popular appreciation of survivor testimony itself. This move towards the centrality of the voice of the survivor reflects the gradual pedagogical, and historical, shift away from the Holocaust as a history simply concerned with, and narrated by, perpetrators and towards a victim orientated learning perspective. From the edge of historical enquiry survivors have emerged as symbols of human suffering and both they, and their words, form the basis of a

mode of education aimed at creating more enlightened citizens who do not remain impervious to injustice in everyday life. The first to recognise the potential of survivor testimony for transmitting the Holocaust to future generations, organisations like the Holocaust Educational Trust, have worked tirelessly to ensure that the survivor voice has become a prominent, if not the most prominent, authority of the Holocaust in the classroom. This has not only involved encouraging written survivor testimony to be utilised and explored but, more significantly, has involved enabling survivors themselves to physically enter classrooms across the country in order to deliver their personal testimony themselves.

Such a development was not, however, necessarily anticipated. For whilst Totten stated in 1994 that if students were to expand and enhance their knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust ‘...the importance of eyewitness testimony needs to be taken seriously by educators and teachers’ there was a distinct antipathy towards employing testimony within the classroom environment.<sup>1</sup> Certainly testimony itself is not unproblematic for, as Edelheit states, ‘most survivors reconstruct their experiences into very narrow terms, usually without reference to any larger historical contexts and with very little attention to the larger events around them.’<sup>2</sup> In the classroom situation one could understand the reluctance to teach from a survivor centred perspective through the use of a survivor voice due to the perceived sense that it would provide only limited information and that the direction it would provide for further exploration into the subject as a whole would be limited. Survivor testimony is often, ‘Laden with pathos...and so dependent on individual memory’ arguably limiting its use as an educational tool.<sup>3</sup> Seemingly from the margins of historical discussion Holocaust survivors have become integral to education in Britain, to the point at which they are referred to by one organisation as the ‘Heart of Holocaust Education.’<sup>4</sup>

The underlying assumption that first-person accounts can ‘graphically depict what genocide means to the individual victim’ now provides the basis for Holocaust education as it currently stands in the twenty-first century.<sup>5</sup> This approach has proved extremely popular with students often referring to the experience of hearing the testimony of a Holocaust survivor as being the most valuable aspect of their Holocaust learning. As one student observed, ‘I particularly

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<sup>1</sup> Totten. S, ‘The Use of First-Person Accounts in Teaching about the Holocaust’, *The British Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol. 3, No. 2, (Winter 1994), pp. 160 – 183, p. 162

<sup>2</sup> Edelheit (1988), p. 2 as quoted in Totten, ‘The Use of First-Person Accounts’, p. 166

<sup>3</sup> Young. J, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 163’

<sup>4</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, ‘Survivor Stories’, available at [www.het.org.uk/index.php/survivor-stories](http://www.het.org.uk/index.php/survivor-stories), (accessed 20 August 2012)

<sup>5</sup> Totten, ‘The Use of First-Person Accounts’, p. 160

enjoyed hearing the survivor testimonies as it really brought home how real the Holocaust was.<sup>6</sup> Nor is the demand to hear a survivor speak waning. Despite the aging survivor population the number of survivor speakers in schools, as organised through the Trust, has increased rather than decreased in recent years. In the 2009-2010 academic session the Trust facilitated 274 visits by survivors to speak in schools and other institutions across the country. During the 2012-2013 academic year, however, this figure had almost doubled and had risen to 504 survivor sessions taking place.<sup>7</sup> As such survivors in Britain, from the perspective of educational organisations such as the Trust, have become the principal mediators of the Holocaust in the classroom and are perceived as being 'the most powerful tool in raising awareness of the dangers of prejudice and racism.'<sup>8</sup>

This move towards the focus on the individual experience through survivor speakers in education has not, however, simply occurred as a means of providing students with the chance to hear testimony or as a means of supplying survivors with a forum in which their voices and testimonies can be heard. Enabling the voice of the survivor has also ensured that the image of the dehumanised victim has been replaced by individual faces of the Holocaust ensuring the restoration of the humanity of both victims and survivors. As the Holocaust Educational Trust tells students;

'Survivor testimonies are powerful because they challenge the process of dehumanisation...we cannot imagine the numbers of people that suffered during the Holocaust – 6 million Jews and countless other victims. However, we can gain some understanding by focusing on the individual stories and testimonies of those who suffered and died.'<sup>9</sup>

By using testimonies to facilitate the focus on the individual, educators are trying to ensure that the victims of the Holocaust are not reduced to abstract figures. The IHRA advises educators to, 'Individualise the history by translating statistics into personal stories.'<sup>10</sup> It is believed that, if students are able to hear and engage with individual testimony, their understanding of human experience within an incomprehensible event can be enhanced and the 'human dimension' of

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<sup>6</sup> Respondent 9, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: London North Visit 2011', (2 November 2011), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 8 June 2013)

<sup>7</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Outreach Programme Annual Report 2010-2011*, (Unpublished), p. 1; Personal correspondence with Holocaust Educational Trust Outreach Officer Karen van Coevorden, (17 November 2013)

<sup>8</sup> London Jewish Cultural Centre, 'Jewish Life and Learning', available at [www.ljcc.org.uk/events/1033-survivor-stories-to-mark-yom-ha-shoah.html](http://www.ljcc.org.uk/events/1033-survivor-stories-to-mark-yom-ha-shoah.html), (accessed 17 January 2012)

<sup>9</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz Project Orientation Seminar: Lead Educator's Notes*, (Unpublished), p. 7

<sup>10</sup> International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 'How to Teach about the Holocaust in Schools' available at: [www.holocaustremembrance.com/educate/teaching-guidelines/how-to-teach-about-holocaust-in-schools](http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/educate/teaching-guidelines/how-to-teach-about-holocaust-in-schools) (accessed 2 February 2014)

history is preserved.<sup>11</sup> Far beyond the efforts exerted within wider culture it is those within the field of education who have sought to ensure that survivors become an integral aspect of Holocaust consciousness and whilst in wider culture survivors assume a central position, in part, due to what they, and their testimony, infers about Britain, in Holocaust education it appears that their words and presence in the classroom encapsulates the essence of a fundamental principle of current Holocaust teaching. The Trust refers to this focus on the individual experience and the rejection of abstract identification as a means by which they are able to restore the humanity of the survivors and to rehumanise the victims of the Holocaust.<sup>12</sup> The frequent use of the term by the Trust, both within the educational material they produce and the media reports about their work, has not only ensured that the concept of rehumanisation has become an integral aspect of Holocaust education but it has also altered the way in which those who experienced the Holocaust are encountered within in both education and wider society.

### *Rehumanisation and the Changing use of Holocaust Imagery in the Classroom*

The move towards exploring individual experience as a means of rehumanisation, has taken place alongside an increasing rejection of photographic material depicting the victims of the Holocaust which was previously used to portray the historical event to students. The systematic dehumanisation of those who were persecuted was extensively documented through the photographic legacy of images captured by perpetrators, liberators and, although clearly to a far lesser extent, the victims themselves. Such graphic images have often been utilised as a means of providing educators, with what Salmons refers to as, 'shock tactics,' enabling them to illustrate to students the magnitude of the atrocities committed and, in some instances, to provide proof that the Holocaust really did take place.<sup>13</sup> This desire to demonstrate to students the impact of the camps through the medium of photography is arguably understandable. Educators involved in Holocaust education frequently start from the premise that "hearing is not like seeing" particularly with regards to visiting atrocity sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau.<sup>14</sup> Yet

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<sup>11</sup> Kitson, A, 'Challenging Stereotypes and Avoiding the Superficial: Suggested Approach to Teaching the Holocaust', *Teaching History*, Vol. 104, (2001), pp. 41-48, p. 43

<sup>12</sup> Despite the frequent utilisation of this term by the Holocaust Educational Trust it must be acknowledged that the concept of rehumanisation did not, originate with the Holocaust Educational Trust. The use of this term by the Trust reflects the guidance and advice offered to educators and educational organisations by the IHRA. Please see: International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 'How to Teach about the Holocaust in Schools.'

<sup>13</sup> Salmons, P, 'Teaching or Preaching? The Holocaust and Intercultural Education in the UK', *Intercultural Education*, Vol. 14, No. 2, (June 2003), pp. 139 – 149, p. 147

<sup>14</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, 'About the LFA Project', available at [www.het.org.uk/index.php/lessons-from-auschwitz-general/about-lfa](http://www.het.org.uk/index.php/lessons-from-auschwitz-general/about-lfa), (accessed 21 August 2012). A greater discussion of the use of this phrase can be found within the final chapter of this study.

whilst field visits to sites of atrocity are increasingly undertaken by British schools, for many teachers a pressured timetable means that the subject already faces considerable time restrictions on the curriculum and taking students to Poland is not a conceivable, or economically viable, option. Photographs may seem, therefore, to provide a more accessible means of illustrating the extent of the destruction unleashed in Nazi occupied areas. Viewed within this context the disturbing images captured of the victims of the Holocaust in the camps and ghettos, which Zelizer describes as having, 'become a lasting iconic representation of war atrocity and human evil' are perhaps the most accessible way for teachers, without the time or capacity to visit Holocaust sites, or without an in-depth understanding and knowledge of the Holocaust, to visually transmit an awareness of the Holocaust to students.<sup>15</sup>

One of the problems with using such imagery in the classroom, however, is that the way in which students become aware of, and view, the victims is mainly through photographic images captured through the lens of the perpetrator. Gazing at photos of Einsatzgruppen shootings or the suffering experienced within the camps is often to see the victims from the perspective of the perpetrator and could reinforce Nazi ideology by showing the Jews to be, in some way, beyond human. This is not only problematic but also potentially dangerous, as the Holocaust Survivors Friendship Association warns;

'It can be tempting to use horrific imagery in an attempt to shock and motivate students. However, much of the photographic evidence of the Holocaust was produced by the perpetrators. If we focus on this material, then the images the perpetrators had of their victims will be the same ones our students see.'<sup>16</sup>

The majority of people who are aware of the Holocaust are undoubtedly familiar with photographs of corpses, impossible to differentiate according to age or gender strewn across barren land destined for a mass grave with their previous identity unknown and their history silent. Yet, as Wolfgang Sofsky highlights, the Holocaust did not simply involve the murder of people physically, it also 'destroyed human beings by humiliation and psychological murder.'<sup>17</sup> Whilst the capturing of images depicting this humiliation and destruction provides testament to what happened it has also ensured that, to a certain degree, this humiliation can continue. The use of such images in an educational environment, therefore, could undermine the need,

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<sup>15</sup> Zelizer. B, *Remembering to Forget: Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye*, (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1998), p. 1

<sup>16</sup> The Holocaust Survivors Friendship Organisation, 'Learning Resources', available at: [www.holocaustlearning.org/learn](http://www.holocaustlearning.org/learn), (accessed 7 February 2012)

<sup>17</sup> Sofsky. W, *The Order of Terror: The Concentration Camp*, (New Jersey, Princeton University Press, 1997), p. 210

articulated by the IHRA, to reinforce the dignity of the victims for the body is considered to be a 'repository of symbolic interpretation, a focus for the deepest prejudice and the source of personal and social identity.'<sup>18</sup>

During the Holocaust this source of personal identity was systematically attacked through the assault on both the somatic form and the removal of social identity through disorientation, the removal of personal possessions and the replacement of individuals' names with numbers, with the final result often being captured through the lens of the camera. Another means by which those persecuted had their personal identities assaulted was through the forcible removal of clothing and the habitual humiliation which ensued. This sense of degradation is articulated within memoirs of many, particularly female, survivors of the Holocaust. As a member of the Sonderkommando at Auschwitz-Birkenau explained 'lots of women were embarrassed...don't forget that many of them had come from religious homes and had never undressed in front of strangers, even their husbands. That's why many of them felt humiliated.'<sup>19</sup> The sense of bewilderment experienced by many is expressed by one female survivor who describes the shock of being told to, 'get undressed? Right here? In front of the men?'<sup>20</sup> Whilst another recalls her shame as 'laughing SS men walked through our lines' once the females had removed their apparel.<sup>21</sup>

Mark Twain asserted that, 'clothes make the man. Naked people have little or no influence in society.'<sup>22</sup> Seen thus, clothes are not merely an extension of the self but are also a means of disguising the physical flesh thereby permitting others to see only what we wish them to see. As Engel suggests, 'clothing can either hide or reshape that realness providing an altogether surface-level image.'<sup>23</sup> An assault on this sense of control over the exposure of the individual body, therefore, is an assault on our fragile inner identity and by removing the ability of the individual to take control over their own somatic form through enforced anonymity one can discern the invasion of both physical, and emotional, identity. If it is true that we 'use images to define ourselves and others' to repeatedly expose the images of the naked or semi naked body

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<sup>18</sup> Mangan. J, 'The Potent Image and the Permanent Prometheus' in Mangan. J (ed), *Shaping the Superman-Fascist Body as Political Icon: Aryan Fascism*, (London, Frank Class Publishers, 1999), pp. 11-22, p.11

<sup>19</sup> Sacker. J, 'To Survive so the Truth Would Come Out' in Greif. G (ed), *We Wept Without Tears: Testimonies of the Jewish Sonderkommando from Auschwitz*, (London: Yale University Press, 2005), pp. 87-121, p. 100

<sup>20</sup> Bitton-Jackson. L, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing up in the Holocaust*, (London, Pocket Books, 2000), p. 74

<sup>21</sup> Perl. G, *I was a Doctor in Auschwitz*, (Salem, Ayer Company Publishers Inc, 1992), p. 33

<sup>22</sup> Twain. M as cited in Wilhelm. A, 'The Clothing Motif in Updike's "Rabbit, Run"' in *South Atlantic Bulletin*, Vol. 40, No. 4. (November 1975), pp. 87-89, p. 87

<sup>23</sup> Engel. S, 'Marketing Everyday Life: The Post-modern Commodity Aesthetic of Abercrombie & Fitch', *Advertising and Society Review*, Vol. 5, No. 3, (2004), available at: <http://muse.jhu.edu/journals/asr/v005/5.3engel.html>

so desecrated reinforces the notion of dehumanisation and victimhood and would, therefore, make it more difficult for students, and for wider society, to see beyond these images and consider the humanity of the people who were attacked during the Holocaust.<sup>24</sup>

Whilst not articulated or emphasised in the consistent way that it is today, it is apparent that those who created educational resources prior to the establishment of the National Curriculum were aware of the importance of creating a link between students and victims through the focus on the individual. Despite explorations of the Holocaust through individual experience, however, the focus on the rehumanisation of the victims does not appear to have been the main imperative for educators who were simply facing a struggle to gain acceptance for the Holocaust as a subject with educational value. Within the, albeit relatively scarce, educational material produced specifically for teaching and learning about the Holocaust before the 1990s it is clear that images now viewed as inappropriate for the classroom were utilised as a means of reinforcing to students the horrors of the Final Solution. This can most strikingly be illustrated by use of two particular images of a woman named Margit Schwartz, who was incarcerated at Bergen-Belsen, which are used in the resource for teachers and students *Auschwitz Yesterday's Racism*, created to accompany the Auschwitz exhibition held in East London in 1983. If teachers were to utilise this resource in the classroom the first image students would see would be a photograph of Schwartz with her family before the Holocaust. This image reflects the type of recognisable family images which would later come to dominate the way in which the Holocaust was taught as a means of illustrating to students that those who perished were more than simply victims of atrocity. By using this image the creators of the resource are attempting to establish a sense of commonality between student and victim. Establishing commonality is an increasingly central theme within British Holocaust education which will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter.

Alongside this image, and dominating the page, however, is a photograph of Schwartz taken by British officials in the immediate aftermath of the camps' liberation in 1945. Exceedingly emaciated, naked and barely able to stand Schwartz stares at the floor rather than the camera whilst teachers and students are invited to note the shocking difference between the figure in the first photograph and the figure in the second. The attempt to create a connection between the Holocaust and the impact on the individual through illustrating the extent to which the individual body and mind were assaulted is a gesture towards a more concerted attempt to

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<sup>24</sup> Perlmutter. D, 'Re-visions of the Holocaust Textbook images and historical myth-making', *Howard Journal of Communications*, Vol. 8, No. 2, (1997), pp. 151-159, p. 152

humanise the victims of the Holocaust. Nonetheless, the choice of words used in the accompanying text which describes Schwartz as inhabiting a ‘wretched festering body and unhinged mind’ does little to create a sense of rehumanisation nor does it allow the individual depicted to maintain her dignity, an aspect of Holocaust education and remembrance which the IHRA now deems to be crucial.<sup>25</sup> The use of such imagery in the ILEA teacher’s pack was echoed in another resource which accompanied the exhibition, and educational video entitled *Auschwitz: An Exhibition*. Anticipated to be used with students in secondary school education, images of naked women being driven to the gas chambers are utilised. The nakedness of the women represented in a position of submission to the perpetrators reinforces the debasement of their social and bodily identity. The concern is that not only did this material risk reducing the humanity of the victims but, also, that it may perpetuate the stereotype that the Jewish population went to their deaths without offering any resistance.<sup>26</sup>

The use of images which less graphically illustrate bodily desecration, alongside a focus on individual testimony, is just one such way organisations have approached the challenge of restoring the humanity of those who have been continually re-victimised. Yet the way in which victims were represented in educational material prior to the establishment of the National Curriculum should not, however, infer that with the arrival of the curriculum automatically came, what is now recognised as, good educational practice by those institutions which are considered experts in Holocaust teaching. In the formative years of what is now recognised as the field of Holocaust education graphic images were still promoted by organisations which have been seminal in the development of the educational good practice. In 1995 the Holocaust Educational Trust, in conjunction with David Cesarani, produced a publication for use within schools entitled *A History of the Holocaust*. Of only three photographs representing Jewish people within this book two of them depict corpses. Whilst its use was gradually reduced by the Trust, the resource was only updated in 2010. In 1997 one of the most well-known resources produced by the Trust, in collaboration with the Spiro Institute, began to be distributed to teachers. Whilst cautioning teachers not to use too many graphic images the *Lessons of the Holocaust: Complete Teaching and Resource Pack* also states that ‘this does not

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<sup>25</sup> London Auschwitz Education Committee, *Auschwitz: Yesterday’s Racism – A Pack of Materials for Teachers*, (London, The Committee, 1983), p. 14:3

<sup>26</sup> *ILEA Resource Auschwitz: An Exhibition*, Directed by Brian Taylor, (London: ILEA Learning Branch, 1984)

mean that images that graphically depict the horror of the Holocaust should not be used, as pupils need to comprehend that these terrible events really did happen.<sup>27</sup>

Alongside the concerns expressed regarding the use of graphic imagery to emphasise the scale and impact of the Holocaust, there is also the concern amongst educators that, in a digital filled world in which images of the Holocaust are readily accessible on the internet, students may actually become desensitised to the images being presented due to overexposure to them. As one teacher remarked when discussing his own move away from using graphic images or film footage, 'Students are so used to seeing images of death in films now that showing them images of dead people, even on such a large scale, really have no major effect. I got the feeling with my students that they really were just taking the images for granted and not appreciating the fact that they were real.'<sup>28</sup> The dehumanisation of the victim would surely be complete if those viewing photographic images failed to appreciate that they were real images due to their desensitisation to them. Educational organisations, therefore, seek to reinforce to teachers that they need to proceed with caution if they want to use graphic images because of fear over the exploitation of 'the students' emotional vulnerability' but also because of students increasing desensitisation which, if left unchecked could potentially culminate in Holocaust fatigue.<sup>29</sup> This desensitisation could also lead to observers ultimately, re-victimising the victims for it also 'repeats the original violation of their dignity of human beings' and could be said to distance the students from the individuals they are observing through placing them in the position of 'the dominance of the viewer over the viewed.'<sup>30</sup>

Despite these pedagogical concerns, however, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust does continue to acknowledge that some teachers and those involved in commemorative activities will still wish to utilise such images and whilst advising them to "avoid unnecessary, repeated or inappropriate images of dead bodies or open mass graves" they also add that "If you feel that you must use such images ensure that they are used to highlight the destruction of communities."<sup>31</sup> Notwithstanding this acknowledgement it is apparent that those organisations

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<sup>27</sup> Cesarani, D, *A History of the Holocaust*, (London, Holocaust Educational Trust, 1995); Holocaust Educational Trust & Spiro Institute, 'Information for Teachers' in, *Lessons of the Holocaust: The Complete Teaching and Resource Pack*, (London, HET&LJCC, 1997), p. 25. The Spiro Institute is now referred to as the London Jewish Cultural Centre or LJCC.

<sup>28</sup> Moorhouse, D, 'Teaching the Holocaust' (1 January 2004), 'History Teacher's Discussion Forum', available at [www.schoolhistory.co.uk/forum/index.php?showtopic=2410&st=45](http://www.schoolhistory.co.uk/forum/index.php?showtopic=2410&st=45), (accessed 31 July 2012)

<sup>29</sup> United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, 'Guidelines for Teaching about the Holocaust', available at, [www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/guideline/](http://www.ushmm.org/education/foreducators/guideline/), (accessed 21 August 2013)

<sup>30</sup> Dean, C, *The Fragility of Empathy After the Holocaust*, (Ithaca, Cornell University Press, 2004), p. 16, p.33

<sup>31</sup> Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'Guidance on how to use Images', available at, [www.hmd.org.uk/resources/image-library/guidance-how-use-images](http://www.hmd.org.uk/resources/image-library/guidance-how-use-images), (accessed 21 December 2013)

committed to the advancement of Holocaust education have re-evaluated the use of graphic photographic images in their educational work and, subsequently, the utilisation of such images has declined significantly. In an attempt to rescue the victims of the Holocaust from the mass grave of anonymity to which they were consigned during the Holocaust, Holocaust educators have increasingly sought to rehumanise both survivors and victims through a concerted determination to move away from images depicting dead, emaciated or naked bodies and instead to individualise the history of the Holocaust by facilitating the presence of survivor speakers in the classroom. As teacher guidance notes provided by the Holocaust Educational Trust state that, 'In light of the dehumanisation experienced during the Holocaust, it becomes crucial that we restore the humanity of the victims.'<sup>32</sup>

### *Identification and Pre-war Jewish Life*

Alongside, and as part, of this move in education towards rehumanisation through individualisation has been the emergence of a belief in the need to establish a sense of commonality and identification between survivor and student. Not only does the presence of the survivor in the classroom allow students to engage with individual stories as a means of unravelling the complexities of history but it also allows educators to generate a link between the student and the past through forging a connection between student and survivor. One of the main ways in which this sense of identification has been achieved is through a greater engagement with pre-war Jewish life. Exploring pre-war identity not only to ensure students are reminded of the common humanity of those who perished and suffered during the Holocaust but, also, as a means of making the past more recognisable and therefore, more accessible, to students.

The emphasis on ensuring an empathic connection between student and victim through a focus on commonality, however, represents a significant shift within the approach taken to represent pre-war Jewish life in the material educational organisations produce for teachers and educators. Older educational resources consistently represent both Jewish life, and Jewish identity, solely through the lens of antisemitism with the Holocaust often being presented as the inevitable culmination of centuries of persecution. Within *Auschwitz Yesterday's Racism*, the roots of antisemitism, development of Nazi persecution and understandings of stereotypes and the role of the Jewish people as scapegoats are discussed at length yet in neither the

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<sup>32</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Pre-war Jewish Life Activity: Teacher Guidance Notes*, (2011)

information sheets, nor in the classroom activity suggestions, is there any information about pre-war Jewish life other than that portrayed through the lens of persecution. Yet such an approach is not purely the remit of material produced prior to the establishment of the National Curriculum. In a similar vein to *Auschwitz Yesterday's Racism*, the 1995 resource *A History of the Holocaust* claimed to explore Jewish life under the heading of 'The Jews and Anti-Jewish Hatred.' Yet the information provided about Jewish life was in fact only a simplified description of religious and scientific antisemitism despite being the only way in which students were encouraged to engage with the notion of Jewish life before the war.<sup>33</sup> Surprisingly, given the current desire of the Trust to engage with pre-war Jewish life through articulations of commonality, the replacement for this resource booklet, published in 2010, whilst seemingly seeking to engage with the Jewish narrative in more depth, fails to provide any sense of Jewish life in the immediate period before the outbreak of war. Instead, this resource, again written by Cesarani, prefers to place the Jewish experience within an historical background of anti-Jewish sentiment and 'frequent explosions of anti-Jewish violence.'<sup>34</sup>

Certainly it is crucial for students to engage with the issue of historic antisemitism for it played a key role in the gradual evolution of the persecution of the Jewish people and needs to be discussed in order to provide students with greater contextual understanding of the Holocaust. Students themselves appear to want to engage with the subject and to try and understand the implications of antisemitic sentiment. When Holocaust survivors speak about their experiences within schools, as survivor Trude Levi observed, students are often keen to know more about the effects of escalating antisemitism frequently asking questions such as 'How did it feel to be a member of the Jewish community between 1938-1944?' and expressing shock and amazement at the way in which Jewish communities were ostracised in areas where they had previously lived untroubled.<sup>35</sup> The considerable emphasis educational organisations have previously placed on this issue, however, had resulted in antisemitism being the main way in which students engaged with Jewish life before the Holocaust, effectively reducing the pre-war Jewish experience to one of victimhood and persecution.

Short has argued that, 'if students are to understand the essence of the Holocaust they will need to know how the Nazi's defined Jewish identity.'<sup>36</sup> Certainly in the same way that it is necessary

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<sup>33</sup> Cesarani, 'History of the Holocaust'

<sup>34</sup> Cesarani, D, *The Holocaust: A Guide for Students and Teachers*, (London, Holocaust Educational Trust, 2010)

<sup>35</sup> Levi, T, *Did you ever meet Hitler Miss? A Holocaust Survivor Talks to Young People*, (Valentine Mitchell, London, 2003), p. 37

<sup>36</sup> Short, G & Reed, C, *Issues in Holocaust Education*, (Aldershot, Ashgate Publishing, 2004), p. 47

for students to engage with historical antisemitism it is also important for students to engage with the way in which those in power in Nazi Germany defined Jewish identity. An examination of the gradual expulsion of the Jewish population from the public sphere through the implementation of Nuremberg Laws in 1935 reveals how the Nazi party sought to define what was meant by Jewishness and how they subsequently treated those who were classified as such.<sup>37</sup> Nevertheless, despite the importance of teaching these definitions as articulated by Short, by failing to discuss Jewish identity to any significant degree outside of the context of antisemitic sentiment and through analysing laws which were enacted solely as a result of how racial Jewishness was defined by non-Jews, educators were once again at risk of only representing the victims of the Holocaust from the perspective of the perpetrators.

In the years since these resources were published, however, educational organisations have sought to reduce the conceptual “distance” between the past and the present through the language of identification and commonality. The importance of ensuring that the Jews are not taught solely in terms of the Holocaust and persecution is reiterated by the IHRA which, in guidance to educators, asserts that they must, ‘Take care not to define the Jewish people solely in terms of the Holocaust’ nor solely through the lens of historical persecution.<sup>38</sup> The Institute of Education also maintains this position, stating that, ‘It is only by reflecting on the *vibrancy*, *diversity* and the *normality* of Jewish life before the genocide that students can begin to understand the void that has been created across Europe.’<sup>39</sup> It is through the growing awareness of the need to contextualise the experiences of those survivors entering the classroom that one can discern another move in the shift towards rehumanisation in British Holocaust education through the growing significance of exploring pre-war Jewish life as part of Holocaust teaching.

Yet despite organisations devoted to the transmission of Holocaust education frequently reiterating the importance of not teaching the Holocaust in isolation, teachers themselves often do not appear to consider pre-war Jewish life to any significant degree within their Holocaust teaching. As one teacher noted whilst undertaking a Continuing Professional Development (CPD) course with the Institute of Education, ‘Devoting a session to pre-war Jewish life, to contextualise the impact of the Holocaust was a “light bulb” moment. I realised – with some

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<sup>37</sup> The Nuremberg Laws are often utilised within Holocaust education as a means of illustrating to students the legalised alienation of those classified as being Jewish. The Holocaust Educational Trust explores this persecution within their Anti-Jewish Laws activity aims to enhance students understanding of anti-Jewish legislation. Holocaust Educational Trust, *Anti-Jewish Laws Resource*, (Web based resource, undated)

<sup>38</sup> Foreign and Commonwealth Office and Department for Education, *United Kingdom Country Report for the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance and Research*, (December 2010)

<sup>39</sup> Institute of Education, ‘Jewish Life before the Second World War: The Gumprich Family’, (2010) available at, [www.hedp.org.uk/page\\_viewer.asp?page=Lesson+starters&pid=82](http://www.hedp.org.uk/page_viewer.asp?page=Lesson+starters&pid=82) (accessed 14 February 2012)

surprise – that actually I had never delivered a genuine contextual lesson prior to the Holocaust before.<sup>40</sup> The influence of organisations such as the Institute for Education and the Holocaust Educational Trust in increasing awareness about the need to contextualise the Holocaust within wider Jewish experience appears to be being felt as learning about, and then teaching about, pre-war Jewish life has become increasingly popular amongst both teachers and educators. Certainly information gathered by the Trust indicates that pre-war Jewish life is an increasingly popular area of exploration amongst those teachers who request educators from the Trust to perform outreach sessions in their schools. In 2011 the Trust re-launched their website and as a part of this placed resources, created by trained educators, online for teachers to download and use within the classroom. This allows teachers to engage with the work of the Trust and the pedagogical practices underlying their work without necessarily having an outreach educator in the classroom. Of these resources it was the pre-war Jewish life resource was the second most popular resource to be downloaded.<sup>41</sup>

This is, of course, extremely promising as it indicates a growing awareness and desire amongst teachers to contextualise the victim experience and ensure that the rehumanisation of survivors is continued. Nevertheless, it also indicates that whilst there is a desire amongst teachers to teach about pre-war Jewish life they are often still reliant upon the material produced by specialist organisations such as the Institute of Education, Imperial War Museum and Holocaust Educational Trust in order to inform and guide their teaching. It is necessary, therefore, to consider what direction is currently being taken in the mediation of historical consciousness through the transmission, and subsequent interpretation, of a sense of pre-war Jewish identity by these organisations, for, as Bernstein submits, when considering the representation of those who experienced the Holocaust there is just as much, if not more, of an ‘ethical burden of representation when the subject is the lives of those same people in the years before they became victims of the Nazi terror.’<sup>42</sup>

The Holocaust Educational Trust seeks to address this burden of representing Jewish life before the Holocaust by illustrating the normality of Jewish life through one of their most popular resources, the ‘Pre-War Jewish Life’ activity. This resource consists of 15 double sided cards each with a different photograph depicting Jewish individuals before the war on one side, and

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<sup>40</sup> Judson. L, ‘Transforming Holocaust Education’, *The Guardian*, (18 January 2012), available at, [www.guardian.co.uk/teacher-network/2012/jan/18/holocaust-education-teaching-resources](http://www.guardian.co.uk/teacher-network/2012/jan/18/holocaust-education-teaching-resources), (accessed 25 April 2012)

<sup>41</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Educational Resources Report: Academic Year 2010-11*, (Unpublished)

<sup>42</sup> Bernstein. M, ‘Victims in Waiting: Backshadowing and the Representation of European Jewry’, *New Literary History*, Vol. 29, No. 4, (1998), pp. 625 – 651, p. 626

questions, such as ‘can you tell these people’s nationality?’, on the other. One of the main purposes of the activity, which is similar to resources produced by other organisations in Britain, seems not so much to explore pre-war Jewish life but rather to encourage students to explore the notion that photographs should not be encountered on face value and those aspects of identity such as nationality and religion cannot be discerned simply by appearance alone. With the exception of the image of one orthodox Jewish man, for example, the images which have been utilised within this resource have been deliberately chosen to ensure that students will be unable to tell that the individuals depicted in the photographs are Jewish simply by their appearance. The Trust views the contextualisation of the survivor’s Holocaust experience through this resource as an integral part of their educational ethos and the recognisable life presented within these activities is reflective of the way in which individual experience is contextualised so as challenge pre-existing conceptions about Jewish identity.

Attempting to debunk stereotypes is of course a crucial aspect of Holocaust teaching and subverting preconceptions is an inherent part of how such education is carried out. Yet as the teacher guidance notes reveal, those within the Trust are seeking to ‘create points of commonality between them and the students themselves’ and this is achieved by presenting pre-war Jewish life through images which depict situations recognisable to students today, such as family holidays and engagement parties, with students being asked whether they ‘have photographs similar to them?’ at home.<sup>43</sup> This focus on individual experiences and images of Jewish people before the war in order to both rehumanise the victims of the Holocaust and to generate a sense of commonality appears to be working. Students frequently describe the significance photographic images had in enabling them to forge a connection to the victims of the Holocaust. One student, for example, describes looking at an image that looked ‘just like me and my little brother in so many photographs.’<sup>44</sup> Other participants have invoked the language of commonality themselves with another student declaring that he felt that people should, ‘take the numbers out of the Holocaust and focus on the names of individuals who died and how they were just like us.’<sup>45</sup> Others have claimed that this activity led to their realisation that, ‘Every

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<sup>43</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Pre-war Jewish Life Activity*

<sup>44</sup> Cawood, R, ‘Student Showcase: Photographs’, available at, [www.lfaproject.org.uk/student-showcase/article/c-172/rose-cawood-castle-douglas-high-school-kirkcudbrightshire/](http://www.lfaproject.org.uk/student-showcase/article/c-172/rose-cawood-castle-douglas-high-school-kirkcudbrightshire/), (accessed 20 August 2012)

<sup>45</sup> Clark, R & Wijesinghe, S, ‘Student Showcase: Researching the Local Community’, available at, [www.lfaproject.org.uk/student-showcase/article/c-179/rebekah-clark-sakunthala-wijesinghe-st-albans-high-school-for-girls-hertfordshire/](http://www.lfaproject.org.uk/student-showcase/article/c-179/rebekah-clark-sakunthala-wijesinghe-st-albans-high-school-for-girls-hertfordshire/), (accessed 20 August 2012)

single one of the victims was special to somebody, each one had hopes, dreams and ambitions – they were just like us.’<sup>46</sup>

Yet whilst the type of activity does allow students to expose stereotypes and stress commonality when one looks beyond the vocabulary of common humanity, and how those in the photographs were “just like us”, one can see that whilst it is the stated aim of Holocaust educators that, ‘The personal stories told by Holocaust survivors [should] present the Jews as human beings and restore their identities,’ an aspect of both victim and survivor identities which is rarely, if ever, discussed is their Jewishness.<sup>47</sup> This omission is certainly surprising for, within educational circles, there appears to be a consensus that the Holocaust ‘should not be taught in isolation from Jewish history and culture.’<sup>48</sup> One would assume, therefore, that exploring Jewish life and culture before the war would be an integral part of Holocaust education. Returning to the guidance provided by the Institute of Education referred to earlier which stated that, ‘It is only by reflecting on the vibrancy, diversity and the normality of Jewish life before the genocide that students can begin to understand the void that has been created across Europe.’<sup>49</sup> Explicitly stating that Holocaust education should not only teach students about the people who were lost but, also, about the long established way of life and the culture which was devastated during the Holocaust and contextualising the Jewish experience during the Holocaust within a greater understanding of Jewish life and culture.

Within an educational resource produced in conjunction with the FA the Holocaust Educational Trust claims that a fundamental aim of the lesson plan given to explore pre-war Jewish life is to ‘increase knowledge and understanding of Jewish life in Europe before the Second World War.’<sup>50</sup> Despite this intention, however, neither knowledge nor understanding of Jewish cultural life is enhanced. Whilst gestures are made within some educational resources to touch on these issues, overwhelmingly, the favoured approach towards representing Jewish life is through the sentiment that they were “just like us.” The exploration of the “vibrancy” and “diversity” of the Jewish experience to which the IHRA refers appears to be absent, or obscured, within this approach of teaching the Holocaust through the rhetoric of common humanity. None of the

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<sup>46</sup> Rackham. E & Dosso. M, ‘Nothing Could Prepare us for the Reality’, available at, [www.dunraven.org.uk/news/?pid=6&nid=2&storyid=497](http://www.dunraven.org.uk/news/?pid=6&nid=2&storyid=497), (accessed 19 August 2012)

<sup>47</sup> Magen. S, ‘Using Testimony in Holocaust Education’, available at: [www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning\\_environments/testimony.asp#5](http://www1.yadvashem.org/yv/en/education/learning_environments/testimony.asp#5), (accessed 19 February 2012)

<sup>48</sup> Trojanski P, cited in Kirshner. S, ‘Polish Schools Begin Teaching Holocaust Studies’, *Canadian Jewish News*, (28 February 2002)

<sup>49</sup> Institute of Education, ‘Jewish life before the Second World War.’

<sup>50</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust & the Football Association, *Introduction to the Holocaust: Footballers Remember: Teacher Guidance Notes*, (London, HET & FA, 2013)

resources created by the Trust for use in the classroom engage with the complexities and diversity of Jewish cultural experience. Nor do they offer or undertake any outreach session devoted to an exploration of Judaism. Overwhelmingly, therefore, within the education carried out by the educational organisation with the largest media, and public, profile in Britain, Jewish life is either not mentioned or simply referred to in a way in which to reinforce commonality.

Given the centrality of Holocaust survivors at the 'heart of Holocaust education' and the considerable effort exercised by organisations to individualise the experiences of the survivors and humanise the victims it may appear contradictory to then speak of their decontextualisation in the teaching of the Holocaust. Yet through consistent attempts to rehumanise the victims of the Holocaust, by emphasising their commonality to British students, it appears as if the recognisable experience that the representation of pre-war life attempts to show is gradually resulting in the decontextualisation of survivors from their Jewish identity through obscuring a sense of what this cultural or religious identity may be. Gallant and Hartman have stated that, 'Pedagogies must be constructive, creative and inclusive of the Other' yet with Holocaust education prior to the National Curriculum emphasising the eternal victimhood of the Jewish people and more recent Holocaust education focusing on the common links between those who were persecuted and students today, this inclusiveness cannot be discerned within Holocaust teaching.<sup>51</sup> Rather than treating the Jewish people in isolation, it would be beneficial to not only understand how the Nazi Germany defined Jewish identity but also how those who were themselves Jewish both defined, and define, their own Jewish identity. This is not to suggest the teaching of one monolithic Jewish identity but to explore pre-war Jewish life from the perspective of the survivors, rather than purely from the perspective of the perpetrators or not at all. With only minimal or non-existent contextualisation of Jewish identity and culture it is increasingly apparent that whilst the emphasis on the individual experience has increased, in Holocaust education survivors are becoming increasingly detached from any understanding of their Jewish identity.

What is forgotten within historical consciousness is just as, if not more, significant that what is chosen to be remembered. This sentiment can certainly be echoed in education. For what is not chosen to be represented, in short, what is omitted, from the teaching programme is just as revealing as what is being taught. As Einser has stated, 'It is my thesis that what schools do not

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<sup>51</sup> Gallant, M & Hartman, H, 'Holocaust Education for the New Millennium: Assessing our Progress', *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol. 10, No. 2, (Autumn 2001), pp. 1 – 28, p. 5

teach may be as important as what they do teach.<sup>52</sup> From the perspective of exploring the notion of decontextualisation the omission of what educational organisations choose not to teach proves extremely valuable and ultimately raises a number of questions regarding how to begin to understand this lack of an exploration of wider Jewish culture and identity. By, for the most part, not engaging to any significant degree with what was normal in the lives of Jewish victims before the Holocaust, and without an understanding of the diversity of Jewish identities and cultures, the perception of Jews, both during the Holocaust and in Britain today, are being shaped and defined purely by their experiences in the Holocaust and not the wider sense of who they are or how they may have lived before the war.

Understandably, Holocaust educators now seek above all to ignore a sense of cultural difference in order to teach students about the nature of common humanity through, as teacher guidance notes describe, ‘emphasising the humanity of all those who were involved’ by articulating the notion that those who died were just like us.<sup>53</sup> The question of reducing distance between student and survivor, or student and Holocaust victim, lies at the heart of British Holocaust education. Given the tendency in the formative years of Holocaust teaching to utilise dehumanising images of Jewish victims without any real exploration into individual experience, the desire amongst organisations to create a sense of commonality between those Jewish communities who lived in Europe prior to the outbreak of war and the students living in contemporary Britain is understandable. Yet whilst this approach is admirable it is also rather misleading, for, from the perspective of today, those who suffered and perished during the Holocaust can only be viewed from a distance due to the differences in the way they lived then, and the way students live today, and by failing to address any sense of difference educators are not addressing one of the things that defines common humanity – our differences to each other.

As Richardson has observed, however, ‘shared humanity is not, so to speak, the whole story.’<sup>54</sup> Whilst it may seem necessary to reinforce notions of common humanity to students when they first encounter the Holocaust those same students also need to be guided through an appreciation of the reality that ‘To be human is to be different and is to be in constant interaction with strangers – people whose perceptions, experiences, narratives and agendas are

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<sup>52</sup> Eisner. E, *The Educational Imagination: The Design and Evaluation of School Programs*, (New York, Macmillan, 1979), p. 83

<sup>53</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust & National Union of Teachers, *Martin and Erica’s Journey: Teacher Guidance Note*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed, (NUT, London, 2010), p. 4

<sup>54</sup> Richardson. R, ‘Values and Perceptions’ in Hicks. D & Holden. C (eds), *Teaching the Global Dimension: Key Principles and Effective Practice*, (London, Routledge, 2007), pp. 92-103, p.92

different from one's own.<sup>55</sup> Emphasising commonality rather than embracing difference in many ways obscures the fact that those individuals who survived, and those who did not survive, were fundamentally different to each other and, therefore, different to students today. They lived in a different time, within a different context and situations are not as easily transferable between "then" and "now". This emphasis on ensuring an empathic identification between student and victim, however, has perhaps begun to eclipse the realities and complexities of pre-war Jewish life. By failing to acknowledge these differences educators are subsuming cultural identities of both survivors and victims in the quest to define the Holocaust as the debasement and attack on common humanity. In addition, and in reality, through failing to explore pre-war life beyond this students will be unable to gauge the impact that the Holocaust had on the Jewish people, and Jewish culture, in the post war period. Despite the understanding that the Holocaust 'created the biggest and most wrenching Jewish gap in history - the "void", "vacuum", "black hole", "unhealable wound" – whose impact has resounded far beyond the actual killing fields of Europe' an in-depth exploration of the impact on Jewish culture is rarely articulated.<sup>56</sup> Crucially, without engaging with this sense of diversity students could be left with the impression that there was no cultural void left across Europe at all.

#### *Decontextualisation of the Survivor Experience and "Lessons" of the Holocaust*

Such obscuring of Jewish identity within Holocaust education can be better understood when the move towards greater expressions of commonality and identification is considered against the move towards a more inclusive and universal approach to Holocaust education. Despite the arguments surrounding the possibility of "lessons" of the Holocaust being pertinent for contemporary society, as discussed within the introduction to this thesis, it is apparent that within education the concept of "lessons" has emerged as a dominant aspect of the way in which the Holocaust is both taught and conceptualised. Within Britain the universal approach to Holocaust teaching transmitted through lessons for the future has achieved a particular pertinence and provides the moral justification for the inclusion of the Holocaust on the national curriculum and national calendar through Holocaust Memorial Day. As Andrew Burns, the United Kingdom's first Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues observed, it is hoped that the 'lessons from that disastrous period of history guide us in the future.'<sup>57</sup> In public discourse, what these

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<sup>55</sup> Ibid.

<sup>56</sup> Gruber. R.E, *Virtually Jewish: Reinventing Jewish Culture in Europe*, (California, University of California Press, 2002), p. 235

<sup>57</sup> Burns. A, 'Holocaust Memorial Day: Lessons for the Future', (24 January 2013), available at [www.het.org.uk/index.php/blog/entry/holocaust-memorial-day-lessons-for-the-future](http://www.het.org.uk/index.php/blog/entry/holocaust-memorial-day-lessons-for-the-future), (accessed 24 August 2013)

“lessons” are rarely defined yet this has not prevented the Holocaust being used to reflect the righteousness of Britain’s moral commitment to multiculturalism or as a means of emphasising the benefits of living in a tolerant liberal democracy.

The move towards the Holocaust as holding “lessons” for contemporary society can be discerned in the shifting emphasis of the aims of the Holocaust Educational Trust. The founding aim of the Trust was originally to ‘show our citizens and especially our youngsters what happened when racism replaced diversity and when mass murder took over a nation.’<sup>58</sup> Such an aim suggests that the relative dearth of easily accessible information for students, combined with the seeming ambivalence of the wider British population towards engaging with the Holocaust as a specific historical event, had led the founders of the Trust to consider that the organisations primary purpose was to inform the British people about the subject itself. In contrast, the aim of the Trust at the present time is to ‘educate young people from every background about the Holocaust and the important “lessons” to be learned for today.’<sup>59</sup> The move away from simply informing the British public about the Holocaust and towards promoting the applicability of universal “lessons” as providing the touchstone of Holocaust education in British society is, therefore, strikingly apparent.

Other British educational organizations have also adopted this conviction about moral “lessons” being transmitted to students in a transformative manner and have subsequently embraced these lessons as an integral aspect of their educational programs. The Holocaust Centre in Nottingham suggests that Holocaust education can help to foster ‘good citizenship’ values whilst the London Jewish Cultural Centre claims that through learning about the Holocaust we are able to ‘fight prejudice and bigotry through education.’<sup>60</sup> Such is the prominence of the notion of the Holocaust holding contemporary meaning applicable in daily life that the idea that the Holocaust contains “lessons” for contemporary society is accepted almost without question. Such notions are reinforced by organisations such as the Anne Frank Trust. As the mission statement of the Anne Frank Trust reveals their principal aim is ‘To challenge prejudice and reduce hatred by drawing on the power of Anne Frank’s life and diary. To use that power to encourage people to

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<sup>58</sup> Janner. G, *To Life! The Memoirs of Greville Janner*, (Stroud, Sutton Publishing Limited, 2006), p. 214

<sup>59</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, ‘About Us’, available at: [www.het.org.uk/index.php/about-us-general](http://www.het.org.uk/index.php/about-us-general), (accessed 20 August 2012)

<sup>60</sup> The Holocaust Centre, ‘About Us’, available at, [www.holocaustcentre.net](http://www.holocaustcentre.net), (accessed 24 August 2012); London Jewish Cultural Centre, ‘UK Schools Speaker Programme’, (2013) available at, <http://www.ljcc.org.uk/holocaust>, (accessed 12 December 2012)

embrace positive attitudes, personal responsibility, and respect for others.<sup>61</sup> Rather than inform people about the history of the Holocaust it is apparent that for the Anne Frank Trust using the idea of the Holocaust to tackle prejudice and discrimination in British society is their overarching aim.

Reflecting, and shaping, the significance attributed to the existence of such contemporary “lessons” and the shift towards a more contemporary orientated Holocaust education, the Holocaust Educational Trusts’ signature programme is aptly entitled the *Lessons from Auschwitz Project*. During this project those educators running the course actually provide students with the ‘historical conclusions and contemporary lessons’ that the Trust feels that students should learn as a result of being taught about the Holocaust.<sup>62</sup> These contemporary “lessons” which students are provided with range from the fact that, ‘Societies are made up of individuals. If we want to make the world a more humane place, we must start with our own everyday actions’, that ‘The UK government plays a key role in global events and we, as citizens, can influence governmental policy’ and that ‘We must promote tolerance of others by recognising the role played by all regardless of gender, race or creed.’<sup>63</sup> Students then chose which of these contemporary concerns resonates most with them and that is then defined as being a “lesson” of the Holocaust. Such “lessons” are designed to encourage students towards becoming good citizens which, in itself Lee suggests, is a ‘spurious neutral phrase usually devoid of explicit substantive content.’<sup>64</sup> Yet, as discussed in the preceding chapter, the notion of history as a means of creating citizens was a key aspect of the History Working Group’s Interim report which set down the ground rules for the National Curriculum which stated that, ‘history should equip young people to benefit from the rights and exercise the responsibilities of citizens in a representative democracy.’<sup>65</sup> The “lessons” which the Holocaust is seen to provide are viewed by many to contribute to this sense of citizenship and moral responsibility. As Gallant and

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<sup>61</sup> Anne Frank Trust, ‘Mission Statement’, available at, [www.annefrank.org.uk/who-we-are/our-mission](http://www.annefrank.org.uk/who-we-are/our-mission), (accessed 12 May 2013)

<sup>62</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz: Historical Conclusions and Contemporary Lessons Resource*, (Unpublished)

<sup>63</sup> Ibid. Providing students with contemporary “lessons” of course raises a number of questions about the prescriptive framing of Holocaust teaching. By dictating the “lessons” one can learn from the Holocaust organisations like the Trust are encouraging a very static and politically acceptable narrative to be developed. This sense of prescriptiveness will be discussed in greater detail in the fourth chapter of this study.

<sup>64</sup> Lee, P, ‘Historical Knowledge and the National Curriculum’, Aldrich, R (ed), *History in the National Curriculum*, (London, Kogan Page Ltd, 1991), pp. 39–65, p. 42

<sup>65</sup> Department of Education and Science (DES), *National Curriculum History Working Group: Interim Report*, (London, HMSO, 1989), p. 92

Hartman observe '...for Holocaust education to be truly meaningful it must apply the "lessons" of the past to our plans for the future.'<sup>66</sup>

The current mode of Holocaust education, which prioritises the transmission and mediation of contemporary "lessons" applicable for all, reinforces a more universal, and malleable, narrative of the Holocaust with recognisable pertinence for contemporary domestic society. As this emphasis has grown so too it is possible to see a gradual shift towards the Holocaust which is taught in schools being gradually unmoored from the historical context in which it took place as a means of imparting these "lessons" more effectively. It could be asserted that the emphasis on the survivor voice, and the individualisation of the Holocaust through a more focused exploration of the individual survivor experience, offers an opportunity to prevent, or counter, this move towards the universalisation of the Holocaust through the transmission of the "genuine" historical experience within the classroom environment. Yet as the emphasis on the universality of the survivor's message becomes increasingly important so too does the testimony itself become yet another vehicle for the continued reinforcement and mediation of these contemporary "lessons". As the mediators of the supposed "lessons" that the Holocaust is viewed to impart, survivors and their experiences have themselves become increasingly sculpted in order to impart these accepted messages for common humanity.

This "lessons" based approach which has come to dominate British Holocaust teaching encapsulates the universalisation of the Holocaust in British education which reinforces, rather than challenges, the universalised and domesticated image of the Holocaust survivor encountered within popular British culture. Yet whilst the supposed "lessons" of the Holocaust can be suggested to have de-historicised the Holocaust within the classroom, can they be seen to contribute to the decontextualisation of the survivor from their Jewish identity when the survivor is such an integral aspect of Holocaust education and their physical presence in the classroom is so frequently utilised? Upon initial consideration the adoption of universal and contemporary "lessons" alone does not render the individual experience obsolete, nor does it necessarily decontextualise it. As a result of the sentiments expressed and mediated by educational organizations students are quick to assume, and accept, that "lessons" can, and should, be learnt from the Holocaust and applied to their twenty-first century lives. Those students who hear Holocaust survivors give their testimony, either through outreach projects or through the daily survivor speaker sessions at the Holocaust Centre, are often quick to ask

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<sup>66</sup> Gallant & Hartman, 'Holocaust Education for the New Millennium', p. 6

survivors about their view of whether society has learnt anything from the Holocaust with one student asking Trude Levi, 'Do you feel that since the war people have learnt to treat other people like equals?'<sup>67</sup> Survivors themselves appear, in the main, to subscribe to the messages of contemporary concerns, such as anti-racism and preventing bullying, being conveyed within the classroom. Whilst often quick to state that they do not feel that the "lessons" of the Holocaust have been adequately learnt, survivors do tend to support the notion that "lessons" can, and indeed, should exist, with Harry Bibring stating that his reason for telling his story in schools is that 'I want to do my bit combating racism.'<sup>68</sup> Kitty Hart-Moxon, reinforces this sentiment by suggesting that, 'The Holocaust has a relevance today...Prejudice is still around, it's got to be challenged. It starts in the playground and that's why we do quite a lot of work with very young children now.'<sup>69</sup>

Levy and Sznajder have discussed their interpretation of the focus on individual experience stating that, 'on the one hand, memory becomes more concrete, with new biographies and individual faces of victims seeing the light of day. On the other hand, the humanizing of the victim allows for abstract identification.'<sup>70</sup> When considered in the context of Holocaust education obscuring Judaism, or a sense of what it means to be Jewish, ensures that when discussing the individual experience, Holocaust survivors and the millions of Holocaust victims, can be abstracted and transformed into metaphors for a universal sense of suffering and can then be identified more easily with contemporary domestic concerns. Holocaust educators facilitate the construction of an historical truth with which their students engage but with the emphasis on "lessons" which transcend the Holocaust's context and without the contextualisation of survivor's experiences within Holocaust education, one can see that Holocaust education in Britain as subscribing to and teaching, what Cole has described as, the mythical perception of the Holocaust as opposed to the historical Holocaust. If viewed from this perspective Holocaust education is reflecting, rather than challenging, the dominant historical narrative of the Holocaust, and the interpretation of the survivor experience.

Whilst Levy and Sznajder suggest that this move towards the universal meaning growing from the particular 'signals the denationalizing of collective memory' in the instance of Holocaust

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<sup>67</sup> Levi, *Did you ever Meet Hitler*, p. 109

<sup>68</sup> Bibring, H, 'Seventy Years on Kristallnacht Still Haunts Me', *The Jewish Chronicle*, (6 November 2008), available at [www.thejc.com/news/world-special-reports/seventy-years-kristallnacht-still-haunts-me](http://www.thejc.com/news/world-special-reports/seventy-years-kristallnacht-still-haunts-me), (accessed 23 August 2012)

<sup>69</sup> Hart-Moxon, K, 'Lessons Still Need to be Learnt', (27 January 2012), available at, [www.106jack.com/news/local-news/audiovideo-holocaust-survivor-tells-jack-fm-lessons-still-need-to-be-learned-4943/](http://www.106jack.com/news/local-news/audiovideo-holocaust-survivor-tells-jack-fm-lessons-still-need-to-be-learned-4943/),(accessed 29 January 2012)

<sup>70</sup> Levy, D & Sznajder, N, *The Holocaust and Memory in the Global Age*, (Philadelphia, Temple University Press, 2006), p. 133

education the focus on the individual survivor experience and the subsequent decontextualisation of that experience from their Jewish identity not only signals the importance of individual abstraction for the continuation of the British national narrative but also reveals the influence of national historical consciousness on education and, conversely, signals the influence of education on the development of British historical consciousness.<sup>71</sup> In Britain, such emphasis on the universal meanings of the Holocaust leads to the abstract and de-territorialized ruling symbol of the Holocaust being taught rather than the historical Holocaust rooted in Jewish experience. In doing so educational organisations and educators are both reflecting, and shaping the universal, and domestic, memory of the Holocaust within contemporary British society. As time passes, educators are increasingly emphasising the supposed contemporary “lessons” that the Holocaust can be said to impart as a means of ensuring the continued presence of the Holocaust in the educational calendar. That universalised notions of the Holocaust dominate within educational organisations is highly visible to the observer. Between 2008 and 2012 those who participated in the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project produced work upon their return from Poland which would be marked and successful students would then gain university accreditation points from the University of Hull. Yet full credits were often awarded for projects which were historically inaccurate but which spoke eloquently, and at length, about the importance of “lessons” for the future. In education, it seems that the importance has been placed on universal messages and contemporary concerns rather than on the attempt to understand the historical event itself.<sup>72</sup>

By framing the Holocaust as an event against which contemporary “lessons” of tolerance and anti-racism can be learnt, one allows the Holocaust to be used for political and social agendas but, also, ensures that it becomes increasingly removed from its historical context. In a similar ilk to that suggested by Rothberg, one can consider this decontextualisation of the Holocaust as ‘the unmooring of the Holocaust from its historical specificity and its circulation instead as an abstract code for Evil and thus as the model for a potential antiracist and human rights politics.’<sup>73</sup> Yet it is not inevitable that the universal concept of the Holocaust and the notions of Holocaust “lessons” rooted in the present should necessarily lead to the decontextualisation of the survivor. Students themselves appear to respond well to the pathos led approach to the

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid.

<sup>72</sup> One student, for example, received full marks for a project which spoke at length about the role of Rudolf Hess as the Commandant of Auschwitz-Birkenau rather than Rudolf Höss. This Next Steps project also included photographs of Hess in place of Höss yet the assessor who was marking the project failed to note this on the feedback form which the student received. The section of the project devoted to “lessons” was highly regarded. *Lessons From Auschwitz Next Steps Project: West Midlands*, (Spring 2011)

<sup>73</sup> Rothberg, M, *Multidirectional Memory: Remembering the Holocaust in the Age of Decolonization*, (Stanford, Stanford University Press, 2009), p. 229

Holocaust and, if anything, it seems to enhance their appreciation of the survivors they hear from during their study. The decontextualisation of the Jewish survivor from their Jewish identity occurs, therefore, in Holocaust education when the Holocaust is removed from its historical context in favour of contemporary relevance and meaning when *at the same time* the survivor's experience is taught in isolation from Jewish culture or when their Jewish identity is obscured through the emphasis on commonality. When these two elements combine the survivor becomes decontextualised from their identity and, once removed from this, can become the symbol of the dehistoricised, and universalised, survivor with which British culture is already familiar.

The signs of this decontextualisation are often subtle and whilst the seeming dilution of the Jewish aspect of survivor identity through the stress on commonality, and of representing the "normality" of Jewish life recognisable to students in twenty-first century Britain, is not all encompassing across the educational arena it does appear to dominate students' engagement with survivors. The emphasis on universal "lessons" ensures that, despite the focus on individual experiences, engagement with survivors transcends the historical context of the Holocaust in the quest for recognisable meaning for humanity whilst the lack of engagement with any real sense of pre-war Jewish identity and culture, beyond the employment of the terminology of commonality, further de-historicises both the Holocaust itself and the survivors experiences within it.

#### *Decontextualisation and the British Relationship with the Jewish "Other"*

Despite the, often well intentioned, reasons behind the universalisation of the Holocaust, and of the survivor experience, by educators it is apparent that the narratives of Jewish heritage and culture are being marginalised. This marginalisation may not be a deliberate omission but rather one sculpted within the rhetoric surrounding the Holocaust which is enshrined within the notion of lessons for contemporary humanity. Whilst exploring Jewish identity is not of course at odds with expressing a sense of common humanity or eclipsing the universal experience, it seems that Holocaust educators are concerned about the potential of blurring this sense of common humanity in the minds of students through integrating a wider engagement with Jewish identity. Despite the seeming focus on the individual, if the only exploration into Jewish life involves teaching students that, "they were just like us," educators are arguably not allowing students to engage with any sense of what being Jewish may mean or what Jewish culture may consist of.

Through a significant lack of engagement with Jewish culture the socially constructed perception of “Jews” within British education could be said to be increasingly defined solely through the Holocaust which, in turn, is becoming progressively more universalised and removed from Jewish experience. Yet, whilst this decontextualisation is apparent, how can we seek to interpret, and understand, this abstraction in a British context? Given the pressures of an already full curriculum the question as to why educators, and teachers, appear to have chosen to educate students about the Holocaust in this abstract fashion needs to be addressed. If one considers the influence of popular historical and political interpretation of the Holocaust it is clear that an abstracted survivor allows for the increased domestication of the Holocaust experience as it ensures that Jewish/non-Jewish relations are less likely to be discussed as the survivor is increasingly universalised as opposed to situated against, or interpreted through, their Jewish identity. Seen in this light, therefore, it could be argued that the move towards the universal in education has simply been as a result of the non-Jewish community seeking to deliberately obscure British antisemitism and the continuation of a sense of British liberal culture which prefers not to highlight the suffering of one particular group through fear that it may detract from the suffering of others.

Yet this move towards the dilution of Jewish visibility within education should not, however, be viewed as purely providing a deliberate means of ensuring a lack of self-reflection on the part of non-Jewish British society. If one considers the conclusions reached during the 1987 survey of British Holocaust Education, it is possible to consider these moves away from the Jewish survivor towards the domesticated survivor as occurring from both within Holocaust education and from the Jewish community itself as a result of the pre-existing relationship between Jewish and non-Jewish communities within Britain. Within the survey John Fox noted that, ‘What seems to bother most in British educational circles is the overwhelming association of the subject with things Jewish.’<sup>74</sup> As Fox suggested this ‘speaks volumes about attitudes in British society’ in the late 1980s but it can also provide a starting point from which to interpret this move towards the decontextualisation of the survivor experience.<sup>75</sup> For the sentiment that the Holocaust was, and should remain, predominantly a Jewish concern in the past could explain both the reluctance of educational organisations such as the Holocaust Educational Trust to draw undue attention to the fact that, whilst they promote themselves as a non-Jewish organisation, the donors who support them are overwhelmingly Jewish, they are referred to as a Jewish organisation by the

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<sup>74</sup> Fox, John P. *Teaching the Holocaust: The Report of a Survey in the United Kingdom 1987*, (Leicester, The National Yad-Vashem Charitable Trust & The Centre for Holocaust Studies, 1989), p. 64

<sup>75</sup> Ibid.

popular press, apply to Jewish organisations such as Jewish Legacy to request donations from Jewish benefactors and Jewish organisations to assist them in their work.<sup>76</sup> It could also begin to explain their decision to encourage universal “lessons”, applicable to all, rather than focusing on Jewish particularity and suffering. For, despite being placed as a part of Jewish community, both communally and in terms of their financial support, the Trust also places itself deliberately and firmly at the heart of the universalised approach, and subsequently the decontextualised approach, to Holocaust teaching.

As Fox noted when reflecting on his findings, given the Holocaust’s ‘more usual label of a “Jewish subject” it is often regarded with suspicion in some quarters...particularly if, as in the case of the current survey, it was felt that this supposedly “Jewish subject” was being “pushed” too far.’<sup>77</sup> Yet as Bloxham observes, “The tension between the historical specificity and the universal implications of the Holocaust is not a new one for scholars of the subject” and certainly the tension between conveying the specificity of the Holocaust alongside the supposed universal “lessons” and implications which it is said to convey can be discerned within British Holocaust teaching and commemoration.<sup>78</sup> The Holocaust, however, ‘is not and should not be just a “Jewish” concern’ and as such it is possible to interpret the move towards a more “lessons” based approach to Holocaust education as having taken place as a means of appealing to contemporary British society and ensuring that the subject itself was considered as holding meaning for, and being worthy of exploration by, both the Jewish and, most significantly, the non-Jewish communities.<sup>79</sup>

As discussed within the preceding chapter it was only through the persistent lobbying of organisations like the Trust, and members of the Board of Deputies, which guaranteed the Holocaust a place on the National Curriculum. This position was only achieved through framing the Holocaust as a significant aspect of British historical consciousness given its association of the Second World War. Those involved in the creation of the *Submission* framed the importance of the Holocaust from the perspective of its importance, and relevance, for the wider British community suggesting that, ‘it is also a sad signal for the future if our educational curriculum

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<sup>76</sup> Elgot, J, ‘Jewish Organisations Team Fight Political Racism’, The Jewish Chronicle, (22 April 2010) available at, [www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/30876/jewish-organisations-team-fight-political-racism](http://www.thejc.com/news/uk-news/30876/jewish-organisations-team-fight-political-racism), (accessed 21 August 2012); Jewish Legacy, ‘Holocaust Educational Trust’, available at, [www.jewishlegacy.org.uk/het/](http://www.jewishlegacy.org.uk/het/) <http://www.worthwhile.tv/charity/leadingjewishcharityproducers.htm>, (accessed 21 August 2012)

<sup>77</sup> Fox, *Teaching the Holocaust*, p. 4

<sup>78</sup> Bloxham, D, ‘Britain’s Holocaust Memorial Days: Reshaping the Past in the Service of the Present’, *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol.21, No.1-2, (2002), pp.41-62, p. 41

<sup>79</sup> *Ibid*, p.43

chose deliberately to ignore key aspects of Britain's recent past.<sup>80</sup> Given this context it is not too great a leap to conceive that those organisations committed to spreading understanding and awareness of the Holocaust sought to shift British educational opinion away from the belief in a private remembrance of the Holocaust and towards a more universalised and abstract context in which to frame Holocaust remembrance and education. Subsequently, the emphasis on the applicability and the significance of the Holocaust to both Britain and British students could arguably only be seen to have been achieved at this time through a minimisation of the Jewish specificity of the historical event, and the Jewishness of the victims, and subsequently through the emphasis on the lessons for humanity framed through the domestic importance of the Holocaust and the War due to the "sacrifice" of those who died during the Second World War.<sup>81</sup>

Bolchover has stated that prior to, and during, the Second World War, 'British Jews feared the charge of dual loyalty and therefore vociferously proclaimed their patriotism.'<sup>82</sup> To highlight the specific Jewish experience during World War Two, and what we now know and refer to as the Holocaust, would have been to risk giving rise to the notion that 'the Jew was cosmopolitan and thought of his own affairs before those of the country to which he owed allegiance.'<sup>83</sup> This interpretation of the Jewish community's position in British society, infers a sense of vulnerability from within the Anglo-Jewish community and an awareness that, to be too visibly Jewish, could lead to implications for the acceptance of the Jewish community in Britain. This sentiment has been referred to by Bolchover as part of the politics of fear, which is situated alongside the politics of hope. The politics of hope and fear, according to Bolchover, are based on two distinct socio-political theories which, I believe, can still be seen to resonate in more recent times. The politics of hope rests on the notion that "Liberal democracy was proof of a civilised political and economic system" and that the Jewish emancipation in Britain had been 'a signal that man was unalterably set on the path of progress that led from savagery to civilisation' as such Anglo-Jewry saw itself to be 'thoroughly in keeping with the modern British zeitgeist.'<sup>84</sup>

The other, and conflicting view, was that of the politics of fear described as being formed 'through the prism of this more pessimistic philosophy [which] saw emancipation as a contract between the Gentile state and the Jews' by which the state granted emancipation as long as the

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<sup>80</sup> Janner. G, Marshall. J, Rhodes-James. R & Rooker. J, 'Submission on the Teaching of the Second World War and the Rise and Fall of Nazi Germany in the National Curriculum', *Board of Deputies of British Jews Archive*, ACC-3121-C8-2-016, (September 1989), p. 4

<sup>81</sup> *Ibid*, p. 3

<sup>82</sup> Bolchover. R, *British Jewry and the Holocaust*, (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1993), pp. 77-78

<sup>83</sup> *Ibid*, p. 79

<sup>84</sup> *Ibid*. p. 88

Jews abandoned the notion of nationality and existed predominantly as a religious group.<sup>85</sup> As such Jews would ensure they were not overtly visible and would not press too hard for British nationality, two things which had consistently been of concern to certain elements within the non-Jewish population. Such concern over visibility, Bolchover asserts, in part explains the relatively muted response of the Anglo-Jewish community over the treatment of Jews in Nazi Germany. The perception of their vulnerable position in society discouraged too much protest as it would draw attention to the position of the Jewish community in Britain. One social commentator has stated that, 'Since the Holocaust, Jews choosing Britain for their home have realised that they must integrate in order to survive, even though it is easier for a European Jew to 'pass' in white British society.'<sup>86</sup> Yet this statement fails to acknowledge the existence of Jewish sentiments and concerns even prior to the Holocaust which articulated an awareness that in order to be accepted in British society the Jews would need to both dilute their Jewishness and to not draw attention to any perceived "difference" to their Christian neighbours. The politics of fear which existed during, and has continued after, the Second World War can be seen to have its foundation in previous Jewish/non-Jewish relations.

For the Jew as Semitic "Other" has long disrupted a sense of Anglo identity, particularly, although certainly not exclusively, during the fin de siècle, when "the Jew" became synonymous in the socially constructed cultural imagination as the original outsider within. As one commentator has noted, despite popular assumptions of British tolerance towards the Jewish community, 'Jews have been tolerated but never wholeheartedly welcomed into British society.'<sup>87</sup> The wave of Jewish immigration to Britain in the 1880s, largely consisting of Jews fleeing persecution and pogroms in the Eastern Europe, can be seen to have fuelled discourse surrounding Jewishness through the increasingly visible presence of the racial "Other" in British society. As Kadish observes, 'This immigration was to double the size and change the face of "Anglo" Jewry.'<sup>88</sup> As with resistance to later Jewish immigration prior to the outbreak of the Second World War, including to the Kindertransport, explored in the previous chapter, one of the foremost concerns amongst anti-immigrationists, was the threat posed by the infiltration of new arrivals on the economic survival of the English community. Primarily wage labourers, the seeming 'flood' of refugees to whom Ritchie refers did little to encourage sympathy for the new

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid. p. 103

<sup>86</sup> Pascal. J, 'Parallel lives will only feed Racism: Today's Immigrants can Learn from the Jewish Experience', *The Guardian*, (13 December 2001)

<sup>87</sup> Ibid.

<sup>88</sup> Kadish. S, 'Bolsheviks and British Jews: The Anglo-Jewish Community, Britain and the Russian Revolution', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 50, No. 3-4, (Summer, 1988 - Autumn, 1993), pp. 239-252, p.240.

arrivals within Semitic discourse.<sup>89</sup> In 1890 *The Times* reported that one MP asked the President of the Board of Trade, Sir Hicks-Beach 'whether he would take steps to prevent the further recruiting of our already congested labour market by this class of immigrants.'<sup>90</sup> This same sentiment regarding economics can also be seen to have existed during the heightening of hostility towards the German-Jewish population with some claiming that it was 'Britain's first duty was to help her own people.'<sup>91</sup>

Alongside, and in response, to these concerns, some employers also expressed 'a moral antipathy to employing Jews.'<sup>92</sup> As Kushner states despite assumptions to the contrary, '...liberal ideologies were welded to exclusionary national frameworks based on notions of Englishness.'<sup>93</sup> Viewed through this lens any group or individual who disrupted notions of Englishness were seen as threatening and dangerous to the national collective. This can certainly be seen to have been the case in terms of the immigrants from Eastern Europe. For whilst concern about Jewish immigration in the immediate pre-war period is frequently articulated simply in terms of economic concerns it can be discerned that, in reality, previous concerns had not solely been economically based. As Jonathan and Daniel Boyarin state, 'Jewishness disrupts the very categories of identity because it is not national, not genealogical, not religious, but all of these in dialectical tension with one another.'<sup>94</sup> Indeed, as Zukier maintains rather more forcefully, that in popular imagination 'the imaginary Jew obsesses society as one who crosses boundaries, combines contradictory features, breaches the barriers of the natural species and otherwise violates the order of nature.'<sup>95</sup>

Those concerned with immigration and the degeneration of society as a result of increased Jewish presence and visibility led to headlines such as 'The Jew in England' frequently appearing in the press with questions regarding assimilation and Jewish immigrants refusal to assimilate being asked and discussed often.<sup>96</sup> As one author penned;

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<sup>89</sup> Ritchie. J, 'Holocaust Refugees in Great Britain and the Research Centre for German and Austrian Exile Studies in London', *Immigrants & Minorities*, Vol. 21, No. 1-2, (2002), pp. 63-77, p. 64

<sup>90</sup> 'Parliament: House of Commons', *The Times*, (28 November 1890)

<sup>91</sup> Goldman. A, 'The Resurgence of Antisemitism in Britain during World War II', *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter, 1984), pp. 37-50, p. 38

<sup>92</sup> Dyche. J, 'The Jewish Workman', *Contemporary Review*, (1898), in Englander. D (ed), *A Documentary History of Jewish Immigrants in Britain 1840-1920*, (London, Leicester University Press, 1994), pp. 111-113, p.112

<sup>93</sup> Kushner. T, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History*, (Cambridge, Blackwell Publishers, 1994), p. 273

<sup>94</sup> Boyarin. D & Boyarin. J, 'Diaspora: Generation and the Ground of Jewish Identity', *Critical Inquiry*, Vol. 19, No. 4, (Summer 1993), pp. 693-725, p. 721

<sup>95</sup> Zukier. H, 'The Transformation of Hatred: Anti-Semitism as a Struggle for Group Identity', in Wistrich. R (ed), *Demonising the Other: Anti-Semitism, Racism and Xenophobia*, (London, Routledge, 2003), pp. 118-130, p 126

<sup>96</sup> 'The Jew in England', *Reynolds's Newspaper*, (9 December 1900)

‘people who think it easy to anglicise the immigrant Jew of the kind we are now describing would do well to make themselves acquainted with certain of the practices and idiosyncrasies which mark him out not so much as one apart from his fellow man but as one determined to keep apart.’<sup>97</sup>

Even those who did not appear inclined to resent the Jewish immigrants accepted the notion that, ‘it is a well-known characteristic of theirs that they do not willingly mingle with other peoples.’<sup>98</sup> The notion of visibility and assimilation was prominent given the seeming ghettoization of parts of London and the seeming lack of willingness to behave in an English manner – their traditions were said to be ‘against blending with their hosts.’<sup>99</sup> Contemporary statements such as these reveal the underlying concerns of a British community increasingly feeling threatened by the visibility of the outsider within. Yet increasingly even when immigrants did try and acculturate, the process of adopting the cultural traits of another group was gradually being denied to the Jewish populace as theories of degeneration began to shape policy and attitudes towards the Jews in Europe, and significantly, in Britain.

During the increased Jewish immigration into Britain in the fin de siècle the desire amongst a significant number of the established Jewish/non-Jewish community to make newly arriving immigrants less visible so as not to attract attention or problems for the established community can be discerned. Certainly the desire to encourage the newly arriving Jewish population to assimilate was not simply limited to the non-Jewish population. One can observe that the established Jewish community itself was also concerned about the increased immigration of Jews from the East into Britain. As Alderman asserts, the newly arrived immigrants, ‘reminded British Jews of their lowly and foreign origins; worse still, they reminded the Gentiles....The established community wished to stress its qualities as British citizens who happened to profess Judaism; the manners, customs, mores, and even politics of the immigrants all skewed the overall character of British Jewry in a quite opposite direction.’<sup>100</sup> Tananbaum supports Alderman’s contention stating that, ‘The established middle-class Jewish community wanted the immigrants to look, feel and act more English. Anti-alienists made negative reference to the supposed sickly appearance of the Jews....native Jews also feared that they too would feel the

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<sup>97</sup> ‘The Provincial Jewries’, *The Star*, (10 May 1887)

<sup>98</sup> Brewer. M, ‘The Jewish Colony in London’, *Sunday Magazine*, (1892) pp. 16-20 & pp. 119-123, in Englander, A *Documentary History*, p. 69-75, p. 69

<sup>99</sup> Pearson. K & Moul. M, ‘The Problem of Alien Immigration into Great Britain: Illustrated by an Examination of Russian and Polish Jewish Children’, *Annals of Human Genetics*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (October 1925), pp. 5-24, p.8

<sup>100</sup> Alderman. G, *Modern British Jewry*, (Oxford, Clarendon Press, 1992), p. 20

effects if the newcomers aroused anti-semiotic feelings.<sup>101</sup> The racial concerns of the non-Jewish communities which established British Jewry had managed to assuage somewhat due to increased, and often deliberate, assimilation were now being voiced again by those fearful of immigration in a way which threatened the position of established Jewry as much as it affected the perception of the newly arrived immigrants.

Whilst the seeming influx of Jewish immigrants at this time raised concerns about the visibility of the established Anglo-Jewish community, in reality, some non-Jewish social commentators appeared to reinforce the distinctiveness of the newly arrived immigrants from the established Jewish community. As one report on the welfare of immigrants at the time specified whilst analysing the value of new Jewish immigrants, 'Everybody recognises the services of the English Jew to our national welfare.'<sup>102</sup> As a study from 1900 also observed, 'Whether the English Jew is a better man than his foreign parent is open to question, but it can hardly be disputed that he is a better citizen.'<sup>103</sup> Within this short sentence, one can observe a clear differentiation between those Jews who already resided in Britain and those who had recently arrived. Nonetheless, the assumption of a seemingly indelible connection between the two is clear through the choice of the term 'parent' to describe the relationship between those Jews from the east and the Anglo-Jewish community. From this it is clear that whilst the English Jew may be a preferable citizen, they were ultimately related to, and descended from, the foreign Jew and therefore indisputably different to the English. Consequently, whilst acceptable neighbours, they were distinct from what it meant to be truly British. As Kadish notes, this suggests that 'In reality there were two "Anglo" Jewries on the eve of the First World War. A Yiddish speaking immigrant community resided side-by-side with "established" English speaking Anglo-Jewry proper.'<sup>104</sup> Both were viewed by the non-Jewish community, however, as being indelibly connected and the Anglo non-Jewish perception was that "they" should embrace British customs and recognisable Anglo attitudes rather than continuing a visible sense of "Jewishness."

Nor have sentiments such as these significantly declined in the years since Jewish immigration in the late 1800s. The overwhelming number of comments left on newspaper websites in 2011 concerning Britain's first hands free pedestrian crossing to allow observant Jews to cross the road on the Shabbat echoed the expression of concern about the supposed "Other" impinging of

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<sup>101</sup> Tananbaum, S.L. 'Making Good Little English Children: Infant Welfare and Anglicization Among Jewish Immigrants in London, 1880-1939', *Immigrants and Minorities*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (1993), pp. 176-199, p. 180

<sup>102</sup> Pearson & Moul, 'The Problem of Alien Immigration', p. 7

<sup>103</sup> Russell, C & Lewish, H, 'The Jew in London: A Study of Racial Character and Present Day Conditions', (1900) in, Englander, *A Documentary History*, pp. 100-102, p. 101

<sup>104</sup> Kadish, 'Bolsheviks and British Jews', p. 239

a British way of life. Responding to the proposal many people articulated their concerns with comments such as, 'at what point are we going to get a spine and stop pandering to every other cultures stupid religious laws at the cost of the British tax payer. It makes my blood boil.'<sup>105</sup> In British society the question of why "they" cannot be more like "us" and relinquish "their" sense of identity is not, therefore, one which has disappeared.

Perhaps, more significantly it is the awareness amongst the Jewish community themselves that these sentiments do still exist which convinces some British Jews that they should maintain a reduced visibility. Suggesting that the politics of fear to which Bolchover refers may still continue. A twelve year public battle over the establishment of an Eruv in Barnet highlights this for, one newspaper articulated, 'a core of the anti-eruv group is Jewish - though decidedly not Orthodox - and it is doubtful whether non-Jews would have cared at all had not Jews convinced them of the ostensible gravity of the issues at stake.'<sup>106</sup> Whilst some members of the Anglo-Jewish community also expressed their concerns about the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day stating that, 'Our true pain and agony are private and personal and not something to be flaunted in the public arena.'<sup>107</sup> The continued visibility of such concerns, both expressed within the Jewish community and within the non-Jewish communities, could, in part, account for the dilution of the Jewish experience from the Holocaust narrative by those organisations emerging from within the Jewish community and particularly within the early stages of Holocaust education.

In the past, to consider a sense of Jewish particularity would run counter to British concepts of liberalism by emphasising specific Jewish identity in either Holocaust commemoration, education or in wider society. The acceptance of Jewishness within British culture, as long as it is confined to religious and rather less visible expression in society, can provide us with a greater insight into the decision of Holocaust educators to phrase the importance of learning about the Holocaust in terms of universal messages for the future rather than encouraging the teaching of the historical Holocaust which may focus predominantly on the suffering of the Jews. For whilst the liberal culture of yesterday disregarded any kind of specific suffering in favour of the 'domination of Englishness' may have been relinquished in favour of the move towards cultural

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<sup>105</sup> Delgado. M, 'A hands-free green man...so devout Jews can cross the road without breaking a religious law', *The Daily Mail*, (2 October 2011), available at, [www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2044222/UK-hands-free-pedestrian-crossing-devout-Jews-cross-road.html#ixzz1mdMbiMl4](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-2044222/UK-hands-free-pedestrian-crossing-devout-Jews-cross-road.html#ixzz1mdMbiMl4), (accessed 9 August 2012)

<sup>106</sup> Temko. N, 'The long-resisted go-ahead for a Jewish Eruv in London is a victory for multi-ethnic and religious tolerance', *The Guardian*, (14 August 2002), available at, [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/aug/14/religion.uk](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2002/aug/14/religion.uk), (accessed 8 September 2012)

<sup>107</sup> Schochet. Y, 'Our suffering has become too much of a fixation', *The Times*, (19 October 1999)

pluralism, the resentment in Britain of losing this sense of “Englishness” by the adoption of empathy towards the “Other” has seemingly not been removed as of yet.<sup>108</sup> When interpreting discussions surrounding the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day it is possible to see a deliberate sculpting of the day into one designed for all rather than for commemorating one particular group. As groups supporting the establishment of such a day asserted, ‘It is a national day for working towards a more just society, not solely a Jewish day of remembrance.’<sup>109</sup> The sentiment surrounding the notion that Holocaust Memorial Day should reflect universal, as opposed to particular, concerns was supported by the Chief Rabbi Jonathan Sacks who stated that, ‘Were it only a Jewish tragedy, there would be no need for a national day of recollection.’<sup>110</sup>

That the Holocaust was viewed in 1987 as being a purely Jewish concern can certainly gesture towards the move towards a more decontextualised engagement with both the Jewish survivor, and the Holocaust itself, by those organisations devoted to Holocaust education in Britain which, in part, could also account for the popularity of Holocaust education today. It is apparent that the difficulty which the British community have had in understanding or accepting the Jewishness of the victims of the Holocaust is nothing new. Tracing back Jewish/non-Jewish relations to even before the Holocaust it is clear that reconciling Jewish identity with a sense of what it means to be British has been a continual challenge for the non-Jewish community. The direction that Holocaust education has taken in Britain could, subsequently, be said to reveal more about Jewish/non-Jewish relations within British society than it does about pedagogical shifts within educational spheres. The development of the decontextualised survivor symbol can therefore be understood through previous Jewish/non-Jewish relations, British liberalism and from within Holocaust education itself as much as it can be attributed to universal modes of remembrance.

### *Implications for the Non-Jewish Perception of Jewish Identity and Culture*

This chapter has been based on the reading of the absence of representation as much as it is one based on what is present in British Holocaust education. Through interpreting the relative absence of the representation of Jewishness within Holocaust education, however, one can see that what becomes conspicuous through its absence can prove crucial in terms of beginning to

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<sup>108</sup> Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination*, p. 277

<sup>109</sup> Nagler, N, Singh, G, Sayce, L, Pollock, K, Bardgett, S, Gilbert, J & Mason, A, ‘Should Holocaust Day Go Ahead?’ *Daily Mail*, (24 November 2000)

<sup>110</sup> Sacks, J, ‘Why Holocaust Day is Important for Everyone in Britain Today’, *The Times* (27 January 2001)

understand and re-evaluate the way Holocaust education transmits the memory of the Holocaust in Britain today and the implications of the way it does so. Yet this decontextualisation of the Jewish survivor not only has implications for historical consciousness of the Holocaust but also has implications for the construction of the perception of Jewish identity within the non-Jewish community. The current approach being assumed by educational organisations in the field of Holocaust teaching can be seen as being detrimental to student's conceptualisation of, and engagement with, societal difference.

Short highlights the importance of understanding students' conceptions of Jewish identity and culture as a means to protect against anti-Semitism as 'some children may subscribe to anti-Semitic stereotypes' as a result of previous understanding influences and preconceptions.<sup>111</sup> Undoubtedly a greater understanding of Jewish identity could diminish antisemitic stereotypes but it is also possible to see that without a greater understanding of Jewish cultures, through the emphasis on universal "lessons" and through a seeming dilution of Jewish identity, educators have created a notion of the Jewish population somehow existing outside of contemporary culture or being somehow removed from it. As such the image of the Holocaust survivors presented to students within the classroom during Holocaust education have in themselves become socially constructed entities existing almost in isolation from their Jewish identities enabling educators to ascribe whatever meanings they like about their experiences and their lives before, during and after the Holocaust. Without the emphasis on the specificity of the Holocaust, as a particular as opposed to a universalised event, and the specificity of the victims alongside the growing engagement with contemporary meanings for humanity the Holocaust, and the survivors, can easily be placed within the British liberal narrative whilst also ensuring that any greater engagement with Judaism as a living religion is significantly reduced.

Upon an initial consideration the suggestion that survivors and the Jewish community in Britain are becoming increasingly defined by the Holocaust, whilst also suggesting that their Jewish identity is being removed from the representation of the Holocaust within Holocaust education appears contradictory. How can Anglo-Jewry be increasingly defined through the memory of the Holocaust whilst at the same time Holocaust memory is increasingly decontextualised from a wider understanding of what it means to be Jewish? Yet it is possible to reconcile these two positions when considering the way in which the Holocaust is taught within a British context. In 1995, when discussing classroom resources, Short observed that, 'none of the books recognise

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<sup>111</sup> Short, G, 'Teaching the Holocaust: The Relevance of Children's Perceptions of Jewish Culture and Identity', *British Educational Research Journal*, Vol. 20, No. 4 (1994), pp. 393-405, p. 394

that there is a positive side to Jewish history. The focus is exclusively on persecution.<sup>112</sup> Whilst Holocaust educators now seek to ensure that Jewish life appears more “recognisable” to British students through an emphasis on family life, there remains only a limited representation of a positive, and specifically Jewish, orientated history existing. As Bernstein articulates, ‘What perished in the Holocaust was a richly variegated and flourishing network of different Jewish cultures’ yet without any engagement with these cultures the emphasis on Jewish death and destruction is turned into a crime against humanity in which Jewish specificity can be referred to and acknowledged but, ultimately, ignored.<sup>113</sup> It has been observed that, ‘The shaping of pupil experience, their awareness of what the world is and what it might be like – these fundamental elements in individual and national identity are affected by the manner in which any subject matter is presented.’<sup>114</sup> If the subject matter of the Holocaust, and more specifically Holocaust survivors, are presented as universalised, situated within a domestic narrative and then decontextualised from Jewish identity and culture, the students may not only gain the impression of Jewish survivor identity solely invested in the Holocaust but this could also encourage students to consider the Jewish community today as one solely defined by the Holocaust as well. By failing to discuss this within the classroom environment, and with it being little discussed within wider British culture, students are not given the opportunity to discuss these flourishing cultures or to explore Jewishness as a living culture today.

It has been stated that ‘perception hinges upon remembered meanings’ and nowhere can this be illustrated more acutely than in the remembered meaning of the Holocaust as a means of perceiving the Jewish population today.<sup>115</sup> As Mintz states, ‘...there seems to be an unlimited market for memoirs and books about the Holocaust but little interest in materials documenting the rich and varied life of the society that the Holocaust destroyed.’<sup>116</sup> Despite the best intentions of educational organisations, through the increasing decontextualisation of survivors and with such a focus on the of the Holocaust within the education system there is little engagement with Judaism or the wider experiences of the Jewish people outside of the Holocaust, which influences and distorts the perception of the Jewish community today. Through this mediated perception the image of the “Holocaust Jew”, the eternal Jewish victim

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<sup>112</sup> Short. G, ‘The Holocaust in the National Curriculum: A Survey of Teachers’ Attitudes and Practices’, *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol. 4, No. 2, (Winter 1995), pp. 167 – 188, p. 186

<sup>113</sup> Bernstein, ‘Victims in Waiting’, p. 626

<sup>114</sup> Reynolds. J & Skilbeck. M, *Culture and the Classroom*, (London, Open Books, 1976), p. 67

<sup>115</sup> Misztal. B, ‘Memory Experience: The Forms and Functions of Memory’ in Watson. S (ed), *Museums and their Communities*, (Abingdon, Routledge, 2007), pp. 379 – 396, p. 383

<sup>116</sup> Mintz. A, *Popular Culture and the Shaping of Holocaust Memory in America*, (Washington, University of Washington Press, 2001), p. 163

defined almost solely through the Holocaust experience, is therefore being constructed in British society and reinforced through Holocaust education.

This notion is similar to the concept raised by Finkelkraut of 'empty Jews.'<sup>117</sup> Interpreted as Jewish individuals and Jewish communities who are defined purely by their status as Holocaust victims, without the victimisation having been directly experienced, and 'defined only by what they have not experienced.'<sup>118</sup> Whilst some of Finkelkraut's views are extremely contentious his arguments surrounding the notion of the Jewish community defining itself through the Holocaust, and the subsequent impact of this on Jewish culture have some pertinence. As Shumalit notes whilst the Holocaust has, of course, become an integral aspect of both perceptions of, and constructions of, Jewish identity, 'we have to be very careful in the crisis of identity, for Jews in the 21st century in Israel and around the world that the Holocaust won't become the main component.'<sup>119</sup> As one Rabbi articulated, this emphasis on the Holocaust in isolation can be considered as being 'the height of blasphemy and self-degradation to have the Nazis determine the agenda for Jewish life and continuity.'<sup>120</sup>

Given that education is one of the foremost mediators of historical consciousness in society, through being learnt about in relative isolation, with only a minimal gesture towards pre-war Jewish life and culture, the question which should be asked by educators is whether current Holocaust education is leading to a reduced engagement with the Holocaust whilst perpetuating a lack of British engagement with Jewish people as well. In 1970 the question was posed as to whether education can 'integrate two cultures in the mind of its pupils?'<sup>121</sup> When considering the representation of survivors within Holocaust education this question seems as pertinent today as it did then. For, starting from the premise that 'the reality of the Holocaust we see depends on the sources we read' there are inherent implications for contemporary understandings of the Anglo-Jewish community as a result of focusing on the decontextualised figure of the Holocaust survivor within education.<sup>122</sup> Through the increasing abstraction of the survivor from their Jewish identity it is possible to see that far from integrating different

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<sup>117</sup> Finkelkraut. A, *The Imaginary Jew*, (London, University of Nebraska Press, 1994) p. 145

<sup>118</sup> Epstein. J, 'Remembering to Forget: The Problem of Traumatic Cultural Memory', in Epstein. J & Lefkowitz. L (eds), *Shaping Losses: Cultural Memory and the Holocaust*, (Chicago, University of Illinois Press, 2001), pp. 186 – 204, p.197

<sup>119</sup> Imber. S, *The Role of the Shoah in Jewish Education - The Challenge in the 21st Century*, (Unpublished conference paper from the Fourth International Yad Vashem Conference 'Teaching the Holocaust to Future Generations', 2004)

<sup>120</sup> Schochet, 'Our suffering'

<sup>121</sup> Eppel. E, Education for Cultural Pluralism: Papers from a Conference held in London (Dec 15 – 17, 1970) under the Auspices of the Cultural Department, World Jewish Congress, as a Contribution to United Nations International Education Year, (World Jewish Council Cultural Department, 1972), p. 16

<sup>122</sup> McC-Lewin. C, 'Negotiated Selves in the Holocaust', *Ethos*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (September 1993), pp. 295 – 318, p. 297

cultures, or making other cultures a familiar aspect of, students' educational experience Holocaust education is actually alienating the non-Jewish community from a greater understanding of the Jewish community through the way in which Holocaust education is approached and transmitted. When debating what to include in the section of the Holocaust exhibition which was to discuss the history of antisemitism it was suggested by one member of the advisory group that, 'the section should answer the questions of what is a Jew and why are they hated. He asked DC [David Cesarani] whether it would be possible to define a Jew to a non-Jewish visitor. DC did not think it would be possible.'<sup>123</sup> Perhaps, in a similar vein to Cesarani, Holocaust educators feel that to define Jewish culture to a non-Jewish audience, particularly students, is also not possible. It may also indicate concern amongst educationists that to consider Jewish identity and the Jewish experience in the classroom would detract from the transmission of the universal "lessons" the Holocaust is seen to hold for common humanity.

Whilst ultimately the Holocaust has come to define the Jewish experience in British popular imagination, when trying to appreciate what was lost students should be encouraged to understand that for those victims the Holocaust was not the defining aspect of their identities. There is more to the Jewish community today, and there was certainly more to the Jewish victims of the Holocaust than their posthumously assumed, or assigned, Holocaust identities. Even those who survived the Holocaust are often quick to point out that whilst the Holocaust is a significant part of their identity - it is not the only aspect of it. As survivor Ziggy Shipper has said 'I don't live the Holocaust. I live a very normal life.'<sup>124</sup> Yet by not engaging to any significant degree with what was normal in the lives of Jewish victims before, or after the war, and without an understanding of the diversity of Jewish identities and cultures, the perception of Jews being encouraged, is being shaped and defined purely by their experiences in the Holocaust and not the wider sense of who they are or how they may have lived before the war.

David Lindquist believes that students 'have the opportunity to evaluate themselves and their world openly, honestly, and without foregone assumptions when they study the Holocaust.'<sup>125</sup> Yet given the narrow scope of the "lessons" which have traditionally been associated with Holocaust education and the increasing decontextualisation of the Holocaust experience from the

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<sup>123</sup> 'Note of the Main Points Agreed at Meeting on the Holocaust Exhibition's Section on the History of Antisemitism', *IWM Archive: File: Antisemitism* (21 May – year unknown)

<sup>124</sup> Shipper, Z, 'Holocaust Memorial Day: Stand Up To Hatred Educational Film', available at, <http://hmd.org.uk/resources/films/hmd09-ziggy-shipper>, (accessed 26 February 2012)

<sup>125</sup> Lindquist, D, 'Meeting a Moral Imperative: A Rationale for Teaching the Holocaust', *The Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, Vol. 84, No. 1, (2011), pp. 26-30, p. 27

Jewish experience this is in fact not the case. For when one considers the representation of survivors in Holocaust education in greater detail and alongside the representation of the Holocaust and engagement with the Holocaust in British culture one can see that far from being the transformative education that educators wish it to be Holocaust education actually reinforces traditional British sentiments and “myths” of their national identity and in fact reinforces the screen memory which has been adopted and encouraged in wider culture. Within historical consciousness Britain’s position during the Holocaust tends to be projected through the theme of liberation and rescue and whilst Lindquist may consider that students can evaluate the world openly, with a lack of engagement with Jewish identity, the issue of Britain’s history of antisemitism is subsequently overlooked, the tensions between the pre-war Jewish community and Jewish refugees arriving in Britain after the Holocaust are rarely developed within the classroom and as such students are unable to create informed evaluations of themselves and of the country in which they reside.

It has been asserted that ‘Holocaust education is far away from contemporary Holocaust representations.’<sup>126</sup> Against this assertion, however, it is possible to see that through the decontextualisation of Jewish identity, educational organisations are in fact encouraging a very similar representation of the Holocaust, and of the victims and survivors, to that which exists outside of the classroom. Nor are students encouraged to consider the diversity of cultures with educators preferring instead to reinforce notions of common humanity. The reliance within Holocaust education, both inside and outside of the classroom, with “sacred symbols” of the Holocaust through the prominence of the survivor and the Jewish victim can undoubtedly be said to influence the way in which the British-Jewish community is perceived by the non-Jewish community today. As such the Nazi genocide has become the ‘principal bearer of identity’ of Jewish identity constructed by the non-Jewish community within Britain today.<sup>127</sup> Whilst Sander Gilman has noted that, ‘identity is a dynamic process not a fixed point’ the perception of Jewish identity as a Holocaust identity has become increasingly fixed and the opportunity for students to engage with Jewish identity within the realm of Holocaust education carried out by non-governmental organisations appears to be relatively limited.<sup>128</sup> If the history mediated by educational organisations predominately, or solely, discusses the Holocaust in universal terms and in isolation from wider Jewish culture or identity, however, then the perception of both the

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<sup>126</sup> Dreyfus. J.M, ‘Battle in Print: Dehistoricising the Holocaust - Remembrance and the Abandonment of History’, (19 October 2010) available at: [www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2011/battles/5404](http://www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2011/battles/5404), (accessed 7 January 2014)

<sup>127</sup> Bernstein, ‘Victims in Waiting’, p. 636

<sup>128</sup> Gilman. S, ‘The Jewish Nose: Are Jews White? Or the History of a Nose Job’ in Silberstein. L & Cohn. R (eds), *The Other in Jewish Thought and History Constructions of Jewish Culture and Identity*, (New York, New York University Press, 1994), pp. 364-401, p. 365

victims of the Holocaust, and even of the wider Jewish community, could become that which Michael André Bernstein has described as, a 'cemetery culture.'<sup>129</sup> Within Britain, through the distancing of the survivor experience from their Jewish identity, educators are creating what Confino refers to as a 'reduced memory' and understanding of the Jewish experience within Britain.<sup>130</sup>

What is apparent is that this move towards a more decontextualised survivor image and the subsequent reduced engagement with Holocaust survivors, and Jewish culture, has not simply been encouraged by the non-Jewish community but has also been consciously adopted by those organisations who promote British Holocaust education and, at times, by the Jewish community themselves. Whilst the focus on rehumanisation through individualisation has been crucial in the engagement with Holocaust survivors, now that Holocaust education is firmly entrenched within the national, and educational, calendar, it may be time for Holocaust educators to consider a re-evaluation of current modes of teaching and to consider the implications of the universal approach to Holocaust education and the current emphasis on the Holocaust survivor. The fundamental problem is that the Holocaust, and the survivor, presented to students primarily through the lens of universality, has come to eclipse the historical context of the event, and of their own lives and identities. The focus on the individual survivor as a means to rehumanise the Holocaust has ultimately resulted in an emotive, yet highly abstracted, engagement with the survivor in the classroom without any significant or sustained historical contextualisation.

### *Facing the future without survivors*

The IHRA asserts that Holocaust survivors 'have been, and continue to be, the bearers of witness in educational frameworks, both formal and informal.'<sup>131</sup> Certainly within Britain survivors have become the touchstone around which educational organisations have sculpted their educational rationale and educational programmes. It is, however, apparent that Holocaust education has reached a crossroads which could have profound implications for the direction of Holocaust teaching and the future of Holocaust consciousness in Britain. Gradually, survivors are becoming increasingly frail and, sadly, are beginning to pass away. As the Chief Executive of the Holocaust Educational Trust herself admits, 'It's a sad reality. Already we're seeing volunteers become less able, less reliable. It's a question we have been struggling with for some time. As an

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<sup>129</sup> Bernstein, 'Victims-in-Waiting', p. 645

<sup>130</sup> Confino. A, 'Collective Memory and Cultural History: Problems of Method', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 5, (Dec, 1997), pp. 1386-1403, p. 1393

<sup>131</sup> International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, *Teaching the Holocaust without Survivors: Working Paper*, (2010)

organisation, we have a duty to do something.<sup>132</sup> Whilst of course the Holocaust Educational Trust is unable to “do anything” to prevent the physical decline of the survivor speakers who participate in the Trust’s Outreach programme it is clear that for those organisations whose entire pedagogical basis has for the last 20 years developed around the touchstone of Holocaust survivors, the very real fact that survivors will soon be unable to pass on their testimony in the classroom poses a number of questions and means an uncertain future.

Some organisations in Britain, have already engaged with this issue. The Jewish Museum in London, for example, now works with students through a close reading of artefacts and video testimony provided by a survivor named Leon Greenman, who worked closely with the Museum until his death in 2008 and whose story forms the basis of the Holocaust exhibition within the museum itself. Surprisingly, however, despite an awareness of survivors imminent passing no significant attempt is being taken by the majority of educational organisations to record the testimony of the survivors they work with in order to pursue education through video testimony in the future. During a speech at the Trust’s 25 year anniversary appeal dinner in 2013 the Prime Minister David Cameron posed the question as to whether society and the educational organisations themselves should, ‘do more to record the memories and the testimony of the survivors?’<sup>133</sup> Rather than relying on recorded survivor testimony, however, there appears to be a move in Britain towards the concept of the children, and grandchildren, of Holocaust survivors taking their relative’s testimony into the classroom themselves, thus ensuring the Holocaust education remains centred around survivor’s testimony through the physical presence of a speaker in the classroom.

The idea of creating an Outreach session to be carried out by the children of survivors has existed since 2009 and, much like the concept of facilitating survivor speakers in the educational arena, the Trust has been at the forefront of this conceptual shift toward engaging with the possibility of second generation speakers giving testimony in the classroom. The proposal for this project was not one initially raised from within the Holocaust Educational Trust itself but was formulated externally by the Second Generation Committee who then raised the possibility of starting this new initiative with the Trust themselves. Since first being approached by these members of the Second Generation the Holocaust Educational Trust has established a pilot project in collaboration with members of the Second Generation Committee. The first workshop,

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<sup>132</sup> Pollock. K as cited in Jarvis. A, ‘We want to keep our Father’s story alive’, *The Independent*, (27 January 2011)

<sup>133</sup> Cameron. D, ‘25th anniversary of the Holocaust Educational Trust: Prime Minister’s speech’, (16 September 2013), available at [www.gov.uk/government/speeches/25th-anniversary-of-the-holocaust-educational-trust-prime-ministers-speech](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/25th-anniversary-of-the-holocaust-educational-trust-prime-ministers-speech), (accessed 17 October 2013)

designed and run by the Trust, with the aim of helping to prepare those volunteers for the task of delivering their parents' testimonies in schools was attended by approximately 20 children of survivors. The pilot was publically launched in January 2011 and formed the basis of the Holocaust Educational Trust's annual appeal video later that year. Since this time 5 children of survivors have spoken on behalf of the Trust with 7 outreach sessions in schools being carried out to date.

The Second Generation project is designed to be situated alongside, as opposed to replacing, the existing Outreach program. As Karen Pollock reiterated the organisation is 'not trying to hold the second generation up as a replacement for the survivors' but is rather attempting to traverse the complex issue of how Holocaust educators should continue to mediate the "lessons" of the Holocaust in a time without the survivor to transmit their own testimony and reinforce the meaning of this historical event to contemporary British society.<sup>134</sup> Given the importance attributed to survivor's experiences, and the desire to both rehumanise the victims and to keep the memory of the Holocaust visible in present day society, it is felt that through the children of survivors delivering their parent's testimony, the sense of "living history" which has been established through Holocaust survivors giving testimony in schools can be continued. As Pollock goes on to state 'We talk about living history becoming just history – well, that is what we are trying to prevent.'<sup>135</sup>

Second Generation programmes are also being undertaken in other countries. The Jewish Museum in Sydney is already piloting a Second Generation project which, it is envisaged, will replace survivor speakers when schools visit the museum. Currently of the (approximately) 17,000 students who visit the museum each year every single one will hear a survivor speak and the project is designed to ensure that those students who visit the museum once survivors are unable to provide their testimony will still hear testimony about the survivor experience. As with the Trust's pilot it is currently children of survivors who are being trained to tell their parent's testimony, however, it is also understood that non-descendants of Holocaust survivors are also being trained to tell survivor's testimony.<sup>136</sup> Working with non-descendants of the Holocaust to deliver survivor's testimony is also something that the London Jewish Cultural Centre is proposing in their preparation for the future of Holocaust education. For the Holocaust Educational Trust, however, the importance of the personal connection between speaker and

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<sup>134</sup> Pollock, as cited in Jarvis, 'We want to Keep our Father's Story Alive'

<sup>135</sup> Ibid.

<sup>136</sup> Personal correspondence with Mariela Sztrum Education Operations Manager Sydney Jewish Museum, (30 April 2012)

survivor is crucial to the success and emotional impact of the project due to the fact that, ‘the son, daughter or grandchild of a survivor is not only a testament to surviving the Holocaust but also their personal connection ensures that students are aware that the Holocaust has a legacy and continues to be a part of our living history which shapes and effects the lives of individuals and families today.’<sup>137</sup>

The pilot itself has not been without its problems and the seeming move towards the use of children of survivors in the classroom has been met with criticism and concern. For some the use of the children of survivors in the classroom has the potential to create ‘confusion’ amongst students as well as raising questions of the authenticity of the experiences being described and the ‘authority’ with which the child of the survivor is assumed to have to speak on behalf of their parents experiences. As Cesarani goes on to observe;

‘I think young people in a classroom will inevitably ask the person they are hearing ‘what was it like?’ Now if the child of the survivor or refugee has been well briefed and well trained...they will say ‘look I wasn’t there – I can only tell you what I heard from my mother or from my father’ but the temptation will always be to say ‘it was like this’. Now that creates a good deal of confusion and questions of authenticity and authority.’<sup>138</sup>

The question of authenticity is a significant one due to the increasing importance placed on the role of survivors as authentic witnesses to the Holocaust, as illustrated in the previous chapter. The children of survivors born after the cessation of hostilities do not have direct experience with the Holocaust themselves and, as such, cannot provide the eyewitness insight that survivors have previously been able to give. There is also a risk that through choosing to describe the experiences of the survivors through the voices of their children as opposed to, for example, their own voice via pre-recorded video testimony, that the survivor voice, for so long overlooked in education, will once again become obscured, this time through the voice of their child as opposed to the voice of the perpetrator. As Geoffrey Hartman has said, ‘An important reason for oral testimonies of the Holocaust is to allow survivors to speak for themselves.’<sup>139</sup> Yet if the children of survivors are to become part of the “living history” of the Holocaust in the classroom there is a danger that the voice of the survivor will be obscured.

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<sup>137</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Second Generation Pilot Programme: Discussion Paper*, (December 2010)

<sup>138</sup> Cesarani. D, ‘How to Keep Holocaust Memory Alive’, *BBC Radio 4 Today Programme*, (2 January 2011)

<sup>139</sup> Hartman. G, *The Longest Shadow: In the Aftermath of the Holocaust*, (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2002) p. 133

It has been said that, 'If memory of the Holocaust is to be preserved and handed down, each generation must articulate its own particular relationship to the event.'<sup>140</sup> In education, this is no less vital. Marianne Hirsch, herself a child of survivors who has written extensively on familial relationships and memory since the Holocaust, has raised the problem of balancing the survivor's Holocaust identity with their child's identity and experiences, asking, 'how can we best carry their stories forward without appropriating them, without unduly calling attention to ourselves and without, in turn, having our own stories displaced by them?'<sup>141</sup> Even outside of education, therefore, it is apparent that the complexities involved in the treatment and engagement with survivors and the children of survivors are considerable. In Cesarani's view the move towards the utilisation of members of the Second Generation within Holocaust education could be viable if organisations moved away from the model of Outreach they currently rely on and reconfigure their expectations of the educational benefit of hearing from someone related to a Holocaust survivor. As he goes on to note 'as long as that person is talking about their experience of growing up as the child of survivors - what it means to have genocide hanging over their family today.'<sup>142</sup> By moving the "Holocaust experience" away from the direct survivor experience, he argues, then the continuing legacy of genocide could be discussed and, as a result, then there would be value for students across Britain which would not be confused by issues of authenticity of authority.

Arguably the Holocaust has become a defining element of the Second Generation's sense of Jewish identity. It is, perhaps they, rather than their parents, who have the more complicated relationship with the Holocaust, an event which they did not experience but which, a number of them, feel they have inherited memories of through their close association with their parents.<sup>143</sup> Yet, at this early stage of the new educational initiative, the children, and grandchildren, of survivors participating in this project appear reluctant to include themselves in their parents' story and would seemingly rather retell it without their own presence within it. For the children of survivors who participate in this project the very real sense that their 'parents have deputed to us the responsibility of guarding their testimony, of bearing vicarious witness to their life

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<sup>140</sup> Baum. R, 'Never to Forget: Pedagogical Memory and Second Generation Witness' in Simon, Rosenberg and Eppert, *Between Hope and Despair: Pedagogy and the Remembrance of Historical Trauma*, (Oxford, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc, 2000), pp. 91-117, p. 95

<sup>141</sup> Hirsch. M, 'The Generation of Postmemory', *Poetics Today*, Vol. 29, No. 1, (Spring 2008), pp. 103-128, p. 104

<sup>142</sup> Cesarani, 'How to Keep Holocaust Memory Alive?'

<sup>143</sup> Unfortunately, it is not within the remit of this study to explore the notion of memory transmission to any significant degree. For a greater insight into these ideas please see Hoffman. E, *After Such Knowledge: Memory, History and Legacy of the Holocaust*, (London, Vintage, 2005); Karpf. A, *The War After: Living with the Holocaust*, (London, Minerva, 1997)

stories and of remembering the lives that were destroyed'<sup>144</sup> in many instances accounts for the primary reason for their wish to speak in the classroom.

Whether the role of the Second Generation in education will prove either popular or successful in Holocaust education is something only time, and further research, will reveal. Yet, as Sicher states, 'If there will soon be few left with personal experience of the Holocaust, it is high time to ask what kind of memory is being handed down and what kind of post-Holocaust Jewish identity it is helping to create.'<sup>145</sup> By pursuing the route of members of the Second Generation telling their parents' story, and maintaining the same formulaic approach to how the Holocaust is taught through the insistence on the continued "living memory" of the Holocaust, it is likely that the survivor will become even more decontextualised from their Jewish identity. At this point in time there are no plans to incorporate greater exploration of Jewish identity within these new educational initiatives. As a result it is possible that those members of the so called Second Generation who do speak in schools, without consciousness engagement with Jewish identity and culture, will become defined purely by the Holocaust as well.

Despite these concerns, the concerted effort by organisations to maintain their current educational formula based on "living history" through the use of children of survivors does highlight the significant impact that survivor speakers and testimony have had in British Holocaust education and reinforces just how influential the physical presence of the survivor in the classroom has become. Whilst Karen Pollock may have stated that, 'We're not trying to hold the second generation up as a replacement for the survivors,' in reality, this is precisely what is happening.<sup>146</sup> Through failing to truly consider the future path of Holocaust education, and the potential difficulties inherent in the use of Second Generation speakers within the classroom, educational organisations and, subsequently, the school teachers who rely on and utilise their educational advice, will continue to decontextualise the survivor's Holocaust experience from their Jewish identity. British popular consciousness will thus be able to maintain a diminished memory of the Holocaust and a reduced awareness and understanding of the Jewish community as a result of the way that the Holocaust is represented. As educational organisations stand at these crossroads educators need to consider what direction will be taken in the future mediation of the Holocaust including in the transmission, and subsequent interpretation, of a

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<sup>144</sup> The Second Generation Committee, 'About the Second Generation', (2013), available at, [www.2ndgeneration.org.uk/aboutus.php](http://www.2ndgeneration.org.uk/aboutus.php), (accessed 22 December 2013)

<sup>145</sup> Sicher, E, 'The Future of the Past: Countermemory and Postmemory in Contemporary American Post-Holocaust Narratives', *History & Memory*, Vol. 12, No. 2, (Fall/Winter 2000), pp.56-91, p. 57

<sup>146</sup> Pollock, K, as cited in Jarvis, 'We want to keep our Father's story alive.'

real sense of pre-war *Jewish* identity alongside the dominant position assumed in education, and wider culture, in which the primary focus is on how survivors and victims were just like us.

For whilst aiming to be transformative, current Holocaust education does not appear to challenge the British approach of formulating a historical consciousness of the Holocaust based on universalisation and domestication and instead reinforces this narrative through the perpetual reiteration of the emphasis on common humanity at the expense of any sustained or considered engagement with Jewishness itself. Yet rehumanisation should not necessarily mean a dilution of Jewishness or historical reality and it remains unclear as we enter the final years in which survivors will be able to mediate the Holocaust in the classroom whether the move towards Second Generation or greater engagement with Holocaust sites can, or will, challenge the direction educators have taken in the years since the establishment of the National Curriculum. As with Holocaust consciousness it is clear that Holocaust education is an ever evolving process adapting to changing pedagogical theories and contemporary concerns. Yet, as survivor Trude Levi has stated, 'It is important that the young learn about different cultures and stop being arrogant by thinking only one's own culture is valid.'<sup>147</sup> Perhaps organisations devoted to the continuation of Holocaust memory through education will take a moment to consider Jewish culture more openly and to re-historicise the Holocaust and the survivors who endured the event rather than allowing them both to become ever more subsumed within British narratives of memory out of popular interpretations of liberal ideas or the narrative of the universal applicability of de-historicised Holocaust "lessons."

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<sup>147</sup> Levi, T, as cited in Garner, R, 'Courses and vocational training: Horror we must not forget – Education', *The Daily Mirror*, (16 January 2001)

## Section 2: Holocaust Sites

### Chapter 3: From Bergen-Belsen to Auschwitz-Birkenau? Holocaust Sites in British Consciousness

Whilst 'Britain has no geographical link to the Nazi extermination sites nor the sites of deportation' the sites associated with the Holocaust have come to form a significant aspect of British interpretation, mediation and understanding of the historical event itself.<sup>1</sup> This chapter will, therefore, explore the changing role different sites of memory have played in the evolution of British historical consciousness and will seek to understand to what extent atrocity sites have shaped the narrative of the Holocaust as it has come to be understood in British society. Such contextualisation is necessary for sites of memory have also become increasingly integral to the transmission of the Holocaust within Holocaust teaching. Nevertheless, it is only possible to understand the complexities associated with their utilisation within this field if we first attempt to understand their evolving role within British society and culture.

Following a discussion of the British public's confrontation with the site of Bergen-Belsen in the period following its liberation this chapter will then explore the role of the Belsen trials in popular imagination, positing that, the representation of these trials in the British media blurred the sites of Belsen and Auschwitz in British imagination both obscuring, and encouraging, engagement with them. Despite the continuing significance of Belsen in British popular imagination this chapter will then, through a consideration of the representation of Holocaust sites within the Imperial War Museum, show that despite its relative lack of connection to Britain, Auschwitz-Birkenau has now come to assume a primary position in British popular consciousness of the Holocaust. The increasing prominence of Auschwitz in popular consciousness reveals much about how traditional assumptions and understandings of a supposed sense of Britishness have come to shape the way in which the Holocaust has been understood and remembered. Through this lens this chapter will suggest that the evolving awareness of the role of such sites has permeated British consciousness in such a way so as to reinforce perceptions of the Holocaust as an event "committed over there." Thus establishing a distance between those who committed the Holocaust and the British people and, ultimately, reinforcing traditional assumptions about the Holocaust and a British sense of self. Following a study of Britain's relationship to the site of Auschwitz, and the role of education in shaping this association, this chapter will then conclude by exploring the notion that the prominence of

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<sup>1</sup> Petersen, J, 'How British Television Inserted the Holocaust into Britain's War Memory in 1995', *Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television*, Vol. 21, No. 3, (2001), pp. 255-272, p. 258

Auschwitz-Birkenau within popular imagination is facilitating the move of the Holocaust further east against wider historical British engagement with Central and Eastern Europe.

### Encountering Belsen

Of all the sites of memory and of atrocity associated with the Holocaust it is Bergen-Belsen, more commonly referred to as Belsen, which is the site that would immediately be proposed as being of prime significance within British historical consciousness. The only major camp to be liberated by the British army it has widely been accepted that, 'Belsen holds a unique place in the British memory of the war.'<sup>2</sup> Contemporary newspapers and media reports reporting on the liberation of the camp sixty years after British military personnel entered the site, articulate the liberation of Bergen-Belsen as, '...the day that the Holocaust came home to Britain' and the defining moment which 'brought home the barbarity of the Nazi regime for the first time.'<sup>3</sup>

Established in Germany in 1940 until 1943 the site of Belsen was used, not as a concentration camp for the Jews, as is most often remembered in popular historical consciousness, but instead functioned exclusively as a prisoner of war camp. Whilst the role of the camp as a holding centre for prisoners of war was to continue until 1945 discussion about this aspect of the camps' history has become somewhat relegated to the periphery of popular representation and has not yet been effectively disseminated into public awareness. Alongside its role as a prisoner of war camp the Belsen complex also housed the only exchange camp to exist within the Reich. This camp held a number of Jewish prisoners ostensibly in the hope that they may be exchanged for German prisoners of war held by the Allies. In reality few of those held within the camp were actually exchanged. With the Nazi invasion of Hungary in March 1944 the situation of the Jews residing there became increasingly tenuous and by mid-May the Final Solution had begun to take place in earnest with thousands of deportations, the majority to Auschwitz, taking place. As these deportations continued increasing numbers of Jewish prisoners from the newly occupied Hungary were transported to Belsen. Poor sanitary conditions and insufficient accommodation meant that the conditions in the camp were deteriorating whilst outbreaks of typhus were quickly approaching 'epidemic proportions.'<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Flanagan. B & Bloxham. D (eds), *Remembering Belsen: Eyewitnesses Record the Liberation*, (London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2005), p. 114

<sup>3</sup> Boyes. R, 'When Belsen was liberated, the Holocaust hit home in Britain', *The Times*, (16 April 2005); Paterson. T, 'Belsen survivors remember day that shocked the world', *The Independent*, (16 April 2005)

<sup>4</sup> Cesarani. D, 'A Brief History of Bergen-Belsen', in Bardgett. S & Cesarani. D (eds), *Belsen 1945: New Historical Perspectives*, (London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2006), pp. 13-22, p. 18

Conditions in the camp were to worsen even further in late 1944 as the Allied forces made increasing progress on both fronts. As a result of this advance thousands of Jewish prisoners from across the Third Reich were marched or transported to the site of Bergen-Belsen. It was at this time, in December 1944, that Josef Kramer, who had previously been the commandant of Auschwitz, took control of the concentration camp. When Kramer assumed control of the camp the number of inmates numbered approximately 15,000 by April 1945. A mere four months later this figure had swelled to 60,000.<sup>5</sup> This dramatic increase led to severely worsening conditions across the camp and resulted in many thousands of deaths by starvation, exposure and subsequent disease. On 15 April 1945, after the German guards surrendered the camp to the British, the camp and those prisoners it contained, were liberated. The name of Bergen-Belsen was soon to become notorious within Britain.

The British were, however, not alone in discovering sites such as Belsen. Other camps had been liberated by the Soviet Union prior to the arrival of British troops in the German camp, including Majdanek in July 1944 and Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1945, the liberation of which is commemorated annually in nations across the world as part of Holocaust Memorial Day. Despite the earlier liberation of these camps the adoption of Belsen, as opposed to Majdanek or Auschwitz, into the British narrative of the Holocaust is not surprising. Where a Holocaust site was discovered it has seemingly become a part of the national narrative of the country whose troops had been involved in its liberation and dismantlement, not only due to the domestic impact that it had on that particular country, but also because of what such a discovery was seen to reinforce about the British, American or Soviet state. Buchenwald, for instance, which was liberated by American troops on 11 April 1945, has become a site engrained within American collective remembrance whilst Belsen as the only 'intact major camp to be liberated by the British army' has assumed a position of primacy in the interpretation of the Holocaust in Britain.<sup>6</sup>

In contrast to Bergen-Belsen Britain had little, or no, immediate connection to the camps discovered at Auschwitz-Birkenau. Auschwitz, it could be asserted, was as remote in the public imagination as it was geographically. Included on the UNESCO world heritage list in 1979 Auschwitz was the largest of the camp complexes built by the Nazi regime and consisted of at least 40 sub-camps which were established in order to utilise slave labour for the German war effort and German companies. As with many camps in the Nazi system, the history of Auschwitz-Birkenau's evolution is just as complex as its history after liberation. Much like Belsen, despite

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<sup>5</sup> Ibid, p. 19

<sup>6</sup> Flanagan & Bloxham, *Remembering Belsen*, p. 4

becoming infamous for its role in the Final Solution, the original purpose of the camp established in Oświęcim was not intended to be the mass murder of the Jewish people when it was constructed in 1940. Indeed, Auschwitz I, the site which now houses the Auschwitz Memorial Museum, was originally designed as an 'internment camp for Polish political prisoners, and eventually for Russian POWs.'<sup>7</sup> Located three miles away from the original camp, construction of the largest site in the Auschwitz complex, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, commenced in October 1941. Not only designed to house Russian prisoners of war the camp would also be built by them in brutal conditions which lead to the death of many thousands. The site would not be utilised for its original purpose, however, and would instead be used to assist in the extermination of Jews from across Europe through the establishment of gas chambers and crematoria, two of the most iconic symbols to have emerged from the Holocaust.

Despite the scale of the atrocities committed at Auschwitz-Birkenau a variety of influences in the immediate period following liberation, including the fact that the Soviet Union was rather more 'secretive and security consciousness than the Westerners' meaning that they 'revealed little, immediately, of what they had found' compounded by an equally potent distrust of reports made by the Soviet Union from within the West, meant that the liberation of these camps failed to make any significant impact on the British population.<sup>8</sup> This distrust, however, should not be seen to have been directed solely towards the Soviet Union. For it also reflected the deep distrust the British public felt towards official Government reports of atrocities being committed in occupied Europe. This scepticism was not only influenced by lingering British antisemitism and belief in a liberal democracy, which struggled to appreciate the specific persecution of one group in society but also, in part because, 'In Britain, lack of faith in government propaganda (especially in the light of the enormous losses on the western front that had devastated so many families) led, after 1918, to suspicion about any official or media reports about "atrocities."<sup>9</sup> For whilst, as Gullance suggests, 'Harrowing accounts of enemy atrocities are clearly as old as warfare itself...World War I witnessed the dissemination of these images on an unprecedented scale.'<sup>10</sup> One such account portrayed, 'hundreds of patriotic publicists who described in lurid detail such random horrors as a governess hanged "stark naked and mutilated," the sanguinary bayonetting of a small baby at Corbeek Loo, and the "screams of dying women" raped and

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<sup>7</sup> Young, J, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, (London, Yale University Press, 1993), p. 128

<sup>8</sup> Marrus, M, *The Holocaust in History*, (Toronto, Key Porter Books, 2000), p. 198

<sup>9</sup> Kushner, T, 'From 'This Belsen Business' to 'Shoah Business': History, Memory and Heritage 1945-2005', in Bardgett & Cesarani, *Belsen 1945*, pp. 189-216, p. 190

<sup>10</sup> Gullance, N, 'Sexual Violence and Family Honor: British Propaganda and International Law during the First World War', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 102, No. 3 (June 1997), pp. 714-747, p. 715

“horribly mutilated” by German soldiers accused variously of cutting off the feet, hands, or breasts of their innocent and hapless victims.<sup>11</sup> The use of such violent imagery in the representation of the enemy was initially effective in encouraging people on the home-front to support the war effort through installing fear about the enemy and defeat. Yet the increasing propaganda and newspaper reports about the progress of the war effort did not correlate to the number of casualties that were being suffered by the British army nor the number of telegrams being received by families across the country. By the end of the First World War it seemed to the British public that, ‘Truth or falsehood were beside the point: words were simply another weapon, as morally neutral as a cannon or a bomb.’<sup>12</sup>

As such not only were Foreign Office officials more cautious about the reports of atrocities they chose to reveal to the British media and public but in addition, initially at least, reports about atrocities committed against the Jews before, and during, the Second World War, were often greeted with suspicion by a British public who had grown wary of placing their trust in a media with such close associations with the British government.<sup>13</sup> This scepticism was compounded by the sheer scale of the atrocities themselves. When one member of the House of Lords was asked by photographers at Belsen why they were being asked to verify the images that they had taken within the camp he responded by suggesting that the public back home ‘think that perhaps you have been running this for a Press stunt.’<sup>14</sup> As such, Britain’s first contact with a site of atrocity, of what would come to be known as the Holocaust, was heavily influenced by the lingering distrust of Government and media fuelled propaganda. As one of those soldiers who was stationed at Belsen wrote in a letter home, ‘I never used to believe all that sort of stuff in the papers and on the films, I always used to think that it was just propaganda to make us hate Jerry more.’<sup>15</sup> For others there really was a belief that the extent of the crimes must have been exaggerated simply because they were unable to comprehend that such acts would be possible in civilised society. In a debate within the House of Lords in the aftermath of the liberation of Belsen and Buchenwald, Lord Denham acknowledged that, ‘up till now, have we all, or very

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<sup>11</sup> Le-Queux. W, ‘German Atrocities: A Record of Shameless Deeds’, (London, 1914), as cited in Gullace, ‘Sexual Violence’, p. 714

<sup>12</sup> Goldfarb-Marquis. A, ‘Words as Weapons: Propaganda in Britain and Germany during the First World War’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, Vol. 13, No. 3 (July 1978), pp. 467-498, p. 468

<sup>13</sup> Goldman. A, ‘The Resurgence of Antisemitism in Britain during World War II’, *Jewish Social Studies*, Vol. 46, No. 1 (Winter, 1984), pp. 37-50

<sup>14</sup> Earl Stanhope, *Hansard*, House of Lords Debate, Buchenwald Camp, (1 May 1945), Vol. 136, Cc.61-97, Col. 72

<sup>15</sup> Bennett. T, ‘We ordered the SS men to bury the dead. They didn’t like it, so we persuaded them. .. our way’, *Mail on Sunday*, (3 April 2011)

nearly all, refused to open our eyes and to believe the stories which have been percolating through during the last twelve years.<sup>16</sup>

Despite this initial scepticism, however, it is clear that the images and testimonies to emerge from the newly liberated camp of Belsen were to have a significant impact on the British public and their previous feelings of doubt towards the reports of atrocity. As Borg notes, 'The impact which the newsreel films of Belsen made at the end of the war was enormous. People saw and understood for the first time the depth of horror to which state and institutional barbarism can lead.'<sup>17</sup> With the onset of a greater acceptance of the photographic image within popular, and official culture, written reports of the devastating scenes within the camps liberated across Europe were "enhanced" by the images of suffering which flooded the newspapers on both sides of the Atlantic. Such was the impact of the images which were being published on the Allied populations that 'the image soon became central' to the reporting of the liberation.<sup>18</sup> The *Daily Express*, for example, announced that the;

'Pictures of German atrocities which cannot be published in the newspapers are being placed on exhibition in Daily Express Reading Rooms throughout the country. Parents are advised that young children should not be taken to see these pictures but duty is imposed on citizens everywhere to investigate and see for themselves the overwhelming mass of evidence that has been accumulated with the advance of the Allied armies.'<sup>19</sup>

Whilst *The Times* alluded to the impact such images had had on the perception of the Allied discoveries by announcing that, whilst the British public had found it 'easier to suppose that suffering has caused hallucination in the victims than to imagine a degradation of the soul that could descend so far below the animal level of cruelty. The photographs remove the last possibility of doubt.'<sup>20</sup> These images, published relentlessly in British newspapers, were accompanied by a report given by Richard Dimbleby which was broadcast on 19 April 1945 and which has become, Petersen suggests, an 'iconic mediation' of Belsen, and of the Holocaust, in British understanding.<sup>21</sup> Despite Dimbleby's position as a respected correspondent officials at the BBC initially refused to broadcast his report on the basis that they did not believe the extent of the atrocities which he was claiming to have witnessed and were only willing to transmit his

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<sup>16</sup> Lord Denham, *HL Debate, Buchenwald Camp*, Col. 70

<sup>17</sup> Borg, A, *The Relief of Belen: April 1945 Eyewitness Accounts*, (London, Imperial War Museum, 1991), p. 3

<sup>18</sup> Zelizer, B, 'Gender and Atrocity: Women in Holocaust Photographs', in, Zelizer, B (ed), *Visual Culture and the Holocaust*, (London, The Athlone Press, 2001), pp.247-271, p. 249

<sup>19</sup> 'Pictures you should see', *Daily Express*, (21 April 1945)

<sup>20</sup> 'The Victims', *The Times*, (20 April 1945)

<sup>21</sup> Petersen, J, 'Belsen and a British Broadcasting Icon', *Holocaust Studies a Journal of Culture and History*, Vol. 13, No. 1, (2007), pp. 19-43, p. 19

report when he threatened to resign. The impact of the broadcast, combined with the photographic images and film footage which were emerging from the camp, was to have a significant impact on the British population. Indeed, 'the immediacy of Richard Dimbleby's voice heard on the radio, shot through as it was with emotion fresh from the scene of the atrocities, ensured this. Whilst making his recording for the BBC he broke down no fewer than five times.'<sup>22</sup>

As a result of the growing acceptance of these images as valid reports as opposed to atrocity propaganda, one can also discern, as Stone articulates, the increasing 'use of Belsen as a justification of the British war effort.'<sup>23</sup> The images of Bergen-Belsen were viewed as illustrating the true nature of the Nazi regime and, as a symbol of what Britain was fighting against, the resonance of the name of Belsen gained increasing currency within both the British media and the British public. For many within Britain, the images of what had transpired within the camps provided proof that the German nation that they had been fighting against for almost 5 years was an opponent worth defeating. As one woman asserted when she wrote to the *Daily Mirror* to express her outrage at the images of the newly liberated camps, 'Horrible and nauseating as these pictures may be, let the people see the bestiality we are fighting against.'<sup>24</sup> The question of whether this was a just war was now no longer in doubt as newspapers, the government and the public began the process of utilising the knowledge of the camps in 1945 to retrospectively explain, and justify, the war effort. This process and the role of Belsen as providing a justification of the war effort continues to this day and will be discussed later in this chapter.

### *Perpetrators and the Belsen Trials: A Blurring of Narratives*

As earlier chapters have illustrated, in contemporary British culture, engaging with survivors and their experiences is viewed to be integral to gaining an understanding of the Holocaust. With the emergence of survivors as a prominent symbol of the Holocaust in the public arena in recent years it has often been through their words that Holocaust sites, and the atrocities committed behind their walls, have been mediated to the British public. Regardless of the way in which survivors have become increasingly integral to a greater understanding and knowledge of the daily horror which occurred within these sites one can see that it was not through the survivors that Belsen, and other sites of atrocity, were understood in the years following liberation. It may

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<sup>22</sup> Ibid. p 23

<sup>23</sup> Stone. D, 'The Domestication of Violence: Forging a Collective Memory of the Holocaust in Britain 1945-6', *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 33, No. 2, (1999), pp. 13-29, p. 28

<sup>24</sup> Thompson. Mrs, 'Letters: All these horrors must be known', *The Daily Mirror*, (23 April 1945)

initially appear contradictory to suggest that engagement with Belsen did not take place through the survivors of the camp when the images captured by British photographers after the German surrender, which mediated the site to the British people, were predominantly of emaciated survivors and the anonymous dead. As Bridgman notes, 'The photographs of the camp littered with 13,000 bodies, the hollow eyed emaciated prisoners...fixed indelibly on the Western consciousness the grim reality of the Final Solution.'<sup>25</sup> Despite their role in mutely articulating the result of years of persecution, however, within the images that dominated British media in 1945 'There was no interest in the victims as such, other than to illustrate the bestiality of the perpetrators.'<sup>26</sup>

Whilst the 'horrifying scenes found by the British Army when they liberated the camp on 15 April 1945 have come to symbolise the worst excesses and inhumanity of the Nazi regime' as Allied troops entered further into German territory the British increasingly wanted someone, not somewhere, to place the blame for the suffering they had experienced during five years of conflict.<sup>27</sup> The name of Bergen-Belsen as the site of the atrocities certainly became infamous but it was those who were arrested by the British army after the liberation of the camp who became the lens through which the British people could both interpret what had occurred there and direct their indignation and anger. As a result of this growing desire for someone to apportion blame to for the atrocities photographs of Commandant Josef Kramer began to appear frequently within British newspapers. An image of the former commandant appeared on the front page of the *Daily Express* under the heading 'The Shackled Monster of Belsen' the report goes on to portray Kramer as 'A typical German brute,' describing him as 'A sadistical heavy featured Nazi—quite unashamed.'<sup>28</sup> During the Belsen Trials, the *Daily Worker* announced, 'Belsen Beast Taken Back to Death Camp', whilst reassuring readers that there was 'the muzzle of a sten gun never more than a few inches from the middle of his back' to ensure he was not permitted to escape.<sup>29</sup> The resulting image of a sadistic predatory animal being cautiously handled presented within this newspaper resonates throughout other depictions of Kramer, not only reinforcing the brutality of his actions, but also placing him beyond the realm of human decency thereby increasingly distancing Kramer from British readers. As one witness to the

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<sup>25</sup> Bridgman, J., *The End of the Holocaust: The Liberation of the Camps*, (Singapore, Areopagitica Press, 1990), p. 33

<sup>26</sup> Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business', p. 193

<sup>27</sup> Borg, *Relief of Belsen*, p. 4

<sup>28</sup> 'The Shackled Monster of Belsen, *Daily Express*, (21 April 1945)

<sup>29</sup> 'Belsen Beast Taken Back to Death Camp', *Daily Worker*, (22 September 1945)

aftermath of the liberation claimed upon witnessing what had occurred at Belsen, 'I felt so sick that I asked to be allowed to see the "humans" who had perpetrated such atrocities.'<sup>30</sup>

Yet despite the role of Kramer in perpetuating terrible conditions within the camp and his presence within British newspapers it is apparent that the majority of the press coverage at this time 'focused not on Kramer...but on the SS women.'<sup>31</sup> Regardless of the insistence of Koonz who states that, females acting as concentration camp guards were 'statistically insignificant' the role of these women, and their participation in the execution of the Nazi regime, was repeatedly emphasised and habitually depicted by the British media following the liberation of the camp.<sup>32</sup> In many instances it was through these women that the crimes of Nazi Germany were initially interpreted and understood within popular imagination. For female perpetrators were seen as having 'signalled the worst of Nazi barbarism.'<sup>33</sup> The stark contrast between the perception of the female figure as a bearer and nurturer of children in which role she is regarded as being, 'warmth, mother is food, mother is...security' and the reports of the female guards' treatment of those incarcerated in Belsen seen alongside the shocking scenes emerging from the site ultimately led to the presence of female SS guards at the camp being viewed as the inversion of the socially accepted and understood image of the female.<sup>34</sup>

Irma Grese who, at 22 years of age, had been stationed as an SS guard at camps such as Ravensbrück, Auschwitz-Birkenau and finally Belsen was to become the most notorious of those female guards depicted in the aftermath of the liberation of the camps. Referred to in the British press as the 'Blonde Beastess of Belsen' Grese became a key figure through which British understandings of the camps, and of the acts of atrocity committed within them, were understood.<sup>35</sup> Within the *Daily Mirror* it was reported that, 'An attractive blonde who looks like a Hollywood film star is one of the forty-eight accused in the Belsen camp atrocity trial, which opens in Luneburg next month. She is Irma Grese, mild-eyed S.S. woman, who has had more evidence taken against her for cruelty than any other woman in the camp.'<sup>36</sup> The contrast between the image of beauty and the shocking images of Belsen's female victims which had flooded the British media certainly captured British imagination. For those who wanted revenge and justice for both Britain, and those within the camps, Grese with her blonde hair and blue

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<sup>30</sup> Howitt. H, 'Belsen', *The Times*, (2 December 1968)

<sup>31</sup> Shephard. B, *After Daybreak: The Liberation of Belsen 1945*, (London, Pimlico, 2006), p. 174

<sup>32</sup> Koonz. C, *Mothers in the Fatherland: Women, the Family, and Nazi Politics*, (New York, St. Martin's, 1987), p. 404

<sup>33</sup> Zelizer, 'Gender and Atrocity', p. 264

<sup>34</sup> Fromm. E, *The Art of Loving*, (London, G.Allen and Unwin Ltd, 1957), p. 38

<sup>35</sup> 'Blonde Beastess has Confessed her Guilt', *Daily Mirror*, (6 October 1945)

<sup>36</sup> 'Belsen Blonde', *Daily Mirror*, (31 July 1945)

eyes provided a perfect figure against whom this revenge and anger could be directed and expressed.

The influence of the representation of those such as Grese and Kramer in the construction of British understanding of the camps in the immediate period after liberation, and the subsequent legacy and influence they have had in the construction of historical consciousness and British remembrance of the Holocaust, should not be underestimated. Yet whilst the press reports of their role in perpetrating war crimes placed these figures within popular consciousness it was the trials at which they were indicted, in particular that which has become known as the Belsen trial, which can be seen to have solidified their place in British imagination and led to confused interpretations of the camps, and their role in the Final Solution, being presented to the British public. On 17 September 1945, just five months after the liberation of the camp, a British Military Tribunal was opened and the Belsen trial, referred to as the trial of Josef Kramer and 44 others, began.<sup>37</sup> Those on trial were accused of 'having committed war crimes in that, between specified dates, in violation of the laws and usages of war, they did ill-treat causing the deaths of certain named allied nationals and one British national.'<sup>38</sup> Reflecting wider British engagement with the extermination of the Jewish people discussed previously, the trial did not specifically refer to the targeted persecution of the Jewish people within the indictment. Notwithstanding the relatively short lifespan of the Belsen trial it was extensively documented within the British press providing an even greater illustration of the crimes of Nazism to a British public which was 'not bored by Belsen; it was revolted and fascinated and demanded blood.'<sup>39</sup>

Referring to the trial as the Belsen trial, however, is in many ways misleading for the crimes which those in the dock stood accused of did not relate solely to those which had taken place at the Belsen camp. The deliberate movement of prisoners further West in the final stages of the war ultimately meant that many of those prisoners who were discovered in Belsen had in fact previously been held at other camps. As such, the information they could provide about their experiences was not limited to Belsen but, rather, to a variety of sites. This movement of prisoners was also echoed by the movement of Nazi guards between the sites of atrocity, including Kramer and Grese, who were transferred from the site of Auschwitz to the site of Bergen-Belsen. Reflecting the experiences of those who had survived persecution, therefore, the crimes depicted and represented within the trials were not limited to Belsen but incorporated those acts committed at a variety of different sites including the Auschwitz complex.

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<sup>37</sup> Phillips. R (ed), *The Trial of Josef Kramer and Forty-Four Others* (London, William Hodge, 1949)

<sup>38</sup> 'Belsen Trial Opens Today', *The Times*, (17 September 1945)

<sup>39</sup> Shepherd, *After Daybreak*, p. 167

After the initial opening of the trial it was increasingly the crimes committed at Auschwitz which came to dominate the British media reports with headlines such as 'Secret of Hell Camp at Auschwitz' appearing frequently in the British newspapers.<sup>40</sup> The court at the Belsen trial, *The Times* reported, 'has had a surfeit of horror during the past fortnight but for sheer ghastliness, nothing has equalled the description given in evidence today of the gas chambers and burning ghats of Auschwitz which were used as the chief instrument of Nazi policy for the mass extermination of the Jews.'<sup>41</sup> Whilst the *Daily Worker*, when discussing the film of Auschwitz-Birkenau recorded by the Soviets and shown at the Belsen Trial, claimed that, 'Eclipsing in horror even the film of the Belsen camp, it showed: Hundreds of- twins being used for experiments; sterilised men and women; men injected with leprosy; boys unable to stand with frostbite; the gas chamber; and fantastic piles of human hair and corpses.'<sup>42</sup>

Whilst the liberation of Belsen had conveyed the first images of the camps to the British people it is apparent that the resulting trial also ensured that the British public were increasingly aware that other, perhaps even greater, atrocities had been committed at Auschwitz and other sites. Subsequently, despite assumptions that Auschwitz did not form a part of British consciousness of the crimes of Nazism in the immediate post-war period, it is apparent that the material disclosed within the trial not only served to justify the British public's horrified response to Belsen as a place of horror but also tentatively inserted Auschwitz within public imagination. Certainly the frequent reference to 'Belsen and Auschwitz' in newspaper reports in the years following the trial indicates that far from not entering popular imagination, the Belsen trial and the information about the atrocities revealed during it, had actually placed Auschwitz in the sphere of public awareness although clearly not to the extent of Belsen or to the extent that it is today. The suggestion, therefore, that 'Auschwitz simply had no popular resonance in liberal culture' at this time appears somewhat overstated.<sup>43</sup>

Whilst the Belsen trial situated Auschwitz within British imagination it is also apparent that the presence of survivors and perpetrators at multiple camps led to confused narratives emerging in post-war narratives as a result of the way in which the trial, and the crimes presented within it, were represented in the British media. Journalists and the newspapers they write for are known for wanting to publish the sensational and the material presented at the trial with regards to

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<sup>40</sup> Evans. V, 'Nazis used Women for Experiments: Secret of Hell Camp at Auschwitz', *Daily Express*, (26 September 1945)

<sup>41</sup> 'Burning Pits of Auschwitz', *The Times*, (2 October 1945)

<sup>42</sup> 'Auschwitz Film Worried Kramer', *Daily Worker*, (26 October 1945)

<sup>43</sup> Kushner. T, 'The Memory of Belsen', in Reilly. J, Cesarani. D, Kushner. T & Richmond. C (eds), *Belsen in History and Memory*, (London, Frank Cass, 1997), pp. 181-205, p. 188

Auschwitz often eclipsed that of Belsen by providing emerging stories of even greater atrocities. The way in which this material was presented within newspaper reports, however, was often distorted and confused. The crimes that were deemed to have been committed were viewed as being so atrocious that they formed the centre stage of reports of the trials with little or no clarity being expressed as to where these violent acts were supposed to have taken place. From initially describing how a witness at the trial described the medical facilities at Auschwitz, *The Times*, then jumps to describe events which occurred at Belsen, before returning to experimentation which had occurred at Auschwitz.<sup>44</sup> At times the site at which the crimes were supposed to have occurred was not even referred to except as 'at Belsen and Auschwitz'. One newspaper report began with the heading 'Belsen Trial: Attempt to Escape the Gas Chamber' before detailing an incident described by a witness involving Grese and a number of prisoners attempting to evade the gas chambers.<sup>45</sup> Yet this was all achieved without mentioning that this incident was taking place at Auschwitz, indeed, the next incident to be described was said to have taken place at Belsen. Without clear distinctions between the sites an association between the "Bitch of Belsen" and the image of a gas chamber is inadvertently made, and, in the mind of the reader, the notion that a gas chamber existed at Belsen, thus, becomes absorbed into popular consciousness.

It has been asserted that, 'Symbolic capital accumulates thickly around national history's grand events in this manner, encumbering our access to their meanings.'<sup>46</sup> The liberation of Bergen-Belsen and the Belsen trial were no exception. Nonetheless, whilst symbolic capital accumulated readily around the liberation of Belsen and the perpetrators who were held accountable for what had happened there, the fractured way in which the trial was conducted and the confusion wrought by the reporting of crimes committed in two, extremely different, sites of atrocity, can be seen to have encumbered access to a greater understanding of their role, significance and meaning. Certainly this led to a distortion in British understanding of the function and purpose of each camp and allowed a construction of Belsen as a Death Camp, complete with gas chambers and crematoria, to continue for many years.<sup>47</sup> Whilst it is apparent that popular misconceptions, such as a gas chamber existing at Belsen, occurred as a result of the representational merging of these two sites within the British media, the Belsen trial also

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<sup>44</sup> Evans. V, 'Nazis used Women for Experiments.'

<sup>45</sup> 'Belsen Trial: Attempt to Escape the Gas Chamber', *The Times*, (27 September 1945)

<sup>46</sup> Eley. G, 'Finding the People's War: Film, British Collective Memory, and World War II', *The American Historical Review*, Vol. 106, No. 3 (June 2001), pp. 818-838, p. 819

<sup>47</sup> 'Cassandra tells the story of Churchill and the Daily Mirror', *Daily Mirror*, (30 November 1954); This confusion can be seen to have been further compounded in popular imagination by the Sex Pistols performances of 'Belsen was a Gas.' Please see: Stratton. J, 'Punk, Jews and the Holocaust: The English Story', *Shofar*, Vol.25, No. 4, (Summer 2007), pp. 124-149

demonstrates that Auschwitz was not as isolated in popular imagination as some appear to believe. It has been asserted that Belsen 'became a place of horror long before Auschwitz' yet the reality is that Auschwitz, as a place of horror, was a part of British imagination.<sup>48</sup>

This is not to suggest that Auschwitz challenged the unique place that the "horror camp" held in the minds of the British people. The British public may have been more familiar with the name of Belsen, they may have considered it a more integral part of their national identity and Auschwitz may not have assumed the central role in public imagination that it does today, however, this does not mean that the British public were not aware of Auschwitz and the apparent magnitude of the crimes committed there even if, in the years following the trial, it was to become subsumed under the name of Bergen-Belsen due to the rather more intrinsic connection of Britain to that site. Despite the seeming dominance and domestication of Bergen-Belsen in the public imagination one should not be mistaken in considering that this resulted in the complete exclusion of other sites in popular imagination in the immediate post-war period. Equally those other sites, particularly Auschwitz, can be seen to have added greater significance to the crimes of Nazism in the British imagination through the reports of violence and industrialised murder which were reported about the camps in the East and absorbed into popular understanding of the camps in the West. Without the presence of the perpetrators in both camps, however, it is unlikely that Auschwitz would have entered into British discourse to the extent that it did during the Belsen trial and in this way it was these people, and the courts which tried them, who ensured that the name of Belsen became an integral part of the way in which both Belsen and Auschwitz would come to be understood and remembered.

### *The Continuing Presence of Bergen-Belsen in British Imagination*

If the perpetrators and the trials at which they were indicted were, in part, responsible for the somewhat confused absorption of Belsen into the consciousness of the British people, one can see that it is the survivors who in recent years have come to encourage an awareness of Auschwitz to emerge in the public arena. For the image of Auschwitz has emerged alongside a growing engagement with the experiences of Holocaust survivors themselves. A significant number of those survivors who came to Britain in the post war years were interned within Auschwitz-Birkenau and as these survivors and the depictions of their experiences became increasing integral to commemorative events so one can see that Auschwitz became the site

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<sup>48</sup> Bennett. A, 'Seeing Stars', in *Untold Stories*, (London, Faber & Faber/Profile 2005), pp.171 as cited in Kushner, 'From this Belsen business', p. 189

which, it was felt, had to be engaged with in order to comprehend the Holocaust and the experiences of those who suffered during it. During the inaugural ceremony to commemorate Holocaust Memorial Day it was testimony from survivors of Auschwitz, not of Belsen, which was read to the assembled audience whilst in the education pack sent to schools across the country entitled, *Holocaust Memorial Day: Remembering Genocides Lessons for the Future*, it was, again, Auschwitz which was to feature heavily in proposed suggestions for stimulating classroom discussion.<sup>49</sup>

The growing presence of Auschwitz in public imagination should not, however, imply that Belsen has ceased to maintain a certain visibility within British culture. Cesarani has gone so far as to suggest that, 'Sixty years after British troops entered Bergen-Belsen the camp has assumed iconic status in British official memory of the Second World War and the genocide waged against Europe's Jews.'<sup>50</sup> Certainly the conceptualisation of the liberation of Belsen as a heroic aspect of British history, and illustration of the bravery and benevolence of the British national character, has continued in popular consciousness since 1945. The subject for the second Holocaust Memorial Day in 2002, for example, was 'Britain, the Holocaust and its Legacy' the theme paper for which declared that, 'The Holocaust is a part of our national story because it impinges directly on the history of these islands and its peoples...Britain fought Nazi Germany for six years and, thanks to their courage and sacrifice, British service personnel helped to save the remnant of European Jewry from annihilation. British troops liberated the Bergen-Belsen concentration camp and rescued tens of thousands of Jews from death.'<sup>51</sup>

Instances of the symbolism of Belsen being utilised by the national media as a means of evoking a particular sentiment from the general public can also be traced across the pages of the popular press. As Kushner documents the term Belsen continued to be mentioned within popular discourse in the years following the liberation of the camp to the point at which '...Belsen simply becoming a word used to describe anything in an abused state.'<sup>52</sup> In 1954 when reporting on the ill-treatment of a housewife by her husband and mother-in-law *The Times* reported that 'the wife was emaciated and a mental wreck as if, as it was put by a witness, she had come out of Belsen.' Whilst in 1993 the *Sunday Mirror* utilised the name to describe how 'Shocked police

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<sup>49</sup> Macdonald. S, 'Commemorating the Holocaust: Reconfiguring National Identity in the Twenty-First Century', in Littler. J & Naidoo. R (eds), *The Politics of Heritage: The Legacies of 'Race'*, (London, Routledge, 2005), pp. 49-68, p. 63; *Holocaust Memorial Day: Remembering Genocides Lessons for the Future Education Pack*, (London, 2000)

<sup>50</sup> Cesarani, 'Introduction', in Bardgett & Cesarani, *Belsen 1945*, pp. 1-12, p. 1

<sup>51</sup> Cesarani. D, *Holocaust Memorial Day 2002 Theme Paper: Britain and the Holocaust*, (2002)

<sup>52</sup> Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business', p. 196

and RSPCA inspectors found starving animals eating each other alive on a 'Belsen' farm.<sup>53</sup> The way in which such imagery is employed, including the lack of explanation accorded to the name when it is used, leads one to interpret that the writers and editors of the newspapers themselves believe the British public to be fully aware of what Belsen was and the images that the use of the word will automatically evoke.

Beyond allusions to Belsen in the broadsheets and the tabloids, the camp has also continued to have a resonance in British society through other mediums. The importance of the connection between Britain and Bergen-Belsen was evident in the exhibition 'Belsen 1945' which opened within the Imperial War Museum in 1991 and which was dedicated to an exploration of the liberation of the camp. The choice of the site of Belsen for the basis of this exhibition suggests that the site was viewed as being indelibly connected to the British experience and as the site through which British people could seek to learn and understand about the Holocaust. Occupying a considerably smaller space than the current exhibition concerning the Holocaust the Belsen exhibition was, according to Pearce, 'intended to utilise the IWM's growing resources in order to encourage visitors to "grapple" with the more difficult and unpalatable experiences of the war' as well as to inform the general public about Belsen as 'a record of ultimate depravity and as an extraordinary story of survival and recovery.'<sup>54</sup>

The exhibition itself was significant as it articulated the first tentative step towards greater engagement with the Holocaust in British museum culture. Beyond this, however, it also reinforced to those who visited the exhibition the image of British troops as heroic liberators, an image that had developed in the post-war years which, in turn, reinforced British historical consciousness which saw Britain's role in the war as one which was morally justified. Given the complex evolution of the camp one may have anticipated a detailed analysis of the history of Belsen, however, despite being a move towards greater engagement with the Holocaust, as Suzanne Bardgett noted, 'the Belsen Exhibition told little of the camp's history before April 1945. Nor did it try to place the liberation in the broader context of Hitler's war against the Jews. But it was an important step and drew many comments from a public clearly moved by its content.'<sup>55</sup> The decision to base the exhibition almost solely from holdings within the museum was understandable yet it enabled the continuation of an understanding of Belsen as a site with

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<sup>53</sup> 'Wife Reduced to Serf', *The Times*, (24 March 1954); Munnings. B, 'Belsen Farm of Horror', *Sunday Mirror*, (21 February 1993)

<sup>54</sup> Pearce. A, *The Development of Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain 1979-2001*, (Unpublished PhD Thesis, Royal Holloway University, 2010), p. 138; Borg, *Relief of Belsen*, p. 3

<sup>55</sup> Bardgett. S, 'The Depiction of the Holocaust at the Imperial War Museum since 1961', *Journal of Israeli History: Politics, Society, Culture*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (2004), pp. 146-156, p. 153

positive connotations for the preservation of British national identity. As the brief for the exhibition reveals despite the difficulties faced by the British medical team and the complex nature of the decisions made, as well as the implications of these decisions for those desperately ill within the camp, those responsible for the exhibition reiterated that, 'The emphasis throughout the exhibition will be on the positive aspect of what was achieved.'<sup>56</sup>

This emphasis on the more positive aspects of what was achieved at Belsen reflects the fact that, as Schulze claims, the British public have retained 'great pride in their achievements in the liberation of Bergen-Belsen.'<sup>57</sup> That this pride has not abated is illustrated by an Early Day Motion, tabled in 2006, concerning 'Veterans Day' which asserted that the House of Commons recognises that;

'the courage and sacrifice of British servicemen made during the Second World War was paramount to saving victims of the Holocaust; notes that on 15th April 1945 British troops liberated the Bergen-Belsen Nazi concentration camp, rescuing tens of thousands of inmates from certain death; further notes the compassion, hope and freedom that liberators gave back to the Holocaust survivors, many of whom have prospered under the democratic values of the UK.'<sup>58</sup>

If, as Lawrence Langer suggests, 'Our age of atrocity clings to the stable relics of faded eras, as if ideas like natural innocence, innate dignity, the inviolable spirit and the triumph of art over reality' then within this age of atrocity compounded by post-imperial and international decline, British institutionalised memory can be seen to cling to the relic of Belsen and, even more than that, to the image of the innate dignity and inviolable spirit of the British war veteran who fought against Fascism in the name of democracy and for the salvation of the Jewish population of Europe.<sup>59</sup> Far from disappearing in British thought contemporary imagination focuses on the heroic liberation of the camp by the British and the valiant attempt by British medical staff to save the lives of those who were suffering from severe malnutrition and reinforces British pride in the heroic act of British individuals.

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<sup>56</sup> Kemp. P, 'Imperial War Museum Internal memorandum from PK to Keepers of Photographs: Brief for possible exhibition on the relief work carried out at the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen by units of the British army together with various voluntary organisations from April-June 1945, (2/10/1990), *IWM Archives*: File: Belsen Admin General Planning of the Brief

<sup>57</sup> Schulze. R, "'A Continual Source of Trouble': The Displaced Persons Camp Bergen-Belsen (Hohne), 1945–1950', *Post-war Europe: Refugees, Exile and Resettlement, 1945-1950*, (Reading, Thomson Learning EMEA Ltd, 2007), p. 1

<sup>58</sup> *Early Day Motion 2414*, Holocaust and Veterans Day: 2005-06 Parliamentary Session, (Tabled 20 June 2006)

<sup>59</sup> Langer. L, *Admitting the Holocaust: Collected Essays*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 1996), p. 5

Like Richard Dimbleby, those British troops who were actively involved in the liberation returned home with difficult memories of what they had seen and what had transpired within the camps in the days following liberation. The experiences of the liberating British forces, and their memories of this period, are often depicted during times of British Holocaust commemoration, such as the anniversary of the liberation of Belsen, and during Holocaust Memorial Day. In an environment in which the survivor voice usually appears to be the prime focus of Holocaust memorialisation, with regards to Belsen, it is the words and experiences of those who liberated the camp which seem to have resonated within popular British culture.<sup>60</sup> The obituaries of those involved in the liberation of the camp appear within national newspapers with Belsen often being the focal point of the tribute and, for many, the only reason why their obituary was published at all.<sup>61</sup> When considering the image of Belsen in popular British imagination it is apparent that, 'the saving of the Jews has become a symbol of the country's moral righteousness in a world otherwise gone mad or bad.'<sup>62</sup> As such the liberation of Belsen has been absorbed into Britain's historical consciousness of the Holocaust as the site on which heroism was demonstrated and expressed by the British people.

Despite the frequency with which Belsen is evoked within British commemorative events, accompanied by allusions, sometimes veiled other times not, about the triumph of democracy over tyranny, increasingly, it is not only through the lens of liberation of the camp that the name of Bergen-Belsen is viewed and remembered in British historical consciousness. For Belsen has continued in popular imagination through the continued interest in the story of the camps' most famous victim. Anne Frank, the Jewish teenager who has been immortalised by the diary she wrote whilst in hiding in Amsterdam, has become a symbol of the Holocaust world-wide. Certainly due to the popularity of the Diary it is often through the symbol of Anne Frank that Belsen is remembered in popular British imagination. Despite the public awareness of the name Anne Frank in Britain today, however, 'For most of the first decade following the end of World War II, most communities who wrote or read about places like Bergen-Belsen did not concentrate attention on the lives of individual victims—neither the liberators nor many of the survivors had even heard about Anne Frank.'<sup>63</sup> Nonetheless, the name of this one victim was to

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<sup>60</sup> Glanville. J, 'A witness to the worst of times', *The Independent*, (4 June 1998); Molyneaux. J, 'I witnessed the dead of Belsen : We must always confront tyranny', *The Daily Telegraph*, (27 January 2004); Scott. M, 'I looked through the gates of hell and knew why we were fighting: Ian relives the Horror of Belsen', *Sunday Mail*, (15 August 2010)

<sup>61</sup> 'Roger Sheridan: Obituary', *The Times*, (23 November 2007); De-Segundo. W, 'Obituary: Brigadier Robert Daniell', *The Independent*, (19 December 1996); Constable. N, 'Doctor who saw horrors of Belsen breathes new life into village with legacies', *Express on Sunday*, (7 December 2003)

<sup>62</sup> Kushner, 'From This Belsen Business', p. 190

<sup>63</sup> Hasian. M.A, 'Anne Frank, Bergen-Belsen, and the Polysemic Nature of Holocaust Memories', *Rhetoric & Public Affairs*, Vol. 4, No. 3, (Fall 2001), pp. 349-374, p. 350

eventually resonate within British society and would bring the name of Belsen back to the centre of British historical remembrance through the prominence of film adaptations and the universal messages inferred from her diary. As Rainer Schulze acknowledges, 'Bergen-Belsen will also be known to many visitors as the place where Anne Frank died shortly before the liberation of the camp.'<sup>64</sup> As such it is oft through discussions of Anne Frank that Bergen-Belsen is engaged with in British popular imagination not as the site the British liberated but as a young girls final resting place.

There is little direct connection between Britain and the teenager diarist, other than the fact that she perished at the site which was to be liberated by the British months later. Considering this lack of direct connection the scale to which Anne Frank has been absorbed into British culture, particularly as a means by which younger students can engage with the Holocaust without encountering its more violent elements, is remarkable. The travelling exhibition, *Anne Frank in the World*, first visited the UK in 1986 to massive acclaim to those who saw it. Following the success of this exhibition over the years the *Anne Frank + You* exhibition was designed in 2005 and was crafted specifically for a British audience. The exhibition, it is claimed, 'links the story of Anne Frank with contemporary issues relevant for today's youth such as identity and values' and is not only an initiative taken into schools but also into British prisons.<sup>65</sup> The presence of Anne Frank can also be felt on the British memorial, as well as on the educational, landscape. In 2010 there were a recorded nine chestnut trees growing across the UK which were saplings taken directly from the chestnut tree in Amsterdam which Anne described within her diary. Many more trees have also been planted in her name. One such tree is situated in the National Arboretum which, every year in order to symbolise 'the taking of a young life...her haunting tree has its blossoms removed before they bloom.'<sup>66</sup>

Anne Frank's death at Belsen is evoked even when her story is not expanded upon, so much is it felt to resonate within British imagination. Whilst describing the experiences of a member of the British army the *Daily Mail* mentions that Anne Frank was to die 'a few months' before the arrival of the British troops and the significance of her demise appears almost to be evoked in

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<sup>64</sup> Schulze, R, 'Forgetting and Remembering: Memories and Memorialisation at Bergen Belsen', *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, Vol. 12, No. 1-2, (Summer 2006), pp. 217-235, p. 228

<sup>65</sup> Anne Frank House, 'Anne Frank: Education in Great Britain, available at, [www.annefrank.org/en/Education/Travelling-exhibition/Europe/Great-Britain](http://www.annefrank.org/en/Education/Travelling-exhibition/Europe/Great-Britain), (accessed 22 March 2013)

<sup>66</sup> The British Legion, 'Candles to be lit for Holocaust Memorial Day at the National Memorial Arboretum', (24 January 2014), available at, [www.britishlegion.org.uk/news-events/news/national-memorial-arboretum/candles-to-be-lit-for-holocaust-memorial-day-at-the-national-memorial-arboretum](http://www.britishlegion.org.uk/news-events/news/national-memorial-arboretum/candles-to-be-lit-for-holocaust-memorial-day-at-the-national-memorial-arboretum), (accessed 27 January 2014)

order to reinforce the importance of the camp.<sup>67</sup> Nor is this the only newspaper to do so. When reporting on the anniversary of the liberation of Belsen *The News of the World*, similarly described how, 'One of those to die of the disease a few weeks before liberation day was the famous diarist Anne Frank.'<sup>68</sup> The name of Anne Frank gives meaning, significance and symbolism to the camp at Belsen as the final resting place of one of the most well-known victims of the Holocaust. The link to such a symbol of the Holocaust, and the inference contained within the popular press that she could have been liberated by the British had not the disease caused by the Nazi ill-treatment claimed her, is vital in continuing the presence of the Holocaust in British life.

Despite the fact that Belsen continues to permeate British historical consciousness it is still apparent that a shift has occurred within public imagination and that it is now Auschwitz, not Belsen, which dominates the way in which the Holocaust is represented within British culture. Even the date of Holocaust Memorial Day articulates the seeming reconfiguration of British historical consciousness of the Holocaust away from Belsen and towards Auschwitz. When discussing the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day and on which date it should be commemorated it was suggested within Parliament that, 'There are several possible dates, but I suggest the Monday nearest 27 January, which is the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. That would be a convenient time of year for schools and would harness one of the most powerful images of the horror of the Holocaust.'<sup>69</sup> Whilst also noting that, 'the date has the additional advantage of coinciding with the date likely to be recognised as Holocaust Remembrance Day in other European Union countries.'<sup>70</sup>

Lawson suggests that, 'In 2005 the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz was remembered with a similar intensity to the commemoration of the sixtieth anniversary of D-Day some six months before.'<sup>71</sup> This observation is revealing in terms of what it suggests about the significance of the Holocaust in British memory but also in terms of what it signifies about the move towards Auschwitz as a symbolic site of remembrance. The fact that it was the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, not the liberation of Belsen, which was chosen to be commemorated, is indicative of the shift which has occurred in the British imagination. When asked about his plans for commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz

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<sup>67</sup> Bennett, 'We ordered the SS men to bury the dead.'

<sup>68</sup> Buckley. P, 'Belsen 's lessons for us all', *News of the World*, (April 17 2005)

<sup>69</sup> Dismore. A, *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, Holocaust Remembrance Day, (30 June 1999), col. 363

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid*, Col. 364

<sup>71</sup> Lawson. T, *The Church of England and the Holocaust: Christianity, Memory and the Holocaust*, (Woodbridge, Boydell & Brewer, 2006), p. 178

and Belsen the then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, Ivor Caplin, revealed that he would be attending special commemorative events in Poland whilst a 'A United Kingdom delegation and a group of UK schoolchildren will attend a wreath-laying ceremony at the memorial to those who died and will join other international guests for a service at Auschwitz camp.'<sup>72</sup> When pressed further to say how the British government would commemorate the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Bergen-Belsen, which, it was emphasised, 'was, of course, carried out by UK troops', Caplin's sole response was that he was 'not aware of any plans for a special commemoration' to take place.<sup>73</sup>

The emergence of Auschwitz as such a recognisable symbol across the world, and the increasing presence of Auschwitz within British imagination, appears to suggest that Levy and Sznajder's assertion that the memory of the Holocaust is becoming increasingly global and removed from national experience, has merit. Certainly 'Auschwitz remains symbolically universal' can be seen to have transcended its geographical location to have become a symbol not only of the Holocaust but also of the potential evil of man.<sup>74</sup> Auschwitz has become the very epitome of the evils of the Holocaust in British culture with the name frequently being utilised in this vein by the British media who reinforce the significance of Auschwitz by suggesting that 'Its very name has become a symbol of evil, terror and genocide.'<sup>75</sup>

The concern for this chapter is, however, not so much why Auschwitz has become a universal symbol but how and why those in Britain have come to accept the site as one of the main channels through which they engage with the Holocaust. For whilst it is apparent that British historical consciousness has increasingly embraced Auschwitz as a universal symbol and, therefore, has increasingly understood the Holocaust through a universal lens, the domestication of the survivors and the way in which Britain's role in World War Two have been embraced within popular culture force one to question whether Auschwitz has purely come to dominate British memory because of this global memory or whether it is a culmination of universal influences and domestic narratives. If Belsen is the site which reinforces notions of British liberation and British heroism then Auschwitz is the site of universal implications which has been absorbed within the domestic narrative which has connotations for both understandings of British national identity and historical consciousness.

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<sup>72</sup> Caplin. I, *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate, Concentration Camps – Liberation, (29 November 2004), Col. 357

<sup>73</sup> Ibid.

<sup>74</sup> Manning. J, 'The Palimpsest of Memory: Auschwitz and Oświęcim' in Kuhne. T & Lawson. T (eds), *The Holocaust and Local History*, (London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2011), pp. 209-234, p. 219

<sup>75</sup> Pilditch. D, 'England Players Pay Homage at Auschwitz', *Daily Express*, (9 June 2012)

### Representation of Holocaust Sites at the Imperial War Museum

This move towards a more Auschwitz-orientated interpretation of the Holocaust can be considered through the lens of the representation of Holocaust sites within the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition. For whilst Bergen-Belsen formed the basis of the first exhibition associated with the Holocaust at the museum within ten years the site which would come to assume greater prominence within the permanent Holocaust Exhibition would be that of Auschwitz-Birkenau, thus highlighting the shift in popular narratives of the Holocaust towards a more Auschwitz orientated perspective. Domestic spaces such as the Imperial War Museum provide a valuable insight into the way in which Holocaust sites are represented whilst gesturing towards how these domestic representations can both influence, and be influenced by, universal Holocaust narratives. The layout of the exhibition, and the narrative it mediates, has not emerged by chance for 'the field of exhibition development and preparation is a complex and demanding one.'<sup>76</sup> Situated on two levels the exhibition is effectively divided into two main sections, the first explores the historical persecution of the Jews, Nazi ideology and documents the escalating persecution against the Jewish population and the gradual move towards removing those members of society deemed unworthy of life. The second half of the exhibition, separated by a staircase which reinforces to the visitor the metaphorical descent into "hell" which is about to occur, charts the invasion of the Soviet Union and the subsequent evolution of the sustained and systematic murder of the Jewish population of Europe during the Final Solution.

Situated towards the end of the exhibition the section devoted to Auschwitz-Birkenau is the largest single space within the exhibition itself. Stepping out of the dark and oppressive space devoted to deportation and transportation, in which one wall is formed from a reconstruction of the side of a cattle wagon used for the transportations, one enters the space of the exhibition dedicated specifically to Auschwitz-Birkenau and the killing process which took place there. The centre piece of this part of the exhibition is a model, approximately twelve metres long by two metres wide and sprayed in white, which immortalises the final journey of a group of Hungarian Jews from arrival on the ramp at Birkenau, made notorious by the number of selections which took place upon it, to the moment they enter the gas chamber.<sup>77</sup> There is no avoiding the model

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<sup>76</sup> Dean. D, *Museum Exhibition: Theory and Practice*, (London, Routledge, 1996), p. 1

<sup>77</sup> Designed by Gerry Judah, this model is extremely similar to a white plaster model which was created for the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum by Mieczysław Stobierski although, unlike Stobierski's model, it does not depict inside the gas chamber itself. Linenthal. E, *Preserving Memory: The Struggle to Create America's Holocaust Museum*, (New York, Columbia University Press, 2005), pp.205-210

which reinforces the notion that this is something which has to be witnessed due to the gravity of what it is being depicted. Survivor testimony echoes quietly, but continually, across the room. The visitor is able to sit and absorb the testimony in full but rarely do people take the time to do so captivated as they are by the model itself.

Even amongst those who helped to create the exhibition there was a sense that 'people are immediately drawn to the model' and feel a 'wow response' when they engage with the intricate detail of what is depicted within it.<sup>78</sup> As one visitor described, 'There is a room at the end that is a model of a concentration camp that literally took my breath away.'<sup>79</sup> This seemingly innocuous comment is revealing in that it positions the model at the end of the exhibition despite the fact that there is still a considerable amount of material to be covered, not least, information depicting day to day life in the camps and liberation. For many visitors, however, this information becomes immersed in the symbolism of Auschwitz-Birkenau which precedes it whilst the narrative of daily life within the camps is overshadowed by the model of Birkenau. Having witnessed the final journey of the Hungarian Jews, understanding life within the camps feels almost irrelevant, and people move swiftly through this point of the exhibition. Whilst Auschwitz may not be geographically central to the exhibition, therefore, it is certainly central to the narrative of the Holocaust depicted within it. Indeed, it is possible to see Auschwitz-Birkenau being presented as the very culmination of the Holocaust narrative. As Lawson observes, 'Essentially, the story of the Holocaust presented at the Imperial War Museum...is almost literally then the road to Auschwitz.'<sup>80</sup> This interpretation is reinforced by the wording inscribed on the wall at the opening of this space which states that at Auschwitz-Birkeanu 'the Nazis perfected their killing technology.' Other sites thus appear less important to the visitor for whom this 'perfection of murder' subsequently becomes the epitome of the Nazi extermination programme.

Despite the dominant position of this section, when a meeting took place between museum staff and exhibition designers to discuss the ways in which the section of the exhibit dealing with Auschwitz might be amended or improved, concern was 'expressed that there was a risk of the

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<sup>78</sup> Email from J.Taylor to G. Paulsson re Auschwitz Text, (undated), *IWM Archives: File: Auschwitz*

<sup>79</sup> Anon, 'Intriguing and Terrifying: Holocaust Exhibition at the IWM', Trip Advisor, (6 February 2012), available at, [www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction\\_Review-g186338-d187674-Reviews-or30-Imperial\\_War\\_Museum-London\\_England.html#reviews](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attraction_Review-g186338-d187674-Reviews-or30-Imperial_War_Museum-London_England.html#reviews), (accessed 22 October 2013)

<sup>80</sup> Lawson. T, 'Ideology in a Museum of Memory: A Review of the Holocaust Exhibition at the Imperial War Museum', *Totalitarian Movements and Political Religions*, Vol.4, No. 2, (2003), pp. 173-183, p. 179

import of the section, being lost on visitors.<sup>81</sup> Given that the narrative of the exhibition appears framed in such a way to provide the notion that ‘all roads lead to Auschwitz’ the articulation of such a concern appears surprising. The model of Auschwitz is situated within the largest singular space within the exhibition whilst survivor testimony and historical artefacts, such as prisoner’s shoes and a can of Zyklon B, are utilised so as to impress upon the visitor the significance of this space and what is being depicted. In comparison to the representation of other sites within the exhibition it is clear that Auschwitz-Birkenau is viewed as providing the primary vehicle through which to gain a greater understanding of the Holocaust.

The space provided for a discussion of the Aktion Reinhard camps of Belzec, Treblinka and Sobibor, as well as the first camp of this kind established known as Chelmno, for example, initially appears as little more than a corridor as opposed to an actual “space” with which to engage with these sites. This is reinforced by the presence of the only ‘escape’ passage for visitors available in the exhibit which is placed immediately prior to this section. Although acknowledging that the sites ‘were equipped with gas chambers capable of killing thousands of people at a time’ the significance of these camps in terms of their role in the expansion of the murder process and the experimentation in deception which took place at the sites are somewhat downplayed and their significance is not articulated to the viewer. Compounding this relative lack of information many people are drawn immediately forward, through the corridor space dedicated to the Reinhard camps and past the information held there, preferring instead to progress on to the recognisable image of the small boy in the Warsaw ghetto which is positioned under the title of Jewish armed resistance.

A discussion of Jewish armed resistance is of course welcome. It would certainly not be desirable for the Jewish population of Europe to be represented solely as those who went passively like ‘sheep to the slaughter’ as Bruno Bettelheim, drawing on the term utilised by Emmanuel Ringelblum the chronicler of the horrors experienced within the Warsaw Ghetto, asserted.<sup>82</sup> Yet the positioning of this particular section as adjacent to the space devoted to the Reinhard camps, reinforces a misconception that survival from these camps was similar in scale to that of Auschwitz, by associating resistance with the camps themselves. The reality was, however, that the chance of both resistance and survival at Auschwitz-Birkenau was far greater than within the

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<sup>81</sup> Bardgett, S, Document note of meeting held between Museum, Holocaust designers and Martin Smith to discuss the Auschwitz section, (21 May 1998), *IWM Archive: Section file Auschwitz*

<sup>82</sup> Bettelheim, B, *The Informed Heart: The Human Condition in Modern Mass Society*, (London, Thames & Hudson, 1961). The use of this phrase by Ringelblum can be found in his notes from 17 June 1942 in Ringelblum, E, *Notes from the Warsaw Ghetto: The Journal of Emmanuel Ringelblum*, (New York, McGraw Hill, 1958), p. 332

Reinhard camps. The sentiment that, 'Of all the camps in the Holocaust, Belzec was the most deadly' can certainly be interpreted as being justified for, unlike Auschwitz, the camp of Belzec was not intended to house prisoners for slave labour.<sup>83</sup> Those who were deported to these camps were not given a chance to survive by being selected for slave labour as the camps were not designed to house, only to exterminate, the Jewish people who walked through their gates. The small size of the sites which formerly housed the Reinhard camps most starkly illustrates this reality yet nothing is said about the small size of the camps and the visitor's eye is quickly drawn away from the sporadic text which describes the murder process, to the victim's possessions, mainly unearthed from the site of Chelmno, which are displayed underneath it.

When concern was expressed that the importance of the Auschwitz section might not be immediately apparent to visitors it was noted amongst some involved in the design of the exhibition that 'at this point in the exhibition over 3,000,000 Jews had already been killed, half of the Holocaust victims.' Whilst the designers felt that Auschwitz was important, therefore, it is also apparent that some felt that its place in the complex evolution of the Holocaust should not be overstated. Yet in response to this notion Suzanne Bardgett argued that, 'what was special about the Holocaust and what needed to be shown was the fact that for the first time in history humans put other humans into gas chambers and did so systematically using industrial methods.'<sup>84</sup> In one sentence the mass shootings of the Einsatzgruppen, the deaths of thousands in the ghettos from starvation and disease and the Reinhard camps at which the killing methods eventually utilised at Auschwitz were refined, were consigned to what Lawson refers to as the 'appendices' of the exhibition.<sup>85</sup> As such the exhibition is contributing to a Holocaust narrative which is dominated by the symbol of Auschwitz-Birkenau as the focal point of the Holocaust whilst, concurrently, forcing these 'alternative sites of moral encounter' to the edge of popular understanding.<sup>86</sup>

As for Belsen, the site which is said to have an indelible connection to the British Holocaust narrative, the site appears as if it has come to form a part of the exhibition almost as an afterthought. Certainly the site assumes a rather more limited role than one would have imagined for a site of memory which had an entire exhibition dedicated to it at the museum only 10 years previously. The illustration of the move from Belsen to Auschwitz as the foremost site of

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<sup>83</sup> Rosenblatt. S, 'Belzec the Forgotten Camp', (29 April 2000), [www.aish.com/jw/s/Belzec-The-Forgotten-Camp.html](http://www.aish.com/jw/s/Belzec-The-Forgotten-Camp.html), (accessed 17 June 2012)

<sup>84</sup> Bardgett, 'Document Note', *IWM Archive: Section File Auschwitz*

<sup>85</sup> Lawson, 'Ideology in a Museum of Memory', p. 179

<sup>86</sup> DeKoven-Ezrahi. S, 'Representing Auschwitz', *History and Memory*, Vol. 7, No. 2 (Fall - Winter, 1995), pp. 121-154, p. 129-130

popular British engagement and imagination is made strikingly apparent. At the point referred to as 'Discovery' the visitor is confronted by a large image of the iconic photograph of a bulldozer pushing anonymous corpses into a pit whilst film footage taken by the Allied forces plays on loop on small television screens accompanied by the voices of survivors as they provide testimony about the moment of liberation. Many people do not spend much time in this section, giving the information a cursory glance, before moving onwards towards the final stage of the exhibition whilst others pass over the written material and instead preferring to sit and watch the looping film footage before moving away from this space. Understandably, for many the graphic material illustrated within the film footage inspires a contemplation of the experiences of survivors rather than encouraging engagement with the site itself.

Through the prominence of Auschwitz in the exhibit, the inference of the narrative that the Holocaust began with the Nazi assumption of power in Germany and ended in the gas chambers of Auschwitz and the relative failure to address the significance of other sites in the fragmented evolution of the Final Solution continues, rather than confronts, the popular understanding of the site of Auschwitz as *the site* of Holocaust atrocity and, subsequently, allows it to remain as such in British Holocaust memory. Contemporary film images of Auschwitz are also found within the final space of the exhibition accompanying footage of survivors as they tell of their struggle to cope with the Holocaust as their lives progressed. The images again reinforce to the visitor the significance of Auschwitz, and the significance of the survivors, as the main symbols of the Holocaust. It is thus Auschwitz, not Belsen, which has come to represent the Holocaust in contemporary British imagination and the prominence of Auschwitz in the museum exhibition serves to both shape and reinforce this sentiment.

This exhibition is not alone, however, in cultivating the image of Auschwitz as being the centre of popular understanding. When discussing his documentary *The Nazis a Warning from History*, a six part documentary which aired in Britain in 1997, Laurence Rees astutely observed that 'Most people in this country know very little about Treblinka, as most of the focus is on Auschwitz.'<sup>87</sup> Despite stating that the reorientation of popular understanding away from Auschwitz and towards a greater understanding of camps such as Treblinka, Belzec and Sobibor, 'is something I feel passionately about' the next project which Laurence Rees undertook for public consumption was a significant and detailed documentation of Auschwitz-Birkenau. *Auschwitz: The Nazis and the 'Final Solution'* another six part documentary which aired in January 2005 was met with

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<sup>87</sup> Rees, L, 'The Nazis a Warning from History', in Haggith, T & Newman, J (eds), *Holocaust and the Moving Image: Representations in Film and Television since 1933*, (London, Wallflower Press, 2005), pp. 146-153, p. 147

popular, and critical, acclaim.<sup>88</sup> Yet the documentary also appeared to counter all that Rees had previously said about wanting to move the British public's understanding of the Holocaust away from Auschwitz. Despite the title of the series it is apparent that Rees does not analyse the evolution of the camp in isolation from the other initiatives of the evolving Final Solution and that he attempts to situate the site in the wider context of the disjointed structure of Nazism and the persecution of the Jews. As Fernekes asserts, Rees 'integrates the history of the Auschwitz camp complex with the much broader plan to 'Germanize' conquered areas of Eastern Europe.'<sup>89</sup> Nevertheless by using Auschwitz as the central prism through which the wider Holocaust is understood Rees, as reflected in the Holocaust exhibition, is perpetuating, rather than challenging, an Auschwitz orientated interpretation of the Holocaust.

### *The Fall of the Iron Curtain and the Burning Huts of Belsen*

As illustrated by the centrality of Auschwitz at the Imperial War Museum, and the repeated reference to it in political and popular arenas, the relationship of "the West" to Auschwitz has been increasingly presented as, 'a public relationship - despite its being comprised of immensely private, individual traumas. We have always been told that we could have a relationship to Auschwitz, and that this relationship can be instituted in a public domain.'<sup>90</sup> Despite an awareness of Auschwitz in popular British imagination in the period immediately after liberation, however, the emergence of the Cold War and the descent of the so called 'Iron Curtain' across Europe had a considerable influence on the way in which the sites associated with the Holocaust have been remembered in British society and culture. Whilst camps such as Auschwitz had been acknowledged in British consciousness in the aftermath of the liberation of the camps and the Belsen trials, the role of the Iron Curtain was, as Winstone suggests, to serve as a 'practical and psychological barrier' for those in Britain to significantly engage with the sites of atrocity located further east in Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>91</sup> This barrier was not, however, absolute. For whilst it has been claimed that 'Auschwitz had been largely neglected by the Western democracies during the Cold War' reports from the Auschwitz trials which took place in Frankfurt in the 1960s did appear in the British press.<sup>92</sup> Yet the ease of 'knowing' from the perspective of the twenty-

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid.

<sup>89</sup> Fernekes. W, 'Auschwitz: A New History by Laurence Rees', *The History Teacher*, Vol. 39, No. 2 (February 2006), pp. 276-277, p. 276

<sup>90</sup> Staines. D, 'Auschwitz and the Camera', *Mortality: Promoting the Interdisciplinary Study of Death and Dying*, Vol. 7, No. 1, (2002), pp. 13-32, p. 15

<sup>91</sup> Winstone. M, *The Holocaust Sites of Europe: An Historical Guide*, (London, I.B.Tauris & Co Ltd, 2010), p. 1

<sup>92</sup> Struk. J, *Photographing the Holocaust: Interpretations of the Evidence*, (London, I.B.Tauris & Co. Ltd, 2005), p. 186

first century should not obscure the difficulties which the Cold War caused for the formation of Holocaust understanding and awareness.

The fall of the Communism, however, was to gradually encourage greater travel to the area. From the perspective of those areas which had been consolidated as satellite states of the Soviet Union, 'the lifting of the severe restrictions on travel that were a hallmark of socialist regimes were among the most enthusiastically welcomed achievements of 1989.'<sup>93</sup> Yet the opening of the borders and the relative relaxation of travel restrictions did not simply mean, as some populist newspapers inferred, that it was only those from the former Eastern bloc who took advantage of these reduced travel restrictions. The fall of the Iron Curtain also allowed many in Britain to begin exploring Central and Eastern Europe for themselves. Alongside this increased travel came the opportunity to visit sites of Holocaust atrocity which were located outside of Western Europe.

Following the fall of Communism it was the subsequent acceptance of Poland into the European Union in 2004 which encouraged even greater travel to Holocaust sites. Speaking in 2005, the year after the enlargement of the European Union, Frances Tuke, spokeswoman for the Association of British Travel Agents, observed that 'Until last year, much of Eastern Europe was still uncharted territory for most British travellers.'<sup>94</sup> As environmental journalist Mark Rowe penned before the acceptance of Poland into the EU, 'From the Baltic to the Black Sea, travel behind the Iron Curtain was uncompromisingly foreign, usually difficult' as such the majority of British tourists, even those with a particular interest in Holocaust sites, were less likely to visit a site such as Auschwitz than they were a site in the western side of the East/West divide.<sup>95</sup> As a result Britain, and indeed Western Europe, were 'separated, physically, from both the former German and the still-functioning Soviet labour camps, as well as from both the German and the Soviet death pits, located in Poland, Ukraine, Belarus, and Russia.'<sup>96</sup>

The significance of greater access to the Eastern Europe and the subsequent impact on the way in which sites of Holocaust atrocity were engaged with by the British public should not be understated. As Steinlauf asserts, 'While only 5 of the 22 million people who visited Auschwitz over the past fifty years came from outside Poland, since the fall of communism half the visitors

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<sup>93</sup> Szmagalska-Follis. K, 'Are the European Union's New Boundaries like the Iron Curtain? 1989, Borders and Freedom of Movement in Poland and Ukraine', *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society*, Vol. 22, No. 3, (September 2009), pp. 385-400, p. 386

<sup>94</sup> Bridge. C & Starmer-Smith. C, 'Britons Flock to Eastern Europe' *Daily Telegraph*, (30 April 2005)

<sup>95</sup> Rowe. M, 'The Big Trip: Exit the gherkin. It will be sadly missed', *Independent on Sunday*, (25 April 2004)

<sup>96</sup> Snyder. T, 'The Historical Reality of Eastern Europe', *East European Politics and Societies*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (February 2009), pp. 7-13, p.10

have been non-Polish, primarily Germans and Jews from all over the world.<sup>97</sup> Engagement with Holocaust sites has altered dramatically not only in terms of the sites that have been chosen to be remembered within the commemorative and political landscape but also in terms of the way the British public themselves have begun to directly interact with such sites, particularly Auschwitz. When discussing the countries from which people came to visit Auschwitz-Birkenau in 1992 Jonathan Webber stated that, 'The European countries from which the fewest number of visitors came were those, such as Britain, that were not occupied by the Germans during the war.'<sup>98</sup> As result of Britain not having been occupied by the Nazi regime, combined with the relative difficulty of travelling behind the Iron Curtain at this point, the British public felt no particular impetus to visit this site of Holocaust atrocity. By the year 2012, however, the situation had become barely recognisable to the one Webber had described twenty years previously. In a report by the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum, analysing visits to the site in 2012, it was announced that;

'The first ten countries whose citizens visited the Auschwitz Memorial include: Poland (446,000), Great Britain (149,000), USA (97,000) and also Italy (84,000), Germany (74,000), Israel (68,000), France (62,000), Spain (54,000), Czech Republic (48,000) and South Korea (46,000).'<sup>99</sup>

The rise in the number of people visiting Auschwitz in recent years is, according to Karen Pollock, 'extremely encouraging' yet it is also interesting in terms of what it reveals about the role of Auschwitz in British historical consciousness.<sup>100</sup>

Visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau is now an integral aspect of the way in which British people are choosing to understand the Holocaust. Webber asserted in 1992, even before Auschwitz-Birkenau reached the levels of prominence in British narratives of the Holocaust that it had by the opening years of the twenty-first century, that it was more than likely that the 'survival of the physical fabric of Auschwitz contributed in no small measure to the fact that Auschwitz became so well-known after the war.'<sup>101</sup> Rather than being forced to imagine the way in which

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<sup>97</sup> Steinlauf. M, *Bondage to the Dead: Poland and the Memory of the Holocaust*, (New Yoek, Syracuse University Press, 1997), p. 135

<sup>98</sup> Webber. J, 'The Future of Auschwitz: Some Personal Reflections', *Religion, State and Society*, Vol. 20, No. 1, (1992), pp. 81-100, p. 86

<sup>99</sup> Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial & State Museum, 'Auschwitz Memorial in 2012: Undiminished Interest of the World', (4 January 2013), available at, [www.en.auschwitz.org/m/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=1073&Itemid=8](http://www.en.auschwitz.org/m/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1073&Itemid=8), (accessed 25 February 2013)

<sup>100</sup> Pollock. K, *Press Release: Holocaust Educational Trust*, (10<sup>th</sup> January 2011)

<sup>101</sup> Webber, 'The Future of Auschwitz', p. 82

the camp existed on the landscape, which is now either barren or replaced by a simple memorial, in Auschwitz visitors feel that they are able to see the infrastructure of the camp for themselves. As one student attending the Holocaust Educational Trust's *Lessons from Auschwitz* programme said, 'The visit to Birkenau was particularly memorable as it was almost untouched since it was liberated.'<sup>102</sup>

The impression that Auschwitz and, in particular, Birkenau has been left as an untouched space since liberation resonates across the popular press with a journalist describing to readers how, 'Birkenau has been left untouched. The wooden huts are splintering, the roofs leak and in a strong gale the buildings simply collapse. The bunk beds of the inmates are etched with graffiti Jean Loves Gary but no signs point to the gas chambers, the crematoria, or to the rail ramp where the SS doctors chose those fit to work and those destined to die.'<sup>103</sup> Due to this feeling amongst visitors that the camp has been left as it was a sense of proximity to the past, and to those who perished, is thus reinforced at Auschwitz by the simple fact that the ruins of the camp remain. As Webber thus notes, 'There is a great deal for the visitor to see in Auschwitz, and there are a great number of visitors too.'<sup>104</sup>

In contrast to the site at Auschwitz the concentration camp at Bergen-Belsen was not preserved by the Allied forces that liberated it. It was reported in *The Times* in 1945 that 'The Belsen concentration camp is to be burned to the ground on May 21. Destruction by fire is considered by the British authorities to be the only safe way to rid a wide area of northern Germany of the threat of infection and contagious diseases.'<sup>105</sup> Within the 2007 feature length docudrama *The Relief of Belsen* which aired on British television on 15 October 2007 the burning of the huts assumed a somewhat ceremonial, even celebratory, nature which emphasised the relief of the British medical staff and troops as the huts and barracks which remained on the site were expunged. The decision to frame the images of the camp's destruction in this way are, to a certain extent, accurate as Shephard describes, 'It was decided to hold a special ceremony to mark the destruction of the last hut, and a half holiday was proclaimed and all British personnel given permission to attend.'<sup>106</sup> Whilst showing film footage taken at the time of this destruction *The Relief of Belsen* then uses the description of the event given by James Johnston, who was the Senior Medical Officer at the Belsen camp within his memoirs, 'On our recommendation the

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<sup>102</sup> Respondent 12, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: East Midlands Visit 2012', (13 March 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 8 July 2013)

<sup>103</sup> Boyes, R, 'Why Auschwitz must be saved', *The Times*, (24 November 1993)

<sup>104</sup> Webber, 'The Future of Auschwitz', p. 83

<sup>105</sup> 'Belsen Camp to be Burned', *The Times*, (15 May 1945)

<sup>106</sup> Shephard, *After Daybreak*, p. 124

horror camp was completely destroyed by fire. This was the only possible end to a place that had seen so much human misery, degradation and terror and I had the satisfaction of directing the flames and pressing the button.<sup>107</sup>

As a result of this decision, 'By the summer of 1945 the site of the former concentration camp had become an empty and desolate place with almost no architectural remains of the former concentration camp.'<sup>108</sup> This sense of "desolation" is oft referred to by those who have visited Belsen. When discussing the visit of Chaim Herzog the first Israeli head of state to West Germany in 1987 *The Times* described how, 'The camp at Belsen is a windswept, deserted place set among the fir trees and silver birches of northern Germany. No building survived: all the huts, built to contain 100 people but by the end of the war overflowing with 1,000 each, were burnt to the ground in 1945 to stop the spread of disease. Now there are only grass mounds among the heather.'<sup>109</sup> Whilst certainly understandable, the decision to burn the huts of Belsen can be seen as having left a considerable gap in public awareness of the topography, and history, of the camp. The journalists who were present in Belsen were, of course, more concerned with documenting the human life which had been lost and the atrocities that had been committed rather than documenting the camp itself. The atrocity images to emerge from Belsen, and which entered public imagination, depicted the human horror of the result of mass starvation and disease as opposed to structural images and impressions of the camp. Compounding this, and despite the confusion generated in the public arena by conflicting and confused newspaper reports, the nature of the camp at Belsen meant that, unlike a number of other camps, there were no gas chambers at the site which could be photographed as 'evidence' of the atrocities, instead;

'the evidence of mistreatment was the condition of the camp inmates which may partly explain why the cameramen repeatedly filmed sequences documenting the human suffering: heaps of bodies on the ground or in pits; inmates sitting listlessly on the ground; studies of survivors their faces drawn and pinched from hunger.'<sup>110</sup>

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<sup>107</sup> *The Relief of Belsen*, Directed by Justin Hardy, (Channel 4, 15 October 2007), 1:32:48s, Extract taken from Johnston, J, *Memoirs of The Relief of Belsen Concentration Camp: Recollections and Reflections of a British Army Doctor*, (Unpublished, USHMM Archives, 1970)

<sup>108</sup> Wolschke-Bulmahn. J, 'The Landscape Design of the Bergen-Belsen Concentration Camp Memorial', in Wolschke-Bulmahn. J (ed), in *Places of Commemoration: Search for Identity and Landscape Design*, (Washington, Dumbarton Oaks, 2001), pp. 269-300, p. 271-274

<sup>109</sup> Owen. R, 'Hatred rejected as Herzog recalls hell of Belsen', *The Times*, (7 April 1987)

<sup>110</sup> Haggith. T, 'The Filming of the Liberation of Bergen-Belsen and its Impact on the Understanding of the Holocaust', *Holocaust Studies: A Journal of Culture and History*, Vol. 12, No. 1-2, (Summer/Autumn 2006), pp. 89-122, p. 101

The absence of camp infrastructure generates a sense of emptiness which makes it more difficult for visitors to understand the topography of the camp which, compounded by this additional photographic absence, not only results in the site being less engrained in public consciousness but, also, that visitors are less likely to visit the space which constitutes the site of the former camp.

Unlike Belsen the sites of Auschwitz and Birkenau was chosen to be maintained by the Soviet Union as a means of testifying to the perils of Fascism. Through these sites, Charlesworth suggests, 'Polish-Soviet relationship could be refracted through the memorialisation' of the camp as it could be portrayed as 'a symbol solely of fascist aggression' being as it was the place where so many Russian, as well as Polish deaths, had occurred.<sup>111</sup> The alternative to Auschwitz as a site of Soviet appropriation would have been the site of Majdanek, a concentration camp just outside Lublin, also in Poland. Unlike the site of Auschwitz, however, the site of Majdanek would have forced the Soviet Union to confront fractured Polish/Soviet relations. Majdanek was appropriated by the Soviet secret police immediately after liberation and a significant number of non-communist Poles were interned there. As such the site would have caused difficulties for the Soviet Union revealing as it would the memory of the site as one of Communist oppression whilst attempting to utilise it as a site indicative of Fascist oppression. The site of Auschwitz was Cole states, a 'less problematic choice as a site for remembering Polish martyrdom at the hands of the Germans only.'<sup>112</sup>

The site of Auschwitz itself was established in 1947 and was renamed the Auschwitz-Birkenau State Museum. Prior to the fall of Communism 'the site's message was dominated by a misleading civic narrative about Polish victimization by, and resistance to, Nazism' and, as with many memorials to the crimes of Nazism established in the immediate post-war period, the specificity of the Jewish experience within the camps was rarely alluded to.<sup>113</sup> Certainly the representation of the site as a symbol against Fascism allowed an alternative narrative for the site of Auschwitz to be established which absorbed the site as a space of Polish Catholic martyrdom. As has been well documented, this caused considerable tension between Catholics and Jews, with the latter increasingly voicing their concerns that their experiences were being ostracised in favour of a 'Christianised', and nationalised, narrative of the suffering experienced

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<sup>111</sup> Charlesworth. A, 'Contesting Places of Memory: The Place of Auschwitz', *Environment and Planning Society and Space* Vol.12, (1994), pp.579-593, p. 583

<sup>112</sup> Cole. T, *Holocaust City: The Making of a Jewish Ghetto*, (London, Routledge, 2003), p. 223

<sup>113</sup> Blum. L, 'The Poles, the Jews and the Holocaust: Reflections on an AME trip to Auschwitz', *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol. 33, No. 2, (June 2004), pp. 131-148, p. 131

within the camp.<sup>114</sup> Regardless of these conflicts the Soviet Union and the Polish government had thus ensured that the site of Auschwitz was to remain standing as a memory space in which visitors could come to view the perils of Fascism. The events of 1989, however, were to ensure that the site of Auschwitz was to become a symbol of something even bigger than Fascism as it emerged as the very symbol of evil itself.

The maintenance of Auschwitz was crucial for the future direction of Holocaust memory particularly with regards to encouraging visitors from Western Europe to visit the site. What remains at the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau today is, the Museum states, a 'preserved, authentic Memorial.'<sup>115</sup> More than simply a memorial, however, Auschwitz 'serves as a state museum, a documentation centre and an archive of the remains from the concentration camps. It is a major tourist site attracting more than half a million visitors annually.'<sup>116</sup> At Auschwitz I the site has been turned into a museum with former barracks devoted to national exhibitions charting the destruction of the communities devastated by the Holocaust. It is also within these exhibits that those authentic relics from the camp complex are displayed and maintained. Whilst Auschwitz II, or Birkenau, has been preserved as a rather less obviously mediated experience with very few information boards available for those visiting the site to use to understand their experience and which survives. As Dwork and Van Pelt assert in their study of the Auschwitz complex, 'Auschwitz I alone appears to be intact. The presentation of the buildings conveys a sense not of abstract history but of tangible actuality.'<sup>117</sup> Schramm has claimed that 'the memory of violence is not only embedded in peoples' bodies and minds but also inscribed onto space in all kinds of settings: memorials, religious shrines, border zones or the natural environment.'<sup>118</sup> Yet despite the assumption that the memory of violence can be inscribed upon the natural landscape and can in some way impart some kind of meaning to those who visit it, it appears to be the case that, in reality, for visitors to Holocaust sites what they can see is far more emotive and significant than what they cannot see.

When analysing the phenomenon referred to as battlefield tourism, particularly with regards to sites associated with the First World War, Jennifer Ilse states that those visitors who endeavour

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<sup>114</sup> Rittner. C & Roth. J.K (eds), *Memory Offended: The Auschwitz Convent Controversy*, (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1991)

<sup>115</sup> Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Museum, 'Visiting', available at [www.en.auschwitz.org](http://www.en.auschwitz.org), (accessed 14 October 2012)

<sup>116</sup> Bryld. C, 'Auschwitz and the Collective Memory: Thoughts about a Place and its Usage', in Karlsson. K.G & Zander. U (eds), *Holocaust Heritage: Inquiries into European Historical Cultures*, (Riga, Sekel, 2004), pp. 63 – 86, p. 70

<sup>117</sup> Dwork. D & Van Pelt. R.J, *Auschwitz*, (London, W.W.Norton and Company, 2002), p. 359

<sup>118</sup> Schramm. K, 'Introduction: Landscapes of Violence - Memory and Sacred Space', *History & Memory*, Vol. 23, No. 1, (Spring/Summer 2011), pp. 5-22, p. 5

to visit such places, 'come to see a landscape which now visually betrays relatively little of the events which took place during the war.'<sup>119</sup> Nonetheless, when visiting sites of atrocity, as with other rather less violent sites of memory, tourist behaviour and interaction with such spaces is often viewed as 'an activity that is primarily carried out through the medium of vision or the gaze.'<sup>120</sup> Engaging with an absence, such as at Belsen is seemingly much more difficult than engaging with the physical remains of a site such as Auschwitz. Other sites of atrocity, including Bergen-Belsen would, therefore, require a heightened level of engagement and translation in order to ensure that those stories and narratives which have been obscured could be transmitted to future generations and those visiting the sites. In Auschwitz, the visitor does not feel as if they need as much mediation and, therefore, feel as if they are somehow closer to the event which the site is felt to embody. It is clear from the way in which it is Auschwitz, and not Belsen, which has entered popular British imagination, and the fact that it is Auschwitz-Birkenau and not Bergen-Belsen which was chosen as a site for the *Lessons from Auschwitz* course, run by the Holocaust Educational Trust, gestures to the fact that a lack of physicality does matter to those who visit sites of Holocaust memory and atrocity.

The continuation of the importance of Auschwitz as a lasting physical symbol of the Holocaust, and the importance of this in British imagination, was made apparent within a debate hosted online by the BBC which asked whether Auschwitz should be preserved or allowed to decay and, thus, be returned to nature. The overwhelming majority of those who contacted the BBC were adamant that the site should be maintained for future generations with some pointing directly to the destruction of Belsen stating that 'Because it was demolished shortly after it was liberated, there is little at Belsen now beyond monuments' and that as such there is nothing to see which one can associate with the actual history of the space whereas at Auschwitz physical remains allow the visitor to engage more acutely with the site.<sup>121</sup>

Recent additions to the Belsen site, including the establishment of an exhibition housed within the Documentation Centre completed in 2007 and the move towards a restructuring of the memorial space, have been taking place. Based on an aerial photograph taken of the camp by the Royal Air Force in 1944 the landscaping project undertaken at the Belsen site in recent years has been in order to return the site to one which can be understood by the visitor. As

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<sup>119</sup> Iles, J 'Recalling the Ghosts of War: Performing Tourism on the Battlefields of Western Europe', *Text and Performance Quarterly*, Vol. 26, No. 2, (April 2006), pp. 162-180, p. 163

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> 'Cash Crisis Threat to Auschwitz: Comments', BBC News, (26 January 2009), available at, [www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7827534.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7827534.stm), (accessed 29 April 2013)

representatives of the memorial noted in 2011, 'The goal of the landscaping measures is to make the grounds readable again as the site of the historical camp.'<sup>122</sup> Given the increasing association of the Holocaust narrative with the journey to the gas chamber, however, it is unlikely that Bergen-Belsen will challenge Auschwitz in British imagination as the primary site of Holocaust memory and engagement. For the aura of Auschwitz, and the vast expanse of Birkenau, appears to allow the visitor to engage with the Holocaust in a way in which they feel they are unable to do elsewhere. Yet whilst the destruction of Bergen-Belsen by British forces, and the maintenance of Auschwitz-Birkenau by the Soviet Union as a symbol of the fight against Fascism, have contributed to the heightening presence of Auschwitz in British engagement with the Holocaust and the gradual reduction of the British memory of Belsen this should not suggest that Auschwitz is immune from natural decay, a reality that may have a significant impact on the way in which Britain engages with the site in the future.

#### *British Assistance for the Preservation of Auschwitz*

Despite the fact that the structures at the camp at Belsen were deliberately removed it is also clear that the concentration camps, or the 'crumbling sites of destruction' as Young refers to them, were not designed to be preserved.<sup>123</sup> Himmler's oft quoted line from the speech he gave in Posen to members of the Einsatzgruppen in which he referred to the extermination of the Jews of Europe as 'a glorious page in our history, never written, which never can be written' itself highlights the understanding amongst the Nazi leadership that the Final Solution to the Jewish question would be erased from German history once it had been completed.<sup>124</sup> Belzec, Treblinka and Sobibor, the camps established to annihilate the Jews from the General Government of Poland, were destroyed not by the Allies, but by the Nazis themselves in the hope that their crimes would not be uncovered. Due to the fact that the sites were not designed to be preserved the camps themselves, even those not deliberately destroyed, are now falling into disrepair due to the erosion of the materials from which they were constructed. Other images traditionally associated with the camp such as the presence of bone on the ground and the presence of historical artefacts such as spoons strewn across the sites are gradually being subsumed by nature. As one social commentator noted, 'Time cannot be imprisoned. When I first visited Auschwitz, more than 30 years ago, I could pull up the turf anywhere in the open

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<sup>122</sup> Bergen-Belsen Memorial, *Redesign Bergen-Belsen Memorial Stage 2: 2010/11 The Cemetery and Historical Site of the Camp*, (2010), p. 2

<sup>123</sup> Young, *The Texture of Memory*, p. 119

<sup>124</sup> As cited in Rhodes. R, *Masters of Death: The SS Einsatzgruppen and the Invention of the Holocaust*, (New York, Vintage Books, 2002), p. 267

ground beyond the end of the railway track and find the earth white-ish: a paste of calcined human bone and ash. Now, the carbon cycle has quietly done its work over half a century, and the soil is brown again.<sup>125</sup>

In 2008 the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation issued a plea to governments across the world to financially assist them in the maintenance of the camp to ensure that the site was preserved as a place of commemoration, education and remembrance stating that, 'The most urgent preservation work intended to save the Auschwitz Memorial will require tens of millions of euros in funding. This far exceeds the financial capacity of the Museum.'<sup>126</sup> As the 2008 *Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial Report* stated, 'More than a million people from all over the world visit the Auschwitz site each year. For many of them, the visit to the Memorial is an extraordinary experience that enables them to understand the tragic dimensions of the genocide committed here.'<sup>127</sup> The spokesman for the Polish authorities who were responsible for the maintenance of the camp announced that, 'Without outside help, Poland could have trouble retaining Auschwitz as a memorial site.'<sup>128</sup> Certainly the gradual disintegration of the camp had been noted for many years. As was reported in 1995, 'Auschwitz has grown old. The place of death is itself dying' and by 2010, whilst the camp still existed, people lamented that, 'The decay at Birkenau is clear to see.'<sup>129</sup> As the articulation of these concerns may infer, the request for financial assistance, the anticipated response to it and the subsequent discussions and debates surrounding the importance of maintaining the site for future generations were highly documented within the British press. Headlines such as 'Cash crisis threat to Auschwitz', 'Saving Auschwitz - Fight to preserve evil reminder' and 'Buildings are where we store our memories - Auschwitz must be preserved' appeared frequently within the public domain.<sup>130</sup>

The year following the request for financial aid the then Prime Minister Gordon Brown, prior to an official visit to the camp, responded by saying that Britain would 'join with other countries in supporting the maintenance and retention of the memorial at Auschwitz.'<sup>131</sup> Yet despite these

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<sup>125</sup> Ascherson. N, 'Remains of the Abomination', *Independent on Sunday*, (22 January 1995)

<sup>126</sup> Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum Report 2008, (Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu, Państwowe Muzeum, 2009), p.57

<sup>127</sup> *Ibid*, p.59

<sup>128</sup> 'Poles ask the world for funds to stop Auschwitz falling into ruins', *Daily Mail*, (6 August 2008)

<sup>129</sup> Ascherson, 'Remains of the Abomination'; Parry. R, 'Saving Auschwitz: Fight to Preserve Evil Reminder', *Daily Mirror*, (22 October 2010)

<sup>130</sup> 'Cash Crisis Threat To Auschwitz: Comments', (26 January 2009), available at, [www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7827534.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/7827534.stm), (accessed 15 May 2012); Parry, 'Saving Auschwitz'; Macintyre. B, 'Buildings are where we store our memories - Auschwitz must be preserved', *The Times*, (14 January 2010)

<sup>131</sup> Stratton. A, 'UK promises to help fund upkeep of Auschwitz', *The Guardian*, (28 April 2009), available at, [www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/28/gordon-brown-auschwitz-poland](http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2009/apr/28/gordon-brown-auschwitz-poland), (accessed 19 October 2012)

assurances no firm financial commitment was made and it was not until after the 2010 general election and the formation of a new government that the question of Auschwitz was raised in the public arena once again, as the *Daily Mirror* observed, 'It was believed Britain could come up with £10million - but David Cameron has not yet honoured the pledge. And with the axe falling on public spending in the UK, the museum fears that money will not be forthcoming.'<sup>132</sup> Despite the articulation of such concerns, however, in 2011 the British government announced that it would contribute 2.1 million pounds to ensure that the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau would be preserved as a place which people could continue to visit in order to learn about the Holocaust, remember those who perished and to educate the public in order to attempt to prevent further genocide. The Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, Eric Pickles, whose department would be providing some of the financial assistance for the contribution, announced that, 'It is our collective responsibility to ensure that Auschwitz - Birkenau stands as a perpetual reminder of the pain and destructive force of hate.'<sup>133</sup>

Regardless of the supposed "iconic" position of Belsen in British historical consciousness, therefore, whilst the British government has highlighted the importance of funding the restoration and preservation of Auschwitz-Birkenau, it does not currently provide any financial assistance to the site which British troops once liberated. The British government has not provided any significant assistance for the preservation of the camp, instead leaving responsibility for the memorialisation of the camp to the local German authorities. Nor have they provided financial assistance for any educational programme to visit Belsen, or any other site associated with the Holocaust, other than Auschwitz. It appears, therefore, that in terms of political value the site of Auschwitz is now the more integral site to British imagination than Belsen. The imperative to maintain the site is seemingly crucial whereas there is not the same imperative to provide funds to Bergen-Belsen to restore the original topography of the camp.

The willingness of the British government, and indeed the British people, in times of austerity to fund the preservation of this particular site is extremely revealing about the role Auschwitz has come to play in British historical consciousness of the Holocaust. The most striking aspect of this pledge is that the money which would be provided to the Auschwitz Museum would be taken from the budget of the Foreign Office and the Department for Communities and Local

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<sup>132</sup> Parry, 'Saving Auschwitz'

<sup>133</sup> '2m funds pledge for Auschwitz', *Coventry Telegraph*, (28 May 2011)

Government.<sup>134</sup> This decision demonstrates the way in which Auschwitz has been internalised in British culture for the site is seen not only as an event which took place “over there” in a distant land, thereby being worthy of funding from the Foreign Office, but also one which has a significant impact on the way in which Britain considers itself today. Thereby reinforcing the suggestion that the Holocaust is an historical event which can provide “lessons” for Britain, both in terms of what it reveals about the British people and how it can aid contemporary British society’s domestic community affairs through the questions it raises about citizenship. This once again points to the internalisation, and domestication of the Holocaust, whilst concurrently reinforcing this domestication through a site of memory with little direct connection to the British experience itself.

The call for help made by Polish authorities to the international community also reinforces the importance of the position of Auschwitz in international consciousness. By asking for financial support from countries across the world the Museum authorities are not only stating that Auschwitz *should* be everyone’s concern they are also highlighting that the camp has already become part of the domestic narrative of the Holocaust in each of the countries they appealed to. The relocation and dispersal of Holocaust survivors to other countries in the immediate aftermath of liberation ensures that, whether a country has a direct link to the Holocaust or not, a connection can be forged through the presence of those survivors who now live in those countries, such as Britain. Commenting on the declaration by the British government to help fund the maintenance of Auschwitz, Museum Director Piotr M.A. Cywiński noted that ‘Britain initiated a large-scale education project several years ago in which tens of thousands of young Britons have come to see Auschwitz with their own eyes. In this context the understanding on the part of British decision makers of the enormous role of the authenticity of the Memorial in maintaining memory and in the education of future generations should be greeted with acknowledgement.’<sup>135</sup> The ‘large-scale education project’ to which Cywiński refers, and which highlights the extent of the domestication of Auschwitz in British memory, is the Holocaust Educational Trust’s *Lessons from Auschwitz* programme.

The significance of the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project and the Trust, not only in the establishment of Auschwitz as the main site of British memory but also the continuation of it,

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<sup>134</sup> Department for Communities and Local Government, ‘Government Announces £2.1m Funding to Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation’, (26 May 2011), available at, [www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1911229](http://www.communities.gov.uk/news/corporate/1911229), (accessed 21 November 2012)

<sup>135</sup> Great Britain to support Auschwitz Memorial’, Auschwitz-Birkenau Memorial and Museum, (20 December 2010), available at, [www.en.auschwitz.org/m/index.php?option=com\\_content&task=view&id=851&Itemid=8](http://www.en.auschwitz.org/m/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=851&Itemid=8), (accessed 5 January 2013)

should not be underestimated. Established in 1999 the Holocaust Educational Trust's *Lessons from Auschwitz* project is a four part programme for sixth-form students and teachers which includes a one day visit to the sites of Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II. The programme has certainly contributed to the increase in the number of people who have visited the site in recent years. The response of those who participate on the scheme is overwhelmingly positive with many claiming that the 'overall experience was one that will live with me for ever' whilst others stating that visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau 'leaves you awestruck and will be permanently in my memory.'<sup>136</sup> Whilst the emotive impact of visiting the site is frequently expressed by those students who undertake the project this should not infer that the project itself does not have a wider influence in British society. For it is the aim of the programme that students become ambassadors for the Trust in order to ensure that the "lessons" they have gleaned from Auschwitz, and the Holocaust, can be mediated through them into wider society. This is often achieved through students presenting their trip to the school, writing material for the local newspaper, discussing their visit with local community groups or planting a memorial tree and inviting those in the community to witness the dedication. As Karen Pollock observed, 'The inspiring work students go on to do in their local areas demonstrates the importance of the visit.'<sup>137</sup>

Far from simply demonstrating the importance of the visit to Auschwitz, however, the presence of students, and politicians, at the site and the dissemination of media reports documenting these trips ensures that the name of Auschwitz is continually being articulated within the popular British media.<sup>138</sup> The subsequent increase in discussions surrounding Auschwitz in the national press, due to the increased role of Auschwitz in commemorative events, the presence of senior politicians on the visits and the position of the Holocaust Educational Trust in ensuring that their site visits are widely reported, has also been filtered down to the local press as those students who visit Auschwitz disseminate their experiences to others in their local communities. Powerful headlines such as 'School trip to hell on earth' and 'A grim lesson from the past' and the subsequent rhetoric which is employed within each report, alluding to the educational and emotive value of the site, reinforces the importance of Auschwitz in the minds of the British

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<sup>136</sup> Respondent 1 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: South East Visit 2012', (15 October 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com) (accessed 6 July 2013); Respondent 14, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: West Midlands North Visit 2012', (10 May 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 6 July 2013)

<sup>137</sup> 'A project so vital to help pupils learning', *Western Daily Press*, (1 May 2008)

<sup>138</sup> Walker, T, 'A day out at the Nazis' biggest death camp', *The Independent*, (16 November 2006); Hurst, G, 'Clegg sees Reminder of Auschwitz Children', *The Times*, (19 October 2012)

audience whilst increasingly cementing the site as that of seminal significance to Britain's historical consciousness.<sup>139</sup>

The *Lessons from Auschwitz* programme has not simply been reflective of the position of the Holocaust in British society and culture, it has also played a significant role in the absorption and acceptance of Auschwitz-Birkenau as a site which has considerable meaning, and significance, for British society. The way in which the Trust was able to utilise the *Lessons from Auschwitz* programme in such a way as to gain significant media attention for the project, and the site, was illustrated during the UEFA Euro 2012 football tournament hosted in Poland and the Ukraine during which the England football team visited Auschwitz-Birkenau. Members of the England football team had previously visited the site in 2004 yet this was a rather less documented and more personal visit made at the request of some of the players themselves. The 2012 visit, organised by the Football Association in conjunction with the Trust, and carried out with the use of the Trust's educators, was a rather more publicised experience which also highlights the way in which Auschwitz, even since 2004, had been absorbed into British society all the more.

The significance of the visit of the England football team to Auschwitz was, as the *Daily Express* asserted, due to the fact that, 'As we know young people look upon famous footballers as role models....it seems highly likely that if Wayne Rooney conveys something of what he felt on a visit to Auschwitz where so many millions lost their lives then impressionable youngsters will take heed.'<sup>140</sup> The editor of the *Jewish Chronicle* also looked favourably on the initiative stating that footballers, 'are uniquely placed to communicate the lessons of Auschwitz - not the grand, theoretical, historical lessons but the individual stories and unspeakable horrors visited by human beings on others. Living in his bubble of fame can project a footballer's experience on to a huge canvas.'<sup>141</sup> The mediation of Auschwitz through the apparent 'role models' of today and the 'huge canvas' upon which they could project their experiences, and thereby inform those who may not otherwise have been aware of Auschwitz or the significance of the site, demonstrates not only the continued effort exerted by those organisations, such as the Trust, to ensure that Auschwitz is remembered but also demonstrates why the site itself is considered so vital to Holocaust consciousness in Britain.

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<sup>139</sup> 'School trip to hell on earth', *Nottingham Evening Post*, (26 December 2005); 'A grim lesson from the past', *South Wales Echo*, (14 January 2013)

<sup>140</sup> 'No call for cynicism over squad's Auschwitz visit', *Daily Express*, (9 June 2012)

<sup>141</sup> Pollard, S, 'England's footballers humbled by the horror of Auschwitz', *The Times*, (9 June 2012)

The success of these visits in capturing the public's imagination has also influenced how commemoration and education related to other historical events will be carried out in the future. In October 2012 it was announced by the Prime Minister David Cameron that in order to commemorate the centenary of the outbreak of the First World War 'Thousands of schoolchildren will have the chance to visit famous battlefields from the First World War (WW1) as part of a £5 million educational programme to commemorate the war.' The new initiative even goes as far as suggesting that, 'Two student 'ambassadors' and a teacher from each maintained secondary school in England will be invited to visit battlefields like the Somme, Verdun and Fromelles between Spring 2014 and Spring 2019.'<sup>142</sup> The use of the term ambassadors is particularly striking as it is term that the Trust have used for many years to describe those students who participate in the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project anticipating that they will become ambassadors for the Trust in wider society.

In November 2013 the Secretary of State for Education Michael Gove admitted, during a House of Commons debate, that in establishing visits to sites of the First World War the Government 'will be building on the work of the excellent Holocaust Educational Trust' in order to ensure that 'all children have the opportunity to learn from, and commemorate, the sacrifice of those who fell in the First World War.'<sup>143</sup> It is clear that Holocaust education, as will be explored in more detail in the following chapter, has played an influential role in reinforcing the site of Auschwitz in British imagination. It is, therefore, also apparent that through the reiteration of Auschwitz as a site worthy of visitation and education through repeated references to the *Lessons from Auschwitz* programme within national, and local, press, it is Auschwitz, not Belsen, which is being sculpted and engrained in the minds of British public as the site which holds contemporary relevance. Belsen, as the obituaries of those who liberated Belsen that frequently appear in the national press appear to attest to is, in many ways, a remit of the past whilst Auschwitz holds relevance for the future.

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<sup>142</sup> Department for Education & Department for Communities and Local Government, 'Government Announces Scheme to Commemorate WW1', (11 October 2012), available at, [www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-scheme-to-commemorate-ww1](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/government-announces-scheme-to-commemorate-ww1). Yet the decision by the Conservative-Liberal coalition to invest in these visits to First World War sites is surprising for in 2008 *The Guardian* reported that the leader of the Conservative party, now the Prime Minister, David Cameron, referred to sponsored trips to Auschwitz as among some of the many 'gimmicks' funded by the sitting Labour government. The inference that the *Lessons from Auschwitz* programme was simply a 'short term gimmick' generated a swift popular, and political, backlash played out in the pages of the national press: Watt. N, 'Cameron under fire for Holocaust 'gimmick' remark', *The Guardian*, (23 February 2008); Porter. A, 'David Cameron under fire over Auschwitz gaffe', *The Telegraph*, (22 February 2008)

<sup>143</sup> Gove. M, *Hansard*, House of Commons Debate: Education, (11 November 2013), c634

### Moving the Holocaust Further East

The domestication of the Holocaust, through the internalisation of some of the iconic symbols used to evoke recognition of the Holocaust, including the symbol of the survivor, has allowed understanding of the Holocaust to be sculpted in a decidedly British mould in which sentiments about liberal democracy, moral righteousness and defining of the nation against the “Other” are utilised in order to project an image of British superiority both recognisable, and favourable, to the majority of the British public. The acceptance of Bergen-Belsen as an integral aspect of British history, and British public remembrance, appears to sit comfortably within a British narrative of the Holocaust and of the Second World War in general, which sees the British nation cast in the role of heroic liberator. As Darlow suggested, the Second World War had ‘taken on some of the character of the great justification – a justification for Britain and the British. It had come to be seen as *the* moral war, fought for moral reasons; Britain’s enduring heroic legacy to a world and a new generation which should be grateful.’<sup>144</sup> Reinforcing the role of Belsen in British Holocaust consciousness, combined with the articulation of what the presence of survivors demonstrates about the British national character, would surely act as the final means by which the Holocaust could be viewed as an evil act committed by the “Other”, the triumph of western democracy and the domestication of the Holocaust in British society and culture.

As has been illustrated, however, British historical consciousness of the Holocaust and the way in which the memory of the event has been utilised has not remained static and, despite the assumption that Belsen still retains a prominent place in British national understanding of the Holocaust it has been shown that, in reality, a move away from Belsen in British imagination has occurred. This is not to suggest that the name of Belsen has been forgotten, indeed, the name is oft evoked by politicians and the media during commemorative events. Unlike Auschwitz-Birkenau, however, the site of Bergen-Belsen itself does not appear to have become invested with the significance that Auschwitz has come to assume in twenty-first century Britain. If British historical consciousness has been sculpted in such a way so as to reinforce positive attributes of British national character in the British historical narrative, then the move away from Belsen in British historical consciousness appears surprising and the question as to why the site of atrocity most intrinsically connected to Britain’s ‘relationship’ with the Holocaust is receding in British memory still remains.

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<sup>144</sup> Darlow. M, ‘Baggage and Responsibility: The World at War and the Holocaust’, in Haggith & Newman, *Holocaust and the Moving Image*, pp. 140-145 p. 140

Cole asserts that, 'Auschwitz came to replace Belsen in Western consciousness, as the "Holocaust" came to replace more vague notions of Nazi atrocity and the imaginary geography of the "Holocaust" shifted eastwards.'<sup>145</sup> The move of the imaginary geography towards "the East" initially appears to challenge the notion of the British internalisation of the Holocaust as an event with pertinent meaning for the British people. Nonetheless, when one considers the shift from Belsen to Auschwitz alongside the wider shift of the Holocaust eastwards it is possible to see that far from removing the Holocaust from the realm of British identity the shift of the Holocaust further east actually reinforces British understandings of the Holocaust and their own identities.

Certainly in the period following the cessation of hostilities, the 'misconception which the freeing of the camps fostered was the not unnatural idea that the Germans were totally responsible for the destruction of the European Jews.'<sup>146</sup> During this time the German nation itself was seen as the space on which these horrors had been transcribed and the German people were believed to assume total responsibility for these crimes. Whilst this notion of sole responsibility was being increasingly challenged in the immediate period after liberation, and in the popular imagination for a rather longer period, sentiments within Britain towards Germany, and the German people, were rather more accusatory. Camps such as Belsen provided the physical proof of the depravity of Nazi Germany the British public could see for their own eyes the depths to which the German collective had fallen. Rather than simply considering those such as Grese and Kramer as being individually responsible for the crimes that they had committed they were also 'dismissed as typical Germans, the products of a warped and diseased nation.'<sup>147</sup> One member of the British public expressed this view when she submitted her opinion to the *Daily Mirror* that, 'In all Allied countries it would be good if the present generation of children—naturally not infants—were instructed in the deeds of this nation of barbarians.'<sup>148</sup> The acts of those SS guards within the camps were now being viewed by the British public as representing an entire nation of "barbarians" who needed to be re-educated before they could be reintegrated into international society. Situated against sentiments regarding British heroism and valour this depravity exemplified the superiority of British national character.

Despite the strength of public feeling in the wake of the discovery of Belsen, and the prevalence of sentiments such as these, they were gradually to be replaced within the British sphere by

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<sup>145</sup> Cole, T, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler How the Holocaust is Bought, Packaged and Sold*, (New York, Routledge, 1999), p. 100

<sup>146</sup> Bridgman, *The End of the Holocaust*, p. 108

<sup>147</sup> Kushner, 'The Memory of Belsen', p. 184

<sup>148</sup> Kinchett, H, 'Letters: All These Horrors Must be Known', *Daily Mirror*, (23 April 1945)

more conciliatory gestures towards the German people, who it was asserted, could not be held responsible for a regime which was oppressive and abhorrent not only to those viewed as unworthy of life but also to those German citizens who defied its authority and those who were unable to protest out of fear of reprisals. For, as Flanagan and Bloxham assert, as the Cold War began ‘the rhetoric of the Western allies began to discriminate more between active Nazis and the rest of the German population with the idea of the “concentration camp” used to symbolise the victimhood of anti-Nazi Germans as well as the “racial” or “social” “enemies” of Nazism.’<sup>149</sup> The way in which the German people as a collective, particularly those within Western-Germany, were increasingly represented and understood within the West was soon to dominate the way in which the political classes were to portray and encourage understanding of Western Germany as the final bulwark against communism in Europe, whilst newspapers began to publish articles which discussed how the Soviet Union was attempting ‘to sway west-Germany towards communism.’<sup>150</sup> As Bloxham asserts, ‘The theory of Germany as bulwark against Communism—with the military and the nation indistinguishable, identified with and in terms of each other—was popularized [...] in the west also as the Cold War developed.’<sup>151</sup>

Regardless of political support towards relocating blame for the crimes of National Socialism away from the German people and towards the Nazi hierarchy this reorientation of blame was not popular in public opinion and anti-German sentiment continued to persist. The *Daily Mirror* was outraged at the prospect of making Germany an ally against Communism in 1954, expressing disbelief that Churchill ‘was, it appears, ready to put guns into the hands of the same nation which had so recently been operating the gas chambers of Belsen and Auschwitz.’<sup>152</sup> Whilst the response of one member of the public when it was suggested that Germans and the British should be friends was indicative of the views of many who considered themselves above a nation who could operate the gas chambers when he wrote that, ‘It is a fantasy to suppose that a nation that exterminated millions of so-called enemies of the State in Belsen, Buchenwald and Auschwitz could have changed its ways in fourteen years.’<sup>153</sup>

Despite initial resistance towards an acceptance of West Germany as a bulwark against Communism the increasing fear of the Soviet Union, and a somewhat confused understanding of the countries now under the Soviet yoke, the move towards integrating West Germany into

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<sup>149</sup> Flanagan & Bloxham, *Remembering Belsen*, p. 115

<sup>150</sup> ‘Bait for West Germans: National Front Programme’, *The Times*, (16 February 1950)

<sup>151</sup> Bloxham, D, *Genocide on Trial: War Crimes Trials and the Formation of Holocaust History and Memory*, (Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2001), p. 178

<sup>152</sup> ‘Cassandra tells the story of Churchill and the Daily Mirror’, *Daily Mirror*, (30 November 1954)

<sup>153</sup> Turner, J, ‘Viewpoint’, *Daily Mirror*, (8 May 1959)

Western democracy undoubtedly influenced the places and spaces with which the Holocaust was associated in British imagination. The deliberate political sculpting of an image of a more acceptable German collective as a means of protecting the west against the spread of Communism was to be enhanced by the reality that a vast number of the crimes committed by the Nazis and their collaborators occurred in the satellite nations of Lithuania, Poland, Latvia, Romania and the Ukraine. As Snyder suggests;

‘The German destruction of Jewish society, the Holocaust, was also an east European event in three important senses. The vast majority of European Jews were east European Jews, from Poland or the Soviet Union. The death camps were all located in German-occupied Poland. Half of the Jews who died in the Holocaust perished in death pits rather than in death camps; almost all of the major shooting actions took place in Ukraine, Belarus, Russia, and Poland.’<sup>154</sup>

Fear of Communism had already led to the gradual evolution of a politically led narrative which sought to absolve the German people of the crimes of Nazism in British imagination as a means of reinforcing the threat of Communism and directing British distrust further east towards the Soviet Union. With the fall of Communism, however, this narrative became further reinforced as it afforded both historians, and the British public, a greater opportunity to engage with the sites of atrocity which were located further east within the sphere of Soviet influence. Rather than countering the emerging narrative of the crimes of Nazism being committed by a Nazi elite, thus distancing the Holocaust from the imagined figure of the Western European individual, a growing awareness of these other sites of atrocity actually reinforced the notion of the crimes of Nazism being committed by a barbarous “Other” in an ever more distant land.

Whilst it could be suggested that the move to “the East” simply reflects a growing understanding of the complexities of the geography of the Holocaust in popular imagination this alone cannot account for the readiness with which the British public appear to have accepted the Auschwitz led narrative of violence in “the East.” Most notably if there were simply a greater understanding of the way in which the Holocaust developed, and the sites in which it took place, one would expect to find a greater engagement with other sites of atrocity in the east rather than Auschwitz emerging as the only major site in popular consciousness. As discussed earlier in this chapter, despite the fact that the sites of both Auschwitz and Majdanek remained intact at the cessation of hostilities, the Soviet Union preferred the choice of Auschwitz as the site of remembrance for victims of Fascism due to the fact that it ‘this fitted in with a Communist

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<sup>154</sup> Snyder, ‘The Historical Reality of Eastern Europe’, p. 9

geopolitical model, where the fascists had fled westward and could potentially strike eastward again. Auschwitz could be “orientated” westward with Germany as the past and potential aggressor.<sup>155</sup> This apparent reorientation of Auschwitz towards ‘the West’ as a means of reinforcing the crimes of Fascism and the subsequent oppression of Central and Eastern Europe is well documented. Yet whilst the reorientation of Auschwitz has been considered in relation to its utilisation by the Soviet Union discussion about the reorientation of the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau from the perspective of Western Europe, particularly in relation to Britain, has remained relatively mute. Despite this relative silence, however, it is apparent that British engagement with this site should not be considered immune from being shaped by ideological beliefs and the continuing utilisation of national narratives.

When considering the increasingly dominant role of Auschwitz in British culture one can see that Auschwitz has been re-orientated so as to emphasise the location of the Holocaust as occurring in the rather more distant East. The reorientation of Auschwitz “West” by the Soviet Union could not have successfully occurred without a traditional narrative of Polish/Western relations in Polish cultural imagination. When using Auschwitz as a symbol of German aggression the Soviet Union could not only evoke the memory of the 1939 invasion of Poland by Germany but could also draw on the memory of the First World War in order to inspire Polish sentiment towards a fear of “the West.” For whilst Poland itself did not exist as a national entity at this time, much of the land from which Poland was later founded suffered considerable damage and witnessed much fighting and loss of life. In much the same way one can discern that Britain, and the West, have also drawn on pre-existing interpretations of Central and Eastern Europe in order to reinforce to the public a sense of the Holocaust having occurred outside of the Western European sphere. By assuming this position the British people can not only distance the atrocities from their own lands, thereby disassociating themselves further from the sites of Holocaust atrocity, but also enables them to shroud the crimes of the Holocaust within a wider narrative of imagined Eastern European violence.

In order to understand the engagement with such spaces within British historical consciousness it is, therefore, crucial to consider these spaces of memory within wider historical engagement with constructed narratives of “the East” in British imperial, and post imperial, imagination. For the lack of British travel to sites in Central and Eastern Europe and the unfolding East/West dichotomy, discussed earlier, cannot simply be understood as a result of the Iron Curtain. As

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<sup>155</sup> Charlesworth, ‘Contesting Places of Memory’, p. 583

travel writer Harry De Windt observed in his 1907 publication *Through Savage Europe*, 'most Englishmen are less familiar with the geography of the Balkan States than with that of Darkest Africa.'<sup>156</sup> Certainly it can be seen that in the nineteenth century, 'British travel writers' tendency to depict the region as a quaint but potentially gothic and embodied space.'<sup>157</sup>

Some, such as Franzinetti, believe that the East/West dichotomy has emerged purely from the ashes of the Second World War and the solidification of the Cold War in popular imagination suggesting that, 'Far from being a centuries-old dichotomy...[]...the East/West dichotomy was a creation of the Cold War.'<sup>158</sup> Yet for those such as Larry Wolff 'The idea of Eastern Europe was invented in Western Europe in the age of Enlightenment...' and when considering the move in British imagination towards the Holocaust of "the East" as opposed to the Holocaust of "the West" it is possible to see that British cultural imagination was perhaps more willing to draw on traditional imperial narratives as much as it does on Soviet/Western relations in order to make the Holocaust more understandable and acceptable.<sup>159</sup> For, 'The angle of vision is inescapably contemporary, however remote the object in view. Even when we reproduce words and phrases verbatim, the resonances are those of our time. However faithfully we document a period and steep ourselves in the sources we cannot rid ourselves of afterthought'<sup>160</sup> it also can be influenced by past narratives, prejudices and the many complexities of existing understanding and perception.

Certainly it can be discerned that, '...the European East has always been a construct of the imagination more than a geographical fact.'<sup>161</sup> The very term "Eastern Europe", still favoured in British circles over the use of the term Central and Eastern Europe, suggests that the notion of "the East" was constructed from a particular "Western" orientation. As Wolff asserts, 'The Enlightenment had to invent Western Europe and Eastern Europe together as complementary concepts, defining each other through opposition and adjacency.'<sup>162</sup> The constructed entity of "Eastern Europe" has long been a space against which the British, and those in the West, feel

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<sup>156</sup> De-Windt. H, *Through Savage Europe*, (London, T.Fisher Unwin Publishers, 1907), p. 15

<sup>157</sup> Gephardt. K, 'The Enchanted Garden' or 'The Red Flag': Eastern Europe in Late Nineteenth-Century British Travel Writing', *Journal of Narrative Theory*, Vol. 35, No. 3, (Fall 2005), pp. 292-306, p. 293

<sup>158</sup> Franzinetti. G, 'The Idea and the Reality of Eastern Europe in the Eighteenth-Century', *History of European Ideas*, Vol. 34, No. 4, (2008) pp.361-368, p. 368

<sup>159</sup> Wolff. L, *Inventing Eastern Europe: The Map of Civilization on the Mind of the Enlightenment*, (California, Stanford University Press, 1994) p. 15

<sup>160</sup> Samuel. R, *Theatres of Memory*, (London, Verso, 1994), p. 430

<sup>161</sup> Korte. B, 'Facing the East of Europe in Its Western Isles: Charting Backgrounds, Questions and Perspectives', in Korte. B, Pirker. E & Helff. S, *Facing the East in the West: Images of Eastern Europe in British Literature, Film and Culture*, (Amsterdam, Rodopi, 2010), pp. 1-24, p. 1

<sup>162</sup> Wolff, *Inventing Eastern Europe*, p. 5

that they can identify themselves. Not fully “Other” but not fully integrated, the imagined space of the East has stood as ‘a paradox of simultaneous inclusion and exclusion, Europe but not Europe.’<sup>163</sup> It has been suggested that, ‘the term Eastern Europe has a deeper historical significance than is generally accepted’ and certainly with regards to the way in which the Holocaust has evolved in recent years one can see that historical narratives concerning “the East” certainly have a significant influence on the way in which the Holocaust is viewed in Britain.<sup>164</sup>

For as Barraclough notes, “Down to 1945, in many popular accounts even after 1945, the history of eastern and Western Europe and of their relations throughout the ages was portrayed as a grim story of racial struggle, a relentless conflict of Teutons and Slavs, or even as an ineluctable clash of civilizations.”<sup>165</sup> Seen through this prism one can see that Central and Eastern Europe is viewed as being somehow separate and “Other” in British, and western, imagination. Despite the admission of many countries which had previously formed part of the Eastern Bloc into the European Union, for many, ‘Eastern Europe is the in between: neither civilized nor wholly barbaric, neither orderly nor entirely chaotic, neither cultured nor in the state of nature.’<sup>166</sup> The further east one travels the worse the representation appears to become, eastern Poland in particular, is ‘usually assigned negative stereotypes pertaining to allegedly innate and clearly detrimental cultural-psychological traits of its populace. These often questionable interpretations, which refer to such notions as specific “mentality”, “culture” or “attitude” as allegedly prevailing in the region, are linked to selected indexes of economic growth which are clearly negative.’<sup>167</sup>

Nor are such sentiments relegated to nineteenth century travel writing or literature. As one report conducted by the Polish Institute for Public Affairs in 2011 noted, within Britain despite the position of Poland within the EU, ‘...the image of Poland was still based on the old clichéd way of thinking: “East vs. West”, “civilization vs savagery”, with Poland sitting firmly on the wrong side of the lines.’<sup>168</sup> One only needs to consider the recent coverage of the UEFA Euro

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<sup>163</sup> Ibid, p. 7

<sup>164</sup> Snyder, ‘The Historical Realities of Eastern Europe’, p. 7

<sup>165</sup> Barraclough. G, ‘Introduction: Towards a New Concept of European History’, in Barraclough. G (ed), *Eastern and Western Europe in the Middle Ages*, (London, Thames and Hudson, 1970), p. 7

<sup>166</sup> Sushytska. J, ‘What Is Eastern Europe?’, *Angelaki: Journal of the Theoretical Humanities*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (2010), pp. 53-65, p. 61

<sup>167</sup> Zarycki. T, ‘Orientalism and Images of Eastern Poland’, in, Stefanski. M (ed), *Endogenous factors in Development of the Eastern Poland*, (Lublin, Innovatio Press, 2010), pp. 73-88, p. 73

<sup>168</sup> Fomina. J & Frelak. J, *The Perception of Poland and the Poles in Great Britain*, (Warsaw: The Institute for Public Affairs, 2011), p. 7-8

2012 tournament to understand that lingering judgements such as these continue in the British treatment and understanding of Central and Eastern Europe.<sup>169</sup> Against these traditional, and continuing, assumptions regarding this area of Europe, it has seemingly been easier for the British to feel comfortable viewing the violence of the Holocaust against the background of 'the East' than it is against the landscape of, for instance, Germany or France. It is more easily accepted that the violence of the Holocaust occurs in the eastern areas of Europe rather than in the perceived heartland of Europe itself. The notion of Germany, one of the supposed heartlands of civilisation and culture, being responsible for such violence appears easier to accept if the violence occurred geographically further from Western Europe, at a site such as Auschwitz, whilst also reinforcing the distance between the west and the Holocaust. This move has subsequently reassured the British public that the crimes committed were crimes in a distant land, in a different time committed by different people. The British were the liberators of Europe and as such morally and geographically remote from the atrocities committed.

The association of Auschwitz with the geographical location in which it was based reinforces these traditional narratives as well as being shaped by them. It is apparent that the ramifications of the association between Poland and Auschwitz have been felt by the Polish people and Polish government. In March 2006 the Polish Government requested that the name of the camp be altered on the UNESCO heritage list after a number of media references were made, some of them in Germany, which inferred that Auschwitz was a Polish, rather than a German, concentration camp. The Polish Government, therefore, made the request to the United Nations 'to change the title of the Auschwitz concentration camp to remind visitors that it was built and run by Nazi Germany.'<sup>170</sup> It was agreed, therefore, that the camp would no longer be listed "Auschwitz Concentration Camp" but would instead be referred to as the "Auschwitz–Birkenau: German Nazi Concentration and Extermination Camp" to ensure that those visiting the camp would be made aware that the Polish people were not involved in the construction or running of the sites.

Whilst for the majority of the British public this change in name has not been widely felt, it is an illustration not only of the lingering sensitivities associated with both the camp, and the Holocaust in general, but also of the complexities involved in the evolution of memory, and the

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<sup>169</sup> Herbert. D, 'Stripped naked, hosed down with cold water and strapped to a bed', *Sunday Mirror*, (11 December 2011), 'Sol Fears for Euro Fans', *Evening Times*, (28 May 2012); Parker. N, 'Going to cheer on Theo is just too risky: Euro 2012 no-go for ace's family', *The Sun*, (18 May 2012); Taylor. D, 'Racism threatens to ruin Euros before finals have even begun', *The Guardian*, (8 June 2012)

<sup>170</sup> Watt. N, 'Auschwitz may be renamed to reinforce link with Nazi era', *The Guardian*, (1 April 2006); 'Poles claim victory in battle to rename Auschwitz', (27 June 2007), available at, [www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4863026.stm](http://www.news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/4863026.stm), (accessed 21 October 2012)

role of the geographical location of the sites, in allowing distortions of historical understanding to occur. For not only does the indelible association between Poland and Auschwitz become increasingly reinforced so as to allow those in the West to domesticate their understanding of the Holocaust but it also allows confusion to develop about the history of the camp and where responsibility for the evolution of the site from prisoner of war camp to extermination camp should be located. Despite the change in name, however, references to the 'Polish Death Camps' have continued perhaps most notably by President Obama of the United States in 2012.<sup>171</sup> Such slips are usually accidental and refer not to 'Polish camps' per se but rather to camps geographically located in Poland, nonetheless, the implications of such comments allow a continuation of the distortion of the Holocaust in British, and international, imagination. Such are the implications of this distortion that in January 2014 the phrase "Polish Concentration Camps" was condemned by the German Association of Historians who felt that it suggested 'a completely false idea of who was responsible for the Nazi crimes.'<sup>172</sup>

Through embracing the site of Auschwitz as the primary site of remembrance and education Britain is, in many ways, seeking to both domesticate and distance the Holocaust from the British narrative. Sushytska has claimed that 'more often than not the objective of the West is to forestall the encounter with the Other.'<sup>173</sup> Yet by encountering atrocity in a location which is further from Britain, and "the West", and distancing the public from the places of the Holocaust and the atrocities which were committed in these spaces, the West is able to forestall an encounter with themselves. As Kay Andrews suggests, 'perhaps by travelling farther afield we are making the events of the Holocaust more physically remote from ourselves as Western Europeans and therefore find it easier to compartmentalise the events as foreign, or away from us.'<sup>174</sup> Through this lens it can be seen that whilst Belsen provides a usable past through which to reinforce British heroism, in much the same way that survivors have been increasingly utilised to reinforce a constructed image of Britain as a benevolent liberal democracy, so Auschwitz has been increasingly utilised as a useable past which articulates, through the symbolism and imagery associated with it, the distance from Britain to the Holocaust itself. Whilst neither Auschwitz nor Belsen are sites on British soil both have been evoked in different ways in order to assist in the formulation and construction of a British identity defined through the actions of the

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<sup>171</sup> Day. M, 'Poles rebuke Obama over 'Death Camp' Remarks, *The Telegraph*, (31 May 2012)

<sup>172</sup> European Network Remembrance and Solidarity, 'Phrase "Polish concentration camps" condemned by the German Association of Historians', (20 January 2014), available at, [www.enrs.eu/en/news/946-phrase-polish-concentration-camps-condemned-by-the-german-association-of-historians](http://www.enrs.eu/en/news/946-phrase-polish-concentration-camps-condemned-by-the-german-association-of-historians), (accessed 1 February 2014)

<sup>173</sup> Sushytska, 'What Is Eastern Europe?' p. 56

<sup>174</sup> Andrews. K, 'Finding a place for the victim: building a rationale for educational visits to Holocaust-related sites', *Teaching History*, Vol. 141, (December 2010), pp. 42-49, p. 46

past and the actions of the foreign “Other.” For ‘the stories we tell do not just communicate our sense of identity, they constitute it’ and the stories Britain tells about Belsen and Auschwitz within the public arena are no exception.<sup>175</sup> Bergen-Belsen, through the constructed narrative of heroic liberation which pervades British historical consciousness of both the camp and the Holocaust, has been absorbed and utilised in popular imagination as a means by which to reinforce interpretations of what it means to be British. Whilst Auschwitz-Birkenau has been increasingly utilised so as to reinforce the ‘distance’ of the British people from the Holocaust as an event from which the British people were, and remain, comfortably removed. Concurrently domesticating the site of Belsen as a site of British pride and distancing the act of committing the Holocaust through the lens of Auschwitz-Birkenau and the evocation of previous interpretations of German perpetrators and existing narratives of “the East” in popular imagination.

When discussing the need to understand the lessons of the Holocaust for contemporary Britain Tony Blair asserted that ‘we must remember above all that the Holocaust did not start with a concentration camp.’<sup>176</sup> What is apparent is that the popular memory of, and public engagement with, the Holocaust has become increasingly associated with the image of the concentration camp. Even more than this, it is clear that the understanding of the Holocaust is being gained through the prism of one Holocaust site in particular, that of Auschwitz-Birkenau. For, despite the clear continuation of a Belsen narrative within British culture, however, it is apparent that Auschwitz has emerged as the dominant site within British Holocaust consciousness. The gas chambers and crematoria at Auschwitz have come to be an integral aspect of the Holocaust narrative. More than this, they have increasingly come to form the Holocaust narrative itself. As the writer Martin Amis candidly observed, ‘Those images of the rail tracks and the smoke stacks and the terrible emaciated bodies are almost too familiar to us now. There has to be another route to Auschwitz.’<sup>177</sup> With this Amis raises a concerning point. Such has become the strength of recognition of Auschwitz-Birkenau, such has become the success of educational programmes such as that orchestrated by the Holocaust Educational Trust, the popularity of the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum and the prominence of Auschwitz within it, as well as increased independent travel to the site, that these icons of the Holocaust are significantly influencing British historical consciousness of the Holocaust.

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<sup>175</sup> Fuchs. A, ‘Towards and Ethics of Remembering: The Walser-Bubis Debate and the Other of Discourse’, *The German Quarterly*, Vol. 75, No. 3, (Summer 2002), pp. 235 – 246, p. 235

<sup>176</sup> Blair. T as cited in, ‘We must never forget’, *The Telegraph*, (27 January 2005)

<sup>177</sup> Amis. M as cited in Weich. D, ‘Interview: Old Martin Amis Is in Your Face Again’, (14 April 2006), available at, [www.powells.com/authors/amis.html](http://www.powells.com/authors/amis.html), (accessed 21 November 2012)

Far from needing another route to Auschwitz, British historical consciousness needs to discover a route away from Auschwitz and, instead, towards a more encompassing understanding of the Holocaust based on sound contextual and historical understanding as opposed to simple acceptance of certain iconic symbols and images which reinforce preconceived notions of British superiority. Such contextual exploration which considers the way in which Auschwitz, and other Holocaust sites, have been absorbed into popular consciousness is crucial in forging a greater understanding of educational engagement with these spaces which shall be explored within the following chapter through a close reading of *the Lessons from Auschwitz* project.

#### **Chapter 4: “Hearing is not Like Seeing”: Interpreting the Role and Representation of Sites of Memory in British Holocaust Education**

The emergence of Auschwitz-Birkenau as an iconic aspect of British historical consciousness is reflected within the educational environment. In a report conducted by the Institute of Education in 2009 it was reported that in British state maintained schools, ‘two content areas appear to dominate teacher’s coverage of the Holocaust: the period of persecution in the 1930s and a focus on Auschwitz-Birkenau.’<sup>1</sup> This chapter will therefore consider one of the most significant educational initiatives to have emerged within Holocaust education in recent years, the Holocaust Educational Trust’s *Lessons from Auschwitz* project, during which participants spend one day in Auschwitz-Birkenau.

As ‘A place reviled in history for the heinous acts committed there’ Auschwitz may not initially seem to be a particularly suitable place for education to take place.<sup>2</sup> There is a growing sense, however, from both inside, and outside, of the educational community that ‘as alternative educational tools’ memorial sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau have ‘an important contribution to make’ within British Holocaust education.<sup>3</sup> As the number of survivors continues to diminish the rhetoric expressed by educational organisations is that it is increasingly important that ‘students engage as deeply as possible....this can best be facilitated by visiting the sites in Europe and encountering the subject in an environment different from the classroom.’<sup>4</sup>

Tracing the path of the participants as they visit Oświęcim, Auschwitz I and Auschwitz II (Birkenau) this chapter will be a departure from those which preceded it in that it will assume the form of a case study which will both illustrate, and explore, the contradictions which are inherent within the project. Asking what educational visits to Auschwitz-Birkenau reveal about wider British historical consciousness and how they may actually prevent, rather than assist, critical engagement with the Holocaust itself.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Institute of Education, *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools: An Empirical Study of National Trends, Perspectives and Practice*, (London, Institute of Education, 2009), p. 8

<sup>2</sup> Mezga. D, ‘The Imagery of Auschwitz’, *Landscape Research*, Vol. 15, No. 3, (1990), pp. 20-28, p. 20

<sup>3</sup> Cowan. P & Maitles. H, ‘We saw inhumanity close up’: What is gained by school students from Scotland visiting Auschwitz?’, *Journal of Curriculum Studies*, Vol. 43, No. 2, (2011), pp. 163-184, p. 164

<sup>4</sup> Leigh. J, *Holocaust sites in Germany, Poland and Austria: A Teacher’s Guide*, (London, Holocaust Educational Trust, 2000) p. 5

<sup>5</sup> The author participated in a Lessons From Auschwitz course in October-November 2011. The visit to Auschwitz itself took place on 18 October 2011.

### History and Structure of the Lessons from Auschwitz Project

In 2012 the Holocaust Educational Trust proudly announced that on Thursday 18<sup>th</sup> October 'we led our 100<sup>th</sup> visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau as part of our *Lessons from Auschwitz* Project'<sup>6</sup> and in April the following year the 20,000<sup>th</sup> participant made the journey to Poland with the organisation.<sup>7</sup> The project is designed explicitly for sixth form students and no student will be accepted onto the trip unless they are over 16 years of age. There are also a limited number of places available on each trip for full-time members of teaching staff. Initially the project was run biannually and, although offered nationwide, due to practical considerations, including the fact that the flights were chartered only from London airports, the main audience for the programme was based in London and the South of England. The announcement by the Treasury in 2005 that they would commit 1.5 million pounds of funding annually to the project allowed not only a considerable reorientation of the programme but also allowed it to expand significantly.<sup>8</sup>

As a result of this funding the project now takes place regionally with the Trust chartering planes from regional airports allowing a greater number of students from across England and Wales to participate in the course. Two students are selected to participate in the project by the schools which have been accepted onto the course. Continued funding for the project, pledged in 2008 by the same Labour government, and guaranteed in the 2010/2011 session by the new Conservative/Liberal Democrat coalition government has ensured the continuing growth and popularity of the project. In 2013 it was announced that a further £300,000 would be committed to the project annually.<sup>9</sup> Not only has the course become the most renowned educational programme offered by the Trust but it has also ensured that the Holocaust has an almost continual presence in national and local media as students reflect and report on their experiences in forums available to their schools and local communities.

The project itself consists of four stages thereby ensuring that the visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau does not take place in isolation. The first part of this project is a half-day Orientation Seminar

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<sup>6</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, 'Deputy Prime Minister Nick Clegg accompanies students on Holocaust Educational Trust's 100th *Lessons from Auschwitz* visit', (2012), available at, [www.het.org.uk/index.php/component/content/article?id=223](http://www.het.org.uk/index.php/component/content/article?id=223), (accessed 12 December 2013)

<sup>7</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, '20,000 students have now participated in Lessons from Auschwitz', (2013) available at [www.het.org.uk/index.php/component/content/article/11-cat-news-cat-news/261-news-lfa-20k](http://www.het.org.uk/index.php/component/content/article/11-cat-news-cat-news/261-news-lfa-20k), (accessed 14 December 2013)

<sup>8</sup> Gesturing to the expense of students participating in educational projects overseas the Trust provides most of the financial burden of their attendance with schools and colleges asked to donate £59 per student for their participation.

<sup>9</sup> Cameron, D, 25th Anniversary of the Holocaust Educational Trust: Prime Minister's Speech, (16 September 2013), available at: [www.gov.uk/government/speeches/25th-anniversary-of-the-holocaust-educational-trust-prime-ministers-speech](http://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/25th-anniversary-of-the-holocaust-educational-trust-prime-ministers-speech), (accessed 29 January 2014)

which is designed to prepare students for their visit to Auschwitz. Upon arrival all 200 students are assembled together and the Lead Educator of the trip introduces both themselves and the project, highlighting the concept that 'experiencing something first hand is different from reading about it in a text book.'<sup>10</sup> After this brief introduction participants are shown a number of slides containing maps and photographs as the Lead Educator describes the impact of the Holocaust on the Jewish population of Europe and pre-war Jewish life. During this period of time it is re-emphasised to students that one of the most important aspects of learning about the Holocaust is the rehumanisation of the victims through encouraging an awareness that all those involved were individuals whilst concurrently reinforcing the view that the victims were just like us through the use of, for example, a class photograph taken from the Jewish School in Oświęcim. As students are told 'many of you may have similar school photographs.'<sup>11</sup>

This attitude reflects the position of the Trust in their other projects in which engagement with the victims is encouraged through the sentiment that those who perished were just like the students who are learning about their experiences. The importance of survivor testimony in British Holocaust education is also realised as students then hear from a Holocaust survivor who experienced imprisonment within the Auschwitz-Birkenau camp complex. Having heard the testimony participants are then separated into smaller groups with whom they will spend the rest of the course. Each group is assigned an educator provided by the Trust whose role is to stimulate discussion and provoke responses from the students through raising challenging questions. This educator will also accompany the group to Poland and continue to engage with the students for the rest of the programme. Within these smaller groups participants discuss their expectations of the visit and consider its purpose through discussions based around the testimony which they have just heard, tourism at Auschwitz and the use of photography at the site.

The Orientation Seminar is followed by the second part of the project, and the pinnacle of the course, the trip to Poland itself. This is completed within one day with students flying out of the UK in the early morning and returning late that same evening. As part of this visit students first visit a pre-war Jewish site, either a cemetery or a synagogue, and are then taken to Auschwitz I where they are accompanied around the site by a Polish guide who works for the Auschwitz Memorial Museum, and finally to the site of Birkenau where a commemorative ceremony,

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<sup>10</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz Project Orientation Seminar: Lead Educator's Notes*, (Unpublished)

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

officiated by Rabbi Barry Marcus of the Central Synagogue in London, takes place at the end of the day before the students return home. Throughout the visit students are encouraged to engage with testimony and poetry read by the educators at what are considered key points of the visit. As the Institute of Education concluded in their 2010 report into the programme, 'the actual visit to Auschwitz was, perhaps unsurprisingly, the element of the LFA that was most valued most often' and it is this particular aspect of the project which forms the basis of the discussion of this chapter.<sup>12</sup>

Approximately a week after the visit students participate in another half-day Follow Up seminar designed to allow them to reflect on their experiences as well as to consider the historical conclusions and contemporary lessons that they feel they have learned from the visit to Poland. This part of the project is also designed to encourage students to think about the fourth, and final, part of the programme, the student's Next Steps. This final aspect of the programme is designed to ensure the transmission of the "lessons" of the Holocaust to a wider audience beyond those two pupils from each school who attended. This is part of the students' role as Ambassadors for the Trust. As the Trust themselves note, 'Many students choose to focus on contemporary lessons of the Holocaust such as the celebration of diversity; highlighting issues such as racism and bullying in schools; current genocides around the world; active citizenship; and the dangers of being a bystander to racism.'<sup>13</sup> Evidence of these Next Steps as well as a written submission accompanying the material must be provided to the Trust as proof that students have completed all four parts of the programme.<sup>14</sup>

The original impetus for the establishment of a one day visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau occurred in 1996 after Rabbi Marcus of the Central Synagogue in London participated in the March of the Living as part of the UK delegation. Established in 1988 the March of the Living is a two week long 'international experience where teens from around the world come together each year and bear witness to the destruction of the Holocaust in Poland and then travel to Israel to rejoice in the Jewish Homeland.'<sup>15</sup> As Feldman observes the March is, 'an attempt to explore the meanings

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<sup>12</sup> Institute of Education, *Evaluation of the Holocaust Educational Trust's Lessons from Auschwitz Project: Final Report*, (London, Institute of Education, 2010), p. 59

<sup>13</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, 'About the LFA Project', available at: [www.het.org.uk/index.php/lessons-from-auschwitz-general/about-lfa/9-cat-lessons-from-auschwitz/44](http://www.het.org.uk/index.php/lessons-from-auschwitz-general/about-lfa/9-cat-lessons-from-auschwitz/44), (accessed 24 January 2014)

<sup>14</sup> Until 2012 students participating in the LFA programme provided evidence of their Next Steps work to the University of Hull and received accreditation points towards their admission to that institution should they wish to. From February 2013, however, the Next Steps work of the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project has been accredited by ASDAN, a charitable enterprise which acts as a 'pioneering curriculum development organisation and awarding body.' For more information about ASDAN please see [www.asdan.org.uk](http://www.asdan.org.uk)

<sup>15</sup> 'A Journey of Remembrance and Renewal', available at: <http://passport.bbyo.org/destination/national/>, (accessed 29 January 2014)

of the Holocaust in the present through a multisensory pilgrimage to the ruins of the past.<sup>16</sup> Whilst the March of the Living is now extremely well attended by those within the Anglo-Jewish community in 1996, contrary to Rabbi Marcus's expectations, the response from the Jewish community in Britain, 'was so shocking, abysmal, poor, disappointing is an understatement. We were only 16 or 17 or 18.'<sup>17</sup> Expressing his 'embarrassment' at the lack of interest in the March Rabbi Marcus recollected that 'not only did our group have the fewest students but our UK delegation was the smallest.'<sup>18</sup>

This lack of commitment prompted Rabbi Marcus to consider the alternative ways in which knowledge of the Holocaust could be increased within the Jewish community. As he observed, 'people wrongly assume that Jewish people will know a lot about the Holocaust but it isn't always true.'<sup>19</sup> This lack of knowledge, and indeed, interest, inspired Rabbi Marcus to consider that greater engagement was needed with the Holocaust in Britain. Yet he was unsure of how to progress and whilst still an advocate of the importance of the March he also realised that 'in defence of the poor numbers it was a five or seven day trip that's what it is. And you know I understand that you can't just disappear for five or seven days, people are working and then you are going to lose your work leave.'<sup>20</sup> Despite this acknowledgement that the time required to participate in the March was one of the main reasons why members of the Jewish community did not visit Auschwitz-Birkenau Rabbi Marcus was still convinced that visiting sites of atrocity was the most powerful way to inform people about the Holocaust asserting that that the visual impact of 'walking in Auschwitz would be a very powerful message...for people to understand really what went on only a few years ago.'<sup>21</sup>

Subsequently, Rabbi Marcus issued a plea to the Jewish community asserting that 'surely we need at very least to be more informed than we appear to be – hence the idea to organise one day trips to Auschwitz.'<sup>22</sup> When asked about his reasons for choosing Auschwitz, as opposed to another atrocity site, to engage the British Jewish community with the Holocaust it became clear that practical considerations, featured highly amongst the main reasons for deciding to situate these one day visits at this location. As Rabbi Marcus observed, 'it is near to Krakow so you can

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<sup>16</sup> Feldman, J, *Above the Death Pits, Beneath the Flag: Youth Voyages to Poland and the Performance of Israeli National Identity*, (Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2010), p. xvii

<sup>17</sup> Interview with Rabbi Barry Marcus, Interviewed by author, Central Synagogue London, (9 April 2013)

<sup>18</sup> Marcus, B, "*You are witnesses*": *Collection/Anthology of Personal Reflections from the one day visits to Auschwitz*, (London, Holocaust Educational Trust, 1999)

<sup>19</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

<sup>20</sup> Ibid.

<sup>21</sup> Ibid.

<sup>22</sup> Marcus, *You are witnesses*

at least fly in and get in and get out. If you want to go to the other camps you have to fly into Warsaw and sit in a coach for 3-4 hours to get down the eastern side of Poland.<sup>23</sup> In addition to these practical considerations it also became apparent that the prominence of Auschwitz-Birkenau in popular imagination, as a result of the number of people who survived the camp, which encouraged Rabbi Marcus to locate the one day visit in this site. Rabbi Marcus observed that, 'Auschwitz is iconic because there were survivors...so there were people who could give testimony...so because of the survivors it became known and became iconic and became the catchphrase for anything to do with the Holocaust.'<sup>24</sup> Thus, the increasing prominence of Auschwitz in popular imagination led to the establishment of a project which, in the years since its inception, has in turn led to the sustained prominence of the site within British historical consciousness.

Advertised through word of mouth within the Jewish community the first few visits were almost instantly oversubscribed. Gradually the increasing popularity of the visits caught the attention of various organisations such as 'Yad Vashem, CST, United Synagogue...all kinds of people and organisations then wanted to come as an organisational visit to strengthen their own understanding' of the Holocaust.<sup>25</sup> It was at this point that the concept of the one day visit first came to the notice of the Holocaust Educational Trust. Rabbi Marcus describes how the then Director of the organisation, Janice Lopatkin, approached him;

'they asked if they could use the model and I said with pleasure...and for me I was very happy to do that because for me...well there are two things...my aim was, in the beginning, was to take as many people as I could. It is true that I was looking mainly inward towards the Jewish community...So that was my initial aim but then other people started approaching me from the outside and I saw that as an opportunity to reach people that I couldn't.'<sup>26</sup>

After many discussions, therefore, in 1999 the first *Lessons from Auschwitz* project, fronted and promoted by the Trust, took place. Originally conceived so as to inform the Jewish community in Britain about the Holocaust, since the adoption of the project by the Trust, the visits, and awareness of them, have now escalated to such an extent so as to ensure that they are a high profile vehicle through which the Holocaust is mediated to British students and the wider British public. That the project was inspired by a one day visit primarily aimed for the Jewish community in order to increase awareness of, and to commemorate the, Holocaust is significant for it

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<sup>23</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid.

<sup>26</sup> Ibid.

illustrates that the project was initially not designed with pedagogical intentions for a (primarily) non-Jewish audience. In addition, it appears as if the main focal point of the original visits were in order to generate historical consciousness through visiting Auschwitz as a form of pilgrimage, much like the March of the Living. As Rabbi Marcus notes, 'I thought that in the same way that most people respond correctly and visit the "shiva" home of a bereaved relative or friend the format of the one day visit would allow people to pay their respects and keep alive the memory of the countless forgotten souls who perished during the Holocaust.'<sup>27</sup>

It has been said that, 'What is remembered of the Holocaust depends on how it is remembered, and how events are remembered depends in turn on the texts now giving them form.'<sup>28</sup> Within the realm of Holocaust education it is those who choose the texts to use and who situate the education within a certain context, such as Auschwitz, who dictate and help form the historical consciousness of the Holocaust within students. The relationship between the *Lessons from Auschwitz* programme and the one day visits established by Rabbi Marcus in the wake of a poorly attended March of the Living suggests significant complexities, about the way in which the project has developed, the purpose of the visits and the way in which they are conducted. The Trust is seemingly aware of the complexities of these origins and whilst attempting to re-orientate the project towards a more multicultural language it is apparent that tensions exist between the project as it was first devised and the aims and objectives of the programme as it exists today. The continued role of the Rabbi himself within the project in part contributes to these tensions, as does his insistence that the model he created is observed so that the potency of the message which he wanted to transmit was not lost. These tensions are rarely acknowledged, let alone explored, within either academic exploration or by the Trust themselves, however, they will be examined throughout this chapter.

### *The One Day Visit: Considering Oświecim*

On the day of the visit, bleary eyed, the participants arrive early at the British airport from which they will depart for Poland. Whilst the majority clearly pay attention to the advice about dressing suitably for the visit some choose to ignore comfort preferring instead to wear inappropriate footwear, such as high heeled shoes, ill-suited to a full day of walking around the

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<sup>27</sup> Marcus, *You are Witnesses*. It should be observed that the Trust does not deliberately attempt to conceal the origins of the programme, indeed, the presence of the original founder on each trip reinforces this fact. Yet it is an aspect of the historical foundations of the programme which is rarely alluded to or discussed in either the public, or even the academic, sphere.

<sup>28</sup> Young, J, *Writing and Rewriting the Holocaust: Narrative and the Consequences of Interpretation*, (Bloomington, Indiana University Press, 1988), p. 1

sites of Oświęcim, Auschwitz and Birkenau. Once on the plane educators distribute a booklet to each participant entitled *Your Visit* which provides some historical background to Jewish life before the Holocaust and to Auschwitz-Birkenau. Alongside this material students also receive a smaller booklet of survivor testimonies which, the Trust assert, 'give us a unique insight into the Holocaust.'<sup>29</sup>

Upon arrival in Poland students are hurried out of the airport and directed towards a number of coaches which take them, and their educators, to the first stop of the visit, the town of Oświęcim where they will explore pre-war Jewish life at either the Jewish cemetery or the former site of the Great Synagogue and the Auschwitz Jewish Centre. As students disembark from the coaches and walk to the site to which their group has been assigned they barely have time to glance at, or consider, any aspect of the town of Oświęcim other than the relevant sites to which they have been directed. Those students taken to the former site of the Great Synagogue look down on an empty green space as they are asked to imagine the structure which used to stand there whilst descriptions of the thriving Jewish community which used to worship there are articulated to them.

The purpose of this particular part of the visit is primarily to contextualise the pre-war Jewish experience in Oświęcim and to rehumanise the victims through encouraging participants to appreciate that, before the Holocaust, 'they had lives, families and thriving communities,' whilst also pressing upon students that far from not being integrated with the non-Jewish community the Jewish inhabitants of Oświęcim co-existed happily with fellow residents.<sup>30</sup> Reflective of responses to Holocaust education carried out within Britain it is apparent that many teachers support the inclusion of a discussion of pre-war Jewish life as a means of rehumanising the victims. One participating teacher observed that, 'Many of my students would never have been into a synagogue before and I feel that there needs to be an awareness of the fact that the Jewish community during the Nazi period were more than just victims.'<sup>31</sup>

The inclusion of a visit to Oświęcim is one of the few major reconfigurations of the original one day visits to have taken place. Whilst Rabbi Marcus did include explorations of pre-war Jewish life in his visits rather than situating these discussions within the town of Oświęcim he chose instead to take participants to Krakow after, as opposed to before, the tour of Auschwitz-

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<sup>29</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Survivor Testimonies Booklet*, (Unpublished 2011)

<sup>30</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz Educator Notes: Synagogues*, (Unpublished)

<sup>31</sup> Respondent 5 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: Wales Visit 2013', (12 March 2013), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 29 August 2013)

Birkenau. As Rabbi Marcus notes, 'I took them into the town of Krakow into the old Jewish quarter and showed them the cemetery there and the old Jewish synagogue and they got a feel of the ghetto before we went to the airport.'<sup>32</sup> The Trust has not only reversed the order of the project, so as to allow students the opportunity to consider those who perished in Auschwitz-Birkenau outside of the yolk of victimhood prior to visiting the camps, but has also ensured that this is considered in the space of Oświęcim. Thereby allowing students to consider, and to contextualise, the impact of the Holocaust on a particular Jewish community which proved all the more poignant when one considers that there is no Jewish person living in Oświęcim today.

Nonetheless, despite the intentions behind this part of the visit, for some participants the visit to Oświęcim was viewed as being somewhat irrelevant with many expressing the view that the valuable time spent contextualising the wider Jewish experience would have been better spent exploring the sites of Auschwitz and Birkenau with one student stating that, 'We didn't really see anything, it was just a big, green, open space. I think the time might have been better spent somewhere else.'<sup>33</sup> Despite the assertion of an educator from the Trust that 'It is one's presence in a site of absence which is so educationally powerful' the sense that engaging with an absence was difficult, and for some, irrelevant, was echoed by a participating teacher who felt that, 'going somewhere and standing on the soil that used to be the foundation of a religious building somewhat anti-climactic in relation to the rest of the trip.'<sup>34</sup> Nonetheless, the inclusion of this aspect of the visit, given the relatively short time available to educators in Poland, reinforces the extent to which putting a human face on the Holocaust's victims through the exploration of the individual experience has become such a significant aspect of contemporary British Holocaust education. Notwithstanding the sentiments expressed by some participants regarding the visit to the pre-war sites the inclusion of this element of the visit is an addition which Rabbi Marcus embraces asserting that it is 'absolutely an improvement. And...it gives it a bit of a balance and a bit of perspective and it works well.'<sup>35</sup>

Despite the importance of this stage of the visit, however, the speed at which this stage of the project takes place means that what the Trust is trying to achieve is threatened by the very lack of time which is attributed to this part of the visit. Regardless of the appreciation within the

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<sup>32</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

<sup>33</sup> Respondent 2, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: London South Visit 2012', (4 May 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 29 August 2013)

<sup>34</sup> Jackson, T, 'Lessons of the Holocaust', *History Today*, Vol. 63, No. 12, (December 2013), p.7; Respondent 4 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: Eastern 2013', (14 February 2013), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 14 August 2013)

<sup>35</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

Trust that contextualising the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau is extremely important the time allotted to this part of the visit is only 40 minutes and as educators are told, 'This is a short part of the day and time may be lost due to flight delays.'<sup>36</sup> The necessarily brief engagement with the site has led to some participants expressing their concerns that the restrictions placed on this part of the trip significantly impacted on the value they felt they gained from the visit. One student observed that, 'I felt that we could have spent more time there. It felt very like we were simply speeding through the place in the bus and not given time to really see it and appreciate it properly.'<sup>37</sup> Another noted that whilst it was crucial to contextualise the Holocaust within a wider narrative of Jewish life in Oświęcim 'we hardly given any time, herded in and not really allowed to look at the museum information.'<sup>38</sup> One respondent articulated the situation succinctly observing that, 'Had it not been so rushed it definitely would have been excellent. Alas we only spent 5 minutes there.'<sup>39</sup>

The issue of time is not solely associated with this particular stage of the visit. As Maitles and Cowan note, 'Whether a visit to Auschwitz I and Birkenau are included as a tourist attraction of Krakow or part of an educational day visit that accommodates plane schedules, its quick, organised pace can be criticised in that its visitors may require considerably more time to absorb its contents than they are allocated.'<sup>40</sup> It is apparent within feedback left through anonymous online surveys completed by those who participate in the course that many felt that they 'Needed to spend more than a day there.'<sup>41</sup> Such comments are echoed by the sentiments expressed by a participating teacher who observed that, 'the very long day made it difficult for students to really immerse themselves in their learning and fully absorb the experience. It would be better if there was an overnight stay in order for them to take on the significance of Auschwitz-Birkenau and understand more of the historical context surrounding the Holocaust, perhaps by spending a day in Krakow.'<sup>42</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Lessons from Auschwitz Educator Notes: Synagogue.

<sup>37</sup> Respondent 49, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: East Midlands Visit 2010', (27 February 2010), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 14 April 2013)

<sup>38</sup> Respondent 9 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: South West Visit 2010', (17 May 2010), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 14 April 2013)

<sup>39</sup> Respondent 8, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: London North 2012', (7 December 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 6 July 2013)

<sup>40</sup> Cowan, P & Maitles, H, 'It reminded me of what really matters': Teacher responses to the Lessons from Auschwitz Project', *Educational Review*, Vol. 64, No. 2, (2012), pp. 131-143, p. 133

<sup>41</sup> Respondent 15, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: East Midlands Visit 2013', (31 March 2013), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 14 August 2013)

<sup>42</sup> Respondent 4 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: South West Visit 2010', (12 May 2010), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 14 April 2013)

When planning an educational visit it is clear that, 'An itinerary which is too crammed can also restrict the ability of pupils to respond to their new environment and restrict the sort of learning that can occur.'<sup>43</sup> Yet the original project, established as it was for commemorative, rather than educational purposes was not established with the prospect of structured education in mind. In contrast an itinerary which was 'crammed' can be seen to have been considered by the Rabbi as crafting a more emotive environment in which a heightened engagement with the Holocaust, and with Auschwitz, could take place. When asked about his reasons for establishing such a short visit Rabbi Marcus observed that in his view;

'the fact that you leaving London or leaving the UK in the morning and coming back is a great bonus as I didn't want to be a travel operator or a tour guide, dealing with people's hotels and so on, this way it's high impact and it is a very tough day. In the beginning I took a lot of flak from the survivors who said 'one day? You should go for a week!' I mean I understand where they were coming from but in terms of the impact whether you are there for one day or two days...in fact I could argue that being there for one day is almost an, a, self-contained experience which is not in any way tarnished by hotels or touristy kinds of things.'<sup>44</sup>

Despite the understandable reasons behind the establishment of the visit as taking place in one day the premise of the one day visit is not without its problems and, particularly when integrated into an educational sphere, could in fact be inherently flawed. The risk encountered with such a short visit is that, not only could it lead to a lack of critical engagement with the site, and with the Holocaust but that, through the lack of time afforded to an exploration of the relationship between the town of Oświęcim and the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau, the camp can continue to exist in students', and therefore popular, imagination as existing only as 'Planet Auschwitz' disconnected from the locality in which it exists and abstracted from the realities of life in the present.<sup>45</sup> As such the visit can be seen to exist as an isolated experience which reinforces the supposed 'Otherness' of Auschwitz and ultimately of the Holocaust. As Charlesworth notes, for many 'the lived place of Oświęcim has become lost, its geography ignored and disembedded.'<sup>46</sup> As a space considered sacred it is apparent that the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau has also become increasingly disconnected from the surroundings in which it exists whilst concurrently the locality in which it exists has become increasingly subsumed under the presence of the remains of the camp. As Ashworth astutely observes, 'Holocaust

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<sup>43</sup> Snelson. H, 'I understood before but not like this: Maximising historical learning by letting pupils take control of trips', *Teaching History*, Vol. 126, (2007), pp. 6-11, p. 7

<sup>44</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

<sup>45</sup> Dwork. D & and Van Pelt. R.J, *Auschwitz*, (London, W.W.Norton and Company, 2002), p. 361

<sup>46</sup> Charlesworth. A, Stenning. A, Guzik. R & Paszkowski. M, 'Out of Place' in Auschwitz? Contested Development in Post-War and Post-Socialist Oświęcim', *Ethics, Place & Environment: A Journal of Philosophy & Geography*, Vol. 9, No. 2, (2006), pp. 149-172, p. 150

heritage is inherently a heritage without a local community existing in a community without a heritage.<sup>47</sup>

The decision by the Trust to frame the exploration of pre-war Jewish life within the space of Oświęcim, as opposed to the more removed space of Krakow, could be viewed as a step towards ensuring that this “bubble” does not continue to exist. As Bowlby notes, ‘While more than a million people arrive up the road at the museum every year, in the town centre there is no hint of it being a tourist destination.’<sup>48</sup> It is often the case that ‘visitors to Auschwitz make a point of shunning the town, not wishing to linger. They cannot understand, they say, how anyone could still live here.’<sup>49</sup> Through the exploration of the life of the Jewish population of Oświęcim prior to the Holocaust, it could be said that it is not only they, but also the camps, the town and the experiences of the people of Oświęcim themselves which are contextualised.

Despite the intentions of the Trust, however, it is apparent that the neither the town, nor the people who reside within it, are animated by raising discussion of pre-war Jewish life within the space of Oświęcim. Whilst the visit is an attempt to contextualise the locality in which the camps were able to exist it does not consider the residents nor does it consider the proximity of the town itself to the camp preferring to rehumanise the victims rather than considering the camps relationship with, and impact on, the people of Oświęcim. It may be that the Trust does not feel that such discussion of the legacy of the Holocaust in post-war Oświęcim is a relevant or suitable subject to discuss. Given the emphasis on the contemporary relevance of the Holocaust in the present day, however, it is apparent that a discussion of the impact of the proximity of the remains of the camp to the town of Oświęcim would in fact be perfectly suited to the *Lessons from Auschwitz* programme and objectives. For the project exists within the tensions which surround the legacy of atrocity in a local, national and global context as much as it takes place within the context of British cultural memory of the Holocaust. The danger is that the heightened emotion generated within a one day visit, during which the town of Oświęcim is passed through yet fundamentally overlooked, could influence students perceptions in such a way so as they gain a distorted impression of the environment surrounding the Holocaust sites and the people who live beside them.

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<sup>47</sup> Ashworth. G.J, ‘Holocaust Tourism: The Experience of Kraków-Kazimierz’, *International Research in Geographical and Environmental Education*, Vol. 11, No. 4, (2002), pp. 363-367, p.367

<sup>48</sup> Bowlby. C, ‘Emerging from the shadow of Auschwitz’, (31 July 2010), available at [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from\\_our\\_own\\_correspondent/8868666.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/from_our_own_correspondent/8868666.stm), (accessed 24 January 2014)

<sup>49</sup> Ibid.

### The Narrative of “the East”

It has been asserted that, ‘Being away from the centres of normal everyday society the Holocaust site is more than a place of curiosity. It is a symbol of a world that is different, threatening and challenging.’<sup>50</sup> The site of Auschwitz-Birkenau is certainly a challenging one. Despite assumptions to the contrary, however, the sites of Auschwitz and of Birkenau are not of another world and the site continues to exist alongside modern day Oświęcim in which the ‘normal and everyday society’ to which Leigh refers continues alongside the stark reality of the camps existence. As Jacobs notes, ‘in Poland in particular, where the genocide of the Jews was most pronounced, the boundaries between the sacralization of the horrors of the past and the day-to-day lives of those living in the present have become uncomfortably blurred.’<sup>51</sup> For ‘neither Auschwitz nor Birkenau lingers monolithically’ rather they co-exist within a wider narrative of the place and people of neighbouring Oświęcim.<sup>52</sup> Such is the indelible connection between camp and town that part of the camp was absorbed into the town as a means of providing housing at the end of the war. This reality is not acknowledged to visitors, and is certainly not discussed with students, yet this association illustrates acutely the way in which historical realities of the past are subsumed by the way in which they are represented and presented to an audience.

As illustrated within the preceding chapter, ‘The geography of post-war Poland was almost everywhere ‘contaminated’ by Nazi histories’ which has influenced not only the way in which the Holocaust has been remembered but has also influenced the way in which Poland, and the Polish people, have been understood in British cultural imagination.<sup>53</sup> For it is apparent that understanding of the Holocaust has gradually moved eastwards in such a way that has encouraged the perception of Poland as encapsulating the realities of “the East”. The move eastwards in cultural British understanding of the Holocaust and the indelible association of the Holocaust with Central and Eastern Europe could be damaging to the inhabitants of Oświęcim and could alienate students’ conceptualisation about the people who live under the shadow of such a site. This concern with regards to the perception of both Poland and the people of Oświęcim can be seen most acutely during the pre-war visit to the site of the former Jewish

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<sup>50</sup> Leigh. J, *Holocaust sites in Germany, Poland and Austria: A Teacher’s Guide*, (London, Holocaust Educational Trust, 2000), p. 5

<sup>51</sup> Jacobs. J, ‘From the Profane to the Sacred: Ritual and Mourning at Sites of Terror and Violence’, *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion*, Vol. 43, No. 3, (2004), pp. 311–315, p. 313; Dwork & Van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, pp. 359–360

<sup>52</sup> Manning. J, ‘The Palimpsest of Memory: Auschwitz and Oświęcim’ in Kuhne. T & Lawson. T (eds), *The Holocaust and Local History*, (London, Vallentine Mitchell, 2011), pp. 209–234, p. 216

<sup>53</sup> Charlesworth et al, ‘Out of Place in Auschwitz?’, p.161

cemetery in Oświęcim. At the cemetery participants are shown recent signs of antisemitism which are not articulated to those students who are selected to visit the Jewish centre and synagogue. The cemetery itself has been subjected to a number of incidents of vandalism. In 2001 39 tombstones were broken, including that of Szymon Kluger the last Jewish resident of Oświęcim who passed away the previous year, whilst in 2003 a further 16 stones were desecrated whilst swastikas were daubed on the cemetery walls.<sup>54</sup>

Whilst the small size of the Auschwitz Jewish Centre prohibits the ability of all attendees to visit the site it is questionable as to what extent participants can successfully learn about Jewish life in a place of death such as the cemetery. Some of those participants who are taken to visit the site of the former Jewish cemetery to explore pre-war Jewish life noted this seeming contradiction with one participant stating that, 'Our group visited the graveyard, which although showed how there are still prejudices today, didn't help me to understand the pre-war Jewish life. I think I would have much preferred visiting the Synagogue, which represents how the Jews spent their time during life, rather than in death.'<sup>55</sup> Another expressed their disappointment that they 'only really visited the site of the graveyard, we were, in my opinion, not given enough information on how the Jews really lived, what they did, what was really going on in the town, and the sites that any of these pre-war Jewish customs and culture took place.'<sup>56</sup> From the perspective of some participants, therefore, the time spent at the cemetery failed to achieve the connection between victim and participant which the Trust advocates at the pre-war site, and within their educational ethos.

What is more concerning is the inevitable association between the expression of antisemitic sentiments demonstrated within the cemetery and the people of Oświęcim which threatens to foster a somewhat negative perception not only of the people of the locality but also of wider Poland. Concern about the possibility of the perpetuation of a hostile perception being gleaned during the visit to the pre-war sites in Oświęcim was raised by educators who accompanied students to the Jewish cemetery. As feedback from educators in 2011 revealed, it was felt that, 'Possibly participants receive a slightly negative view of Poles in the cemetery.'<sup>57</sup> A lack of time to engage more significantly with the complexities of the legacy of the Holocaust could ultimately lead to students perceiving the inhabitants of Oświęcim, and also of wider Poland, in a

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<sup>54</sup> 'Vandals desecrate Auschwitz Cemetery', (9 May 2001), available at <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/europe/1320431.stm>, (accessed 29 January 2014)

<sup>55</sup> Respondent 46, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: East Midlands Visit 2013', (8 May 2013)

<sup>56</sup> Respondent 26, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: South West Visit 2012', (22 March 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 30 August 2013)

<sup>57</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Educator Feedback Lessons from Auschwitz: Summary of Contents*, (Unpublished 2011)

particularly negative light especially given the proximity of the camp to the town. The discussion of more contemporary antisemitic vandalism led to some participants expressing their surprise that, 'Even today the cemetery has to be kept locked due to anti-Semitic feelings in the city.'<sup>58</sup> Another participant noted that they were 'shocked to find out that the cemetery had to be locked on a daily basis as it was still victim to anti-Semitic vandalism; this highlighted to me the importance of spreading the message of the Holocaust as appalling racist behaviour was still taking place in the small town, despite its history.'<sup>59</sup>

The lack of discussion about the complexities faced by the residents of Oświęcim, in part as a result of the decision to frame this part of the visit purely through the lens of rehumanisation and, also, due to the lack of time afforded to a discussion of pre-war life in Oświęcim ultimately means that the complexities of the Holocaust, and the ensuing complexities associated with its legacy, are not considered. Nor are discussions about the utilisation of Auschwitz by neo-Nazi extremists outside of Poland used to contextualise the antisemitic vandalism which has taken place in Oświęcim. As such a somewhat negative perception of the Polish community, both in Oświęcim and the wider country, is unintentionally sculpted due to the pursuit of a more emotionally engaging 'high impact' experience.

The significance of the need to contextualise the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau is made even more apparent when one considers that, when well-planned and contextualised, educational visits 'have the power to deepen and broaden understanding.'<sup>60</sup> Nonetheless, although participants are encouraged to believe that they have a greater understanding of the Jewish community which resided in Oświęcim yet they have gained little, or no, contextualisation of the site as it exists within Oświęcim. As one participant observed it would be more pertinent to include 'more information about the town pre-war and facts to make it seem more relevant' to the wider narrative.<sup>61</sup> Without this connection or contextualisation it can be discerned that, 'Oświęcim's geography is lost and it becomes Auschwitz' whilst the residents of Oświęcim are only considered within the discussion of antisemitic vandalism, their history and experience of living alongside a former camp, lost within the aura which the name of Auschwitz-Birkenau inspires.<sup>62</sup> Thus the town itself becomes increasingly subsumed by the memory of the Holocaust as the site

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<sup>58</sup> 'Lessons from Auschwitz', (27 April 2010), available at [www.cirencester.ac.uk/news/?id=1100](http://www.cirencester.ac.uk/news/?id=1100), (accessed 29 January 2014)

<sup>59</sup> Smyth. G, as cited in, 'The 100th Holocaust Educational Trust's Lessons from Auschwitz Project', (2012) available at [www.bishopwand.surrey.sch.uk](http://www.bishopwand.surrey.sch.uk), (accessed 14 January 2013)

<sup>60</sup> Snelson, 'I understood before but not like this', p. 6

<sup>61</sup> Respondent 36, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: East Midlands Visit 2010', (23 February 2010)

<sup>62</sup> Charlesworth et al, 'Out of place in Auschwitz?', p.150

of Auschwitz-Birkenau becomes increasingly disassociated with the town and able to assume a position of “placelessness” in participants’ imagination.

Despite this sense of placelessness, however, normal life continues for the people of Oświęcim. As students walk from the site in which they have been attempting to imagine the Great Synagogue, in a space which is now empty aside from grass and a few trees, they pass a number of local construction workers who are repairing the steps down to the area where the synagogue used to stand. As the students pass the workers roll their eyes at each other as if to articulate their exasperation as yet another group of British students trudge past them to explore pre-war Jewish life. As they walk back en-masse to the coaches waiting to take them onwards to the site of Auschwitz I similar expressions of exasperation can be discerned on many of the locals who are clearly used to the scene before them. For those who live in the town and, therefore, both within and outside the Auschwitz “bubble” created by the one day visit, the continual flow of sixth form students within the town poses little real interest. Their presence is simply another reminder of the continued existence of Auschwitz-Birkenau which has come to define them, and their town, so acutely.

#### *From Oświęcim to Auschwitz I*

As the coach travels the short distance from Oświęcim to Auschwitz I students become increasingly quiet and apprehensive. Although encouraged by the lead educator to eat something before reaching the site they do so furtively as if unsure about the appropriateness of eating before starting their tour of the camp, despite the insistence of the educators that they do. Upon arrival at Auschwitz students exit the coach and, after a comfort break within the visitor centre at the site, move with their groups to meet the State Museum Guide who will be leading them through the museum. From there they join the long queue to acquire headphones through which the tour will be conducted. As the Trust advises their educators ‘Time is very short for our groups in Auschwitz I and it is also likely to be overcrowded whilst moving around the camp.’<sup>63</sup> The time allocated for the visit is 2 hours and 30 minutes but frequently, as a result of delayed flights or overrunning at the pre-war Jewish sites, this time is rather more limited than the Trust desires. As such, there is very little time for extended debate as guidance suggests, ‘there won’t be very many opportunities for group discussions and points for reflection

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<sup>63</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz Educator Notes: Auschwitz I*, (Unpublished)

at Auschwitz I.<sup>64</sup> Despite acknowledging the constraints posed by time restrictions, educators are still encouraged to provide some discussion on the move as students pass between exhibits.

The project is centred on the premise that “hearing is not like seeing.” The phrase itself originated with Rabbi Marcus and was used by him prior to the involvement of the Trust in the one day visits. As he recalls;

‘our Rabbis point out succinctly – ‘Hearing is not like seeing’ – I believe we need to see for ourselves, however painful or distressing – if only to be better informed and to strengthen our resolve not to forget the memory of the 6 million who were so mercilessly butchered.’<sup>65</sup>

The Trust has continued to utilise the sentiment and, through both repetition and the success of the project within the British media, it has become a central tagline not only of the project but of the perceived ethos of twenty-first century British Holocaust education.<sup>66</sup> Whilst the mantra of “hearing is not like seeing” may initially appear at odds with the sentiment frequently expressed by educational organisations that in order to educate students from the UK about the Holocaust ‘there can be no better way than through the first-hand testimony of a survivor’ the reality is that as the number of survivors continues to dwindle education carried out through survivor testimony will be increasingly carried out through written and recorded material rather than through survivors being present in the classroom.<sup>67</sup> As such it is likely that sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau will become increasingly central to future Holocaust teaching.

The notion that “hearing is not like seeing” permeates this stage of the project and, as the visit moves away from pre-war Jewish life towards the site of Auschwitz I, the significance of the physical existence of Auschwitz becomes increasingly discernible. Certainly Rabbi Marcus gestured towards the fact that the sites of Auschwitz-Birkenau was more preserved than others was one of the reasons that he chose the site when he established the one day programme noting that, ‘of course Birkenau was purpose built and the sheer size of it is also, obviously, why

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<sup>64</sup> Ibid.

<sup>65</sup> Marcus, *You are Witnesses*.

<sup>66</sup> For examples of phrase being utilised within British media see: Paul. J, ‘Because hearing is not seeing’, (11 September 2010), available at [www.jpost.com/Features/In-Thespotlight/Because-hearing-is-not-seeing](http://www.jpost.com/Features/In-Thespotlight/Because-hearing-is-not-seeing), (accessed 28 January 2014), Campell. R, ‘Into the Past ‘Hearing is not like Seeing’, *Northern Echo*, (26 March 2011), ‘Trip into the Heart of Darkness and a Lessons for the Future’, *Nottingham Post*, (3 March 2012)

<sup>67</sup> Karen Pollock, as cited in Ross-Millar. L, ‘Royston Student’s to hear testimony from Holocaust Survivor’, (18 April 2013), available at [www.cambridge-news.co.uk/Royston/Royston-students-to-hear-testimony-from-Holocaust-survivor-20130418163335.htm](http://www.cambridge-news.co.uk/Royston/Royston-students-to-hear-testimony-from-Holocaust-survivor-20130418163335.htm), (accessed 23 July 2013)

it is the place to take students.<sup>68</sup> The Institute of Education articulate the significance of 'giving knowledge a physical form'<sup>69</sup> and students frequently allude to the fact that, prior to viewing the sheer scale of the ruins of Birkenau and the artefacts held within Auschwitz I, they 'did not realise how big the camps were or how many there were until after we visited.'<sup>70</sup>

Yet whilst hearing may not be like seeing one student noted their frustration that what they saw at Auschwitz meant the site appeared more as a tourist attraction than a site of atrocity noting that, 'In some ways it angered me that it had been turned into what seemed to be a tourist attraction. Yet I still don't understand why I feel that way or why it makes me so annoyed.'<sup>71</sup> This inferred sense of both disappointment and anger towards Auschwitz I is echoed within numerous other student accounts of this part of the visit. Reflecting on the experience another participant observed how, 'Auschwitz 1 was disappointing in my opinion, it felt like a museum rather than a site of where many people were killed' reflecting the views of another who noted that they felt that 'Auschwitz was too focused on the exhibition and museum aspect, making it feel too much of a tourist attraction.'<sup>72</sup>

Concerns about the rising number of tourists visiting Auschwitz have been raised, not only within these educational visits but also wider culture, amid fears that the site is not being treated with the gravity some feel it deserves. When questions surrounding the preservation of Auschwitz were raised within the public arena the significance of increased tourism to the site was expressed with one media report noting that, 'the appeal to preserve the site has raised difficult questions about how the Memorial Museum Auschwitz-Birkenau can balance tourism with due respect for the victims.'<sup>73</sup> Given greater ease of travel the fact that visits to former sites of atrocity have come to play such a significant part in the continuation of historical consciousness of the Holocaust is unsurprising yet increasingly it is apparent that, 'Holocaust tourism is, as a rule, treated with more suspicion than Holocaust commemoration' as for some Auschwitz as a site of mass death is not only the site of a former concentration camp but is also

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<sup>68</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

<sup>69</sup> Institute of Education, *Lessons from Auschwitz Project Final Report*, p. 88

<sup>70</sup> Respondent 15, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: East Midlands Visit 2013', (25 March 2013)

<sup>71</sup> Smyth, 'The 100th Holocaust Educational Trust's Lessons from Auschwitz Project.'

<sup>72</sup> Respondent 13, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: North West Visit 2012', (9 November 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 6 July 2013); Respondent 27, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: West Midlands North Visit 2012', (17 May 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 6 July 2013)

<sup>73</sup> Simon. K, 'This mute witness to genocide must not be allowed to crumble', *Independent on Sunday*, (15 August 2010)

considered 'hallowed ground.'<sup>74</sup> Increasingly, visits to sites of Holocaust atrocity are viewed as falling within the realm of dark tourism. Dark tourism, a concept otherwise termed black spot tourism or thanatourism, concerns visits to sites which are associated with sites of death and disaster. Existing alongside discussions surrounding such 'queasy-making' Holocaust tourism' and the consumption of the Holocaust that it implies the significant rise in the number of people travelling to Holocaust sites has led to increased uneasiness about the appropriateness of visiting such sites.<sup>75</sup> The fear amongst some is that the site is becoming one of voyeurism rather than being visited for more 'morally acceptable' reasons such as commemoration or education.

'The charge that tourists destroy the heritage they have come to experience is as old as heritage tourism itself' and certainly the concern expressed by participants in the project regarding tourism at Auschwitz suggests that there is a perception that increased tourism to the site is somehow damaging the experience of those visiting for educational purposes.<sup>76</sup> Regardless of the acceptance amongst those participating in the project that their presence at the site, conducted for the purposes of education about the Holocaust and remembrance for those who perished, such visits should not be considered to be immune from being associated with the concept of dark tourism. For dark tourists can be encountered participating in 'the visitation to any site associated with death, disaster and tragedy in the twentieth century for remembrance, education or entertainment.'<sup>77</sup> Certainly it can be seen that by 'providing particular narratives, the dead can be encountered for educational purposes. Educational visits to the dead, whether in the classroom through books or at heritage sites through educational tourism, are the basis of the teaching of history.'<sup>78</sup> As Robb suggests, however, 'Dark tourism will likely always include those just looking for cheap thrills, as well as those seeking to bear witness to both past and on-going violence.'<sup>79</sup> Education is certainly not removed from the sphere of dark tourism and, indeed, can be seen to play a significant role within the performance of dark tourist activity. Yad

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<sup>74</sup> Gross, A, 'Holocaust Tourism in Berlin: Global Memory, Trauma and the "Negative Sublime"', *Journeys*, Vol. 7, No. 2, (2006), pp. 73–100, p. 73; Cloonan, M.V, 'The Paradox of Preservation', *Library Trends*, Vol. 56, No. 1, (Summer 2007), pp. 133-147, p. 140

<sup>75</sup> Phillips, M, 'A Distasteful Piece of PR', *Western Daily Press*, (13 June 2012)

<sup>76</sup> Ashworth, G.J, 'Do Tourists Destroy the Heritage They Have Come to Experience?', *Tourism Recreation Research*, Vol. 34, No. 1, (2009), pp. 79–83, p. 79

<sup>77</sup> Lennon, J & Foley, M, 'Dark Tourism – An Ethical Dilemma', in Foley, M, Lennon, J & Maxwell, G (eds) *Hospitality, Tourism and Leisure Management: Issues in Strategy and Culture*. (Scarborough, Cassell, 1997), pp. 153-164, p. 155. For a greater exploration of dark tourism please see: Lennon, J & Foley, M, *Dark Tourism*, (London, Continuum, 2000)

<sup>78</sup> Stone, P, 'Dark Tourism and Significant Other Death: Towards a Model of Mortality Mediation', *Annals of Tourism Research*, Vol. 39, No. 3, (2012), pp. 1565–1587, p. 1576

<sup>79</sup> Robb, E.M, 'Violence and Recreation: Vacationing in the Realm of Dark Tourism', *Anthropology and Humanism*, Vol. 34, No. 1, (2009), pp 51–60, p 8

Vashem, for example, is oft referred to as 'an educational dark tourism site' and educational visits to Auschwitz are no exception.<sup>80</sup>

Despite the fact that those participating in educational visits to Auschwitz can themselves be considered to be dark tourists it is apparent that some participants view there to be a distinction between those tourists visiting Auschwitz as part of a leisure experience and themselves who form a part of an educational initiative. Echoing the general feeling of distaste felt within their group about the tourist experience at Auschwitz I a teacher who participated in the 2013 Wales visit observed that within their group;

'There was also a general sense that the sites are very sacred and should not be regarded as mere tourist attractions. There was some criticism levelled against some other visitors who felt it appropriate to prepare their lunch on the steps of one of the buildings in Auschwitz; have their photographs taken 'posing' in front of land marks; run up and down the railway lines in Birkenau planting flags etc.'<sup>81</sup>

By deliberately encouraging students to eat on the coach, rather than allowing them to position themselves alongside those eating in the space outside the camp, educators thus ensure that they do not participate in this perceived tourist behaviour and also allow the coach to become viewed as a sanctuary for the students being somehow removed from the sites which they are visiting. Through not participating in "normal" activities, such as eating outside of the coach the sense of the distinct Auschwitz bubble, discernible in Oświęcim, is permitted to continue. The trappings of tourism and everyday life are removed from the participants experience of the site enhancing its position as a site which is somehow set apart or Other.

Another participant stated that they were 'surprised at how 'touristy' Auschwitz seemed from the outside. This was mainly to do with the number of buses and tour groups there. Initially on the way in to the camp, it seemed a bit "tacky" - with people wandering around in groups, 'snapping' away at what are well known images - e.g. the gates, the electric fences!'<sup>82</sup> Despite articulating these sentiments the participants appeared not to make the connection that a number of the buses which they saw outside the site were coaches hired by the Trust containing those participating on the *Lessons from Auschwitz* course and that it is those same students, as much as tourists, who relentlessly take photographs of the iconic and recognisable symbols of

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<sup>80</sup> Oren. G & Shani. A, 'The Yad Vashem Holocaust Museum: Educational Dark Tourism in a Futuristic Form', *Journal of Heritage Tourism*, Vol. 7, No. 3, (2012), pp. 255-270, p. 258

<sup>81</sup> Respondent 5 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz: Wales Visit 2013', (12 March 2013)

<sup>82</sup> Respondent 1 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: South East Visit 2012', (15 October 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 6 July 2013)

the site determined to get photographic evidence of their visit to use in their Next Steps work or to show relatives upon their return. The very same “tourist feel” which they attribute to the site is in part created as a result of their very own presence at the site itself.

Such sentiments are indicative of the issues inherent within wider Holocaust consciousness which exists without critical engagement and within a sphere of remembrance governed by instinctive emotion. For whilst students express their disappointment with the tourist feel of Auschwitz I they do not consider that they, and the educational project which they are participating in, are contributors to how and why Auschwitz I is increasingly more tourist focused and why visitors have to attend the visit with a guide and be escorted round the site wearing headphones to ensure people are moved around the site and the exhibits as quickly as possible. Indeed, their presence at the site was viewed as ‘approaching the place with proper seriousness.’<sup>83</sup> The ‘proper seriousness’ to which this student referred is indicative of the way in which those participating in the project tend to view, and are encouraged to view, their presence at the site as worthier than other tourist experiences. Upon their arrival at Auschwitz I fuelled by how emotive it might be the question of whether they themselves are so called “Dark Tourists” is not considered, and the discussions surrounding the appropriateness of taking photographs at Auschwitz and the mediation of experience, are soon forgotten as students themselves begin to document their trip at the iconic gates of Auschwitz by taking photographs of the ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’ sign in an apparent desperation to capture as much of the experience as possible through the lens of the camera.

The increasing demands placed on sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau to provide both an authentic and unmediated experience for those visiting them for both educational enhancement or as part of a wider leisure experience and, yet, to also provide the facilities expected from a site which has an increasing number of visitors each year are considerable. The subsequent tension which exists between the desire to show the world the “realities” of the Holocaust and the difficulties associated with the presence of those very visitors is apparent. Yet it also illustrates the pre-conceived expectations of what participants anticipate from the site itself and is revealing as to what is thought to be gained from visiting a site of atrocity rather than a site in which memory is presented such as a museum, in essence, an unmediated experience at an authentic site of atrocity.

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<sup>83</sup> McGivan. F, 'A Visit to Auschwitz', (13 March 2012), available at D'Overbroeck Sixth Form College Website, [www.doverbroecks.blogspot.co.uk/2012\\_03\\_01\\_archive.html](http://www.doverbroecks.blogspot.co.uk/2012_03_01_archive.html), (accessed 30 August 2013)

### *The Visual Remnants of Destruction*

Despite the articulation of disappointment that the site felt more like a museum than a place of death, participants appear to consider the contents of the displays as immune to the trappings of tourism, one teacher remarked, 'once inside the buildings and seeing the displays of artefacts - the mood changed completely.'<sup>84</sup> The emotiveness inspired by the supposed authenticity of the site which is experienced at Auschwitz I is born not only from the space in which visitors stand as a materially embodied remnant of the past but, also, from what is presented within the displays within the museum itself. Stone has observed that as Holocaust memorialisation has become a more significant part of historical Holocaust consciousness, 'more stress came to be placed on the importance of the authenticity of displays' at Holocaust museums and at Holocaust sites.<sup>85</sup> It has been the seeming authenticity of the sites at Auschwitz and Birkenau which has, in part, encouraged educational organisations, and individual visitors, to travel to them in order to bear witness to the inhumanity of man.

As students enter Auschwitz I the artefacts on display allow a sense of connection to the past to be enforced through the tangible remains presented within the museum. As they pass at speed through the exhibitions, students file one by one past the Death Wall, the base of which is now adorned with candles and flowers as tokens of remembrance left by visitors, through the darkness of the basement of Block 11 known as the Death Block where they see rooms designed for torture and hear, from their Museum guide, about Father Kolbe who sacrificed his own life in a starvation cell in order to save the life of another. Of the other Blocks open to the public it is Block 5 and Block 4 which students enter. Here they are taken through displays containing tonnes of human hair, some of them photographing the display as they pass by despite clear admonitions from guides and educators that they should not. Clearly shocked they are not given much time to linger as the Polish guides encourage them forward to avoid the queue behind them forming an even greater distance. They are, in this instance, voyeurs of the past looking specifically at the key symbols of the Holocaust, the icons of remembrance, and the signifiers of death. From here they are taken to view other material evidence, such as artificial limbs, suitcases complete with names and places of origin inscribed on them, and the clothes of infants and small children to illustrate to the students that those of any age could perish behind the gates of the camps.

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<sup>84</sup> Respondent 1, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: South East Visit 2012'

<sup>85</sup> Stone, D, 'Memory, Memorials and the Museums', in *The Historiography of the Holocaust*, Stone, D (ed), (Basingstoke, Palgrave Macmillan, 2004), pp. 508 – 532, p. 517

As Pluckrose notes, historic sites, and the museums oft contained within them, ensure that 'the remains of the past can be displayed, talked about, touched, wondered over.'<sup>86</sup> For students participating in the project, it is apparent that these material objects are viewed as processing a tangible link with the past. As Rojek observes, 'culture invested certain spaces and signs with an "auratic" quality.' As such individuals are 'required to relate to them with gravity, respect and sobriety.'<sup>87</sup> For many students the item which inspires the most respect and a sense of gravity is the display of human hair at the former concentration camp site which has become one of the more recognisable, and emotive, aspects of the Auschwitz experience. Many claim that until visiting the room of hair in Auschwitz I they did not associate the Holocaust as having occurred to real people. A number of students also asserted that visiting the room containing the remains of human hair was the moment that they felt that they fully appreciated where they were, stating that, 'when I saw the collection of human hair, literally tonnes of it, that I realised where I was standing and what I was witnessing.'<sup>88</sup>

The forcibly removed human hair on display is, Steir asserts, 'one of the most viscerally moving and ethically complex types of museum presentation' to have emerged within the field of Holocaust representation and affects students significantly as it stands as overwhelming evidence of lives extinguished.<sup>89</sup> As one participant observed, 'Seeing the fragments of human life (the hair in the glass case) and the personal belongings of the victims made it all too uncomfortably real.'<sup>90</sup> For students the hair on display acts not only as a tangible articulation of the existence of those who perished but it also encourages a sense of connection between themselves and those to whom the hair formerly belonged. Brain states that, 'since hair grows constantly...it is associated with life and vitality' yet the position of the hair in the museum juxtaposes the association students have of hair with normal life and vitality whilst its place within the museum reinforces the industrialised nature of the Holocaust itself.<sup>91</sup>

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<sup>86</sup> Pluckrose. H, *Children Learning History*, (Hertfordshire, Simon & Schuster Education, 1991), p.95.

<sup>87</sup> Rojek. C, *Ways of Escape: Modern Transformations in Leisure and Travel*, (London, Macmillan, 1993), p. 170

<sup>88</sup> Frea. A, 'Day trip to Auschwitz for pupils from every school', *The Times*, (4 February 2008)

<sup>89</sup> Stier. O.B, *Committed to Memory: Cultural Mediations of the Holocaust*, (Boston, University of Massachusetts Press, 2003), p. 42; The removal of the hair from those incarcerated within camps, and the subsequent assault of the identity of the victims, has become a significant part of the testimony of those survivors who were interned at camps such as Auschwitz. For example see: Bitton-Jackson. L, *I Have Lived a Thousand Years: Growing up in the Holocaust*, (London, Pocket Books, 2000), pp. 74-77, Salz, L, *Concentration Camp Memoirs*, (London: IJA Library, 1994) p.11, Fried. H, *Fragments of a Life: The Road to Auschwitz*, (London: Robert Hale Ltd, 1990), p. 84. As such, this act has also come to form a notable part of the canon of Holocaust iconography in a variety of cultural mediums, not least, in films such as *Schindler's List* and *The Grey Zone*.

<sup>90</sup> Respondent 1, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: South East Visit 2012', (15 October 2012)

<sup>91</sup> Brain. R, *The Decorated Body*, (London, Hutchinson & Co, 1979), p.120

For those students visiting Auschwitz the connection between themselves and the dead appears to have been rendered even closer through seeing the previously embodied fragments of hair. Being able to somehow feel the spirit of those who perished is frequently alluded to when people describe visiting the memorial sites. When accompanying a group of students on a *Lessons from Auschwitz* project one woman described how the voices of those who had perished seemed to 'whisper from the walls' of the barracks in which they had been kept whilst another visitor described how he 'could sense the ghosts of these prisoners haunting the landscape.'<sup>92</sup> The sites, and the objects they contain, create the aura of the "real thing" and appear to establish an acute connection between the present and the past. Simply being in the space of Auschwitz I thus encourages people to believe that they almost see and touch the realities of the Holocaust.

Notwithstanding the assumption that museums provide a mediated experience of the past whilst sites of atrocity, and the material they display, provide a more authentic step back in time, even those sites and objects considered authentic are mediated to the audience who views them. Despite assumptions to the contrary, however, engagement with sites such as Auschwitz is not as unproblematic as it may initially appear. As Wiedmer observes:

'Representation and authenticity stand in uneasy relation to one another. In common memorial parlance, the term authenticity refers to original objects or to actual physical sites where events have occurred, often in the sense that these objects or sites are somehow superior to those whose meaning must first be constructed, and that a type of unalterable truth is to be found in them that cannot be found elsewhere.'<sup>93</sup>

The search for the 'unalterable truth' is undoubtedly one of the fundamental fascinations which draws visitors to sites of Holocaust atrocity. Yet despite this reverence for authenticity the ability to distinguish authenticity from representation is not always as easy as visitors may believe. When discussing memory and authenticity at the site of Dachau Edkins astutely observes that;

'Among visitors today there is a demand for historical accuracy: they want to see things as they were during the Nazi period. They want to see 'the concentration camp'. Yet there are two problems with this. First, many of the buildings from the period 1933-1945 were modified or demolished in its immediate aftermath, when the camp was used for

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<sup>92</sup> Brown. A, 'Walking in the Footsteps of the Children of Auschwitz: Horror of Holocaust Victims Hits Home for Scottish School-kids', *The Daily Record*, (8 September 2012); Blum. L, 'The Poles, the Jews and the Holocaust: Reflections on an AME trip to Auschwitz', *Journal of Moral Education*, Vol. 33, No. 2, (June 2004), pp. 131-148, p.133

<sup>93</sup> Wiedmer. C, *The Claims of Memory: Representations of the Holocaust in Contemporary Germany and France*, (London, Cornell University Press, 1999), p. 165

refugees. Second, even during the twelve years of its notoriety, the camp existed in a number of configurations. Which version would the visitor like to see?<sup>94</sup>

This interpretation gestures towards both the reason for the significance of Auschwitz as a site of Holocaust education and the complexities involved within such an engagement with Holocaust sites. Regardless of the desire amongst the visitor to engage with the historical accuracy of the site of Auschwitz it is clear that the site consists of many layers of memory which extend far beyond the narrative of the Holocaust. The site has also absorbed, and been shaped by, the narrative of Communism, Polish nationalism and Catholicism, narratives of which can be discerned as formulating during the camps existence and evolving during the years following liberation. As such the layers of memory, and layers of influence, which these narratives had, and indeed still have, on the way in which Auschwitz is represented and remembered forces one to consider the way in which representation and authenticity are presented to the visitor. Despite the expression of sentiments about the way in which the camp appears to be untouched it is clear that the sites themselves have not remained static in the years since the camp was liberated by the Soviet Union and some of the most significant aspects of the site at Auschwitz are representations, or reconstructions, of the “authentic” past.

As the tour of Auschwitz I nears its close students are taken into the small gas chamber which existed at the site during the camps existence. Students walk awestruck through the gas chamber and crematoria not quite believing that they are walking through a place where thousands of Jewish people perished. The flicker of candles which have been placed behind the rope barrier and the Star of David draped in Israeli colours reinforce this sense of a tangible link to the past. The apparent commemoration of Jewish victims in their place of death and the presence of students within this space creates the sense of a tangibility of memory and a sense of connection between the past and the present and hushed tones are heard as students absorb where they are standing. Whilst the crematorium in Auschwitz I has emerged as a place of silent reflection its history is more complicated than it may first be considered. For the gas chamber and crematorium at Auschwitz I stands as perhaps the most notable reconstruction carried out by the Soviet Union at the site. Situated at the far side of the camp from where people first enter through gates, inscribed with the infamous ‘Arbeit Macht Frei’, the crematoria forms the conclusion to the tours which take place through the camp. Yet as Dwork and van Pelt describe;

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<sup>94</sup> Edkins, J, ‘Authenticity and Memory at Dachau’, *Cultural Values*, Vol. 5, No. 4, (2001), pp. 405-420, p. 407

'When Auschwitz was transformed into a museum after the war the decision was taken to concentrate the history of the whole complex into one of its component parts. The infamous crematoria where the mass murders have taken place lay in ruins in Birkenau, two miles away. The committee felt that a crematorium was required at the end of the memorial journey, and crematorium I was reconstructed to speak for the history of the incinerators at Birkenau.<sup>95</sup>

The crematorium at Auschwitz I is, therefore, a reconstruction of the gas chamber which had existed at Auschwitz I but which had been demolished by the SS and converted into an air-raid shelter. This reconstruction has occasionally been noted within the British popular press yet visitors to Auschwitz are not usually made aware of the discrepancy between what they think they are experiencing and what they are actually witnessing. As one report in a British newspaper described, 'This restoration was not made plain to visitors, who were encouraged to think that they were seeing the un-retouched place of murder.'<sup>96</sup>

For the majority of the students who participate in the project entering the 'gas chamber' is a profoundly moving experience. As one student remarked, 'It was awful. I walked into that gas chamber thinking I am standing where people once died.'<sup>97</sup> Being in the place where so many people died clearly affects the students considerably. One media report recorded how participating students 'went to a gas chamber and saw the holes where the gas had gone into. That was really intense experience as they saw scratch marks on the walls.'<sup>98</sup> Given the intensity with which students engage with the idea of authenticity, and the sheer emotiveness the crematoria inspires within participants, one could be mistaken for thinking that educational organisations, who are committed to transmitting knowledge of the Holocaust to students, would have highlighted the reconstruction of this space to those participating visit. Yet as one staff member of the Trust observed;

'As with any other aspect of reconstruction at Auschwitz-Birkenau, whether visitors are told or not depends on whether the guide mentions it; in my experience it is rarely mentioned. We don't tell educators to mention it but it does sometimes come up in one of the seminars. The same is true of the execution wall, although guides do say this is a reconstruction more often than they do anything else.'<sup>99</sup>

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<sup>95</sup> Dwork & Van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, p.363

<sup>96</sup> Ascherson. N, 'Remains of the Abomination', *Independent on Sunday*, (22 January 1995)

<sup>97</sup> Booth. S, 'I walked into Auschwitz gas chamber and thought 'I'm standing where those people died'', *Daily Record*, (21 September 2007)

<sup>98</sup> Camilleri. I, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: Young Reporter', (27 March 2013), available at [www.newshopper.co.uk/opinion/young\\_reporter/10318290.LESSONS\\_FROM\\_AUSCHWITZ](http://www.newshopper.co.uk/opinion/young_reporter/10318290.LESSONS_FROM_AUSCHWITZ), (accessed 29 August 2013)

<sup>99</sup> Personal correspondence with Lessons from Auschwitz Education Officer Tom Jackson, (16 April 2013)

As a result, references to this reconstruction are few and far between and students are discouraged by some educators from taking photographs within the reconstructed gas chamber out of respect for those who perished within it. This lack of reference to the reconstructed nature of this particular site is echoed in other publications produced in conjunction with the Trust. Within a guide for teachers, for example, which was designed as a 'travel book' for those who wished to integrate educational travel to sites of the Holocaust into their teaching, the only reference to the gas chamber and crematoria at Auschwitz I is that, 'There is a surviving gas chamber in Auschwitz I which was used to experiment and perfect the killing process. It is quite separate from those used for the mass killing policy of the Final Solution in Birkenau.'<sup>100</sup> Whilst acknowledging the separate purpose of the gas chamber in Auschwitz I to the gas chambers and crematoria in Birkenau, the guide makes no reference to the fact that the gas chamber itself is in fact a reconstruction of the original crematoria which existed on the same space.

It has been asserted that one of the benefits of providing education at sites of memory is that they;

'allow teachers to foster historic thinking in their students by asking them to interpret and explore how these sites present the past. Students can examine how history is constructed by museum curators, consider the role of evidence in historical interpretation, explore the historic narratives told by museums and memorials, understand the perspectives presented or ignored by museums and memorials, and debate issues of what Peter Seixas calls historical consciousness.'<sup>101</sup>

Despite the seeming immediacy of the space with the events of the past students should be given the opportunity to realise that what they encounter at Auschwitz and Birkenau are not absolutes. These sites and spaces exist not only as memorials and cemeteries but also museums within which the narrative of the past displayed is as influenced by the prevailing needs and concerns of the cultures in which they were constructed and exist as those museums which do not exist on sites of atrocity. The objects and the way in which they are presented to the audience are specifically designed not only to testify to the past but also to evoke particular emotions and sentiments within those who view them in order to sculpt a particular narrative of the Holocaust. As Cole asserts, 'Walking through "Auschwitz-land" we do not see an authentic past preserved carefully for the present. We don't experience the past as it really was, but experience a mediated past which has been carefully created for our viewing' and which has

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<sup>100</sup> Leigh, *Holocaust Sites*, p. 119

<sup>101</sup> Marcus, A, 'Representing the Past and Reflecting the Present: Museums, Memorials, and the Secondary History Classroom', *The Social Studies*, Vol. 98, No. 3, (2007), pp. 105-110, p.106

increasingly come to shape, and to be shaped by, the dominant Holocaust narrative which has emerged.<sup>102</sup>

The lack of reference to the constructed, and mediated, nature of the site is particularly surprising given that the re-erection of the cemetery, visited by a number of the participants in Oświęcim prior to visiting Auschwitz I, is explicitly referred to whereas at Auschwitz I such sculpting is deliberately overlooked.<sup>103</sup> This infers that to discuss the reconstruction of sites desecrated by those with antisemitic views, which were previously spaces in which the Jewish community existed, is permissible as the reconstruction illustrates a desire to remember the pre-war Jewish community. Thereby, reflecting the aims of the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project as well as one of the main objectives of British Holocaust education. Yet to discuss the reconstruction or mediated projection of the crematoria is not encouraged perhaps due to a desire not to confuse reconstruction and restoration with falsification. From one perspective the caution of the educators is understandable. The gas chambers have not only evolved as an icon of the Holocaust but have also emerged as a symbol around which those who deny the Holocaust have gathered with many investigations being carried out in the ruins of the gas chambers at Birkenau in order to prove that the Holocaust itself was a myth and the murder of millions in the gas chambers merely an illusion. The Trust may feel that if students are told that crematoria I has been restored, or reconstructed, they may also start to doubt the existence of the Holocaust itself. Yet to discuss how material is presented within the Museum at Auschwitz I or exploring the historical narrative presented by the curators at the site is not to deny the Holocaust occurred but, rather, to encourage participants to understand the reality of the evolution of the camp and the continuing legacy of the site after its liberation.

For those students 'who want to touch real horror' when they visit Auschwitz, the realisation that their experiences are not only highly mediated but also, in some instances, reconstructed, would undoubtedly alter their engagement with the site.<sup>104</sup> On learning that the death wall at Auschwitz was in fact a reconstruction, one student observed that, they 'would have preferred not being told that the death wall was rebuilt, that spoilt the effect and the atmosphere at that particular place.'<sup>105</sup> Consequently, it may be that the Trust is wary of approaching the topic of authenticity and reconstruction. Yet whilst the emotiveness of these spaces cannot be denied

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<sup>102</sup> Cole. T, *Selling the Holocaust: From Auschwitz to Schindler How the Holocaust is Bought, Packaged and Sold*, (New York, Routledge, 1999), p. 111

<sup>103</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz Educator Notes: Jewish Cemetery*, (Unpublished)

<sup>104</sup> Pullar-Strecker. T, 'File under 'never to be forgotten'', *The Independent*, (1 August 1994)

<sup>105</sup> Respondent 1, 'Lessons from Auschwitz London South Visit', (4 May 2012)

until information such as this is filtered into the educational arena it seems unlikely that the mediated nature of such sites will be acknowledged or fully understood amongst the participants who embark on the four part course or those to whom they disseminate their experience to through their Next Steps work. This does not necessarily mean that the reconstructions, and the lack of reference to them, necessarily destabilise the project but rather illustrates the way in which the iconography of the Holocaust which has come to permeate wider historical consciousness is permitted to remain unchallenged within the educational sphere.

### *Bearing Witness to the Past*

Having participated in the consumption of a constructed Holocaust memory at Auschwitz I and viewed the “authentic” relics of the site the students are then encouraged to view themselves as witnesses, and as possessors of a greater knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust, who should now use their experiences to educate others in order to ensure that the Holocaust, and the name of Auschwitz, is not forgotten. As the Chief Executive of the Trust declared, ‘The young people on these visits themselves become eye witnesses.’<sup>106</sup> Whilst this rhetoric is a significant part of the way in which the visit to Auschwitz I is viewed it is important to consider the question of what participants have actually witnessed in Auschwitz I. Certainly they are not witnesses to the Holocaust itself, nor to the suffering of those who were incarcerated within the site. Instead they are consumers and observers viewing the carefully displayed remnants of the past. Yet through reinforcing the notion that they, through coming to the site, have been transformed into witnesses and imbued with the responsibility to inform their friends, family and local community about their experiences, students are encouraged to consider themselves as being closer to the Holocaust purely through having been at the site of the camp. As one participant stated, ‘It isn't like being in a history lesson where you are told that six million people were slaughtered. You witness it and you feel it. It was like getting into a cold bath and being incredibly shocked.’<sup>107</sup> The visceral reaction to the site which students frequently depict appears to emphasise the significance of witnessing to the participants.

Charlesworth notes that, ‘Engaging so deeply with the Shoah through an experience of place and landscape and the experiential encounter of the sense of death at places like Birkenau, Treblinka, Majdanek or at small town selection sites marks many into being witnesses, bearers

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<sup>106</sup> Frean, ‘Day trip to Auschwitz’

<sup>107</sup> Grau, B, as cited in, Frean, ‘Day trip to Auschwitz’

of testimony, just as the survivors were.<sup>108</sup> Yet as Robb asserts, 'witnessing violence is extraordinarily complex' not least when the layers of memory surrounding that violence have become infused with iconic imagery and symbolism.<sup>109</sup> Through the use of the objects displayed particularly, though not exclusively the hair and possessions of the victims, students are led to feel that they are witnessing the crimes of the past. The significance of 'seeing' as the evidence of the Nazi crimes can be easily observed. As one student noted;

'Experiencing something for yourself is far different from hearing about it. If you see it for yourself, those memories stay with you forever...it's still important to go there and see it for yourself so you never forget about it, and then you can come home and teach others about what you've learnt so they too, appreciate the importance of never forgetting this tragedy.'<sup>110</sup>

Such comments not only reveal the depth to which students feel that proximity to sites of atrocity bring a greater understanding of the Holocaust but also raises the question that if so much importance is attributed to first-hand witnessing and 'seeing' why are those they will tell about their experiences in their Next Steps project going to be inspired by hearing about the visit simply because participating students themselves have seen Auschwitz. If hearing is not like seeing then this in many ways negates the very concept of the Next Steps aspect of the course. In addition, these participants seemingly fail to comprehend that what they are experiencing is a sanitised representation of the past complete with the iconic symbolism associated with, and generated by, the narrative of Auschwitz which has come to form the symbolism of the wider Holocaust experience.

In spite of the emotiveness of the hair presented within the display at Auschwitz I, for example, it is by no mere chance that the recognisable long plait has been placed on the top of the mass of hair which is overwhelmingly becoming increasingly devoid of colour as it begins to disintegrate and fade. As early as 1995 the disintegration of the hair was being reported in Britain with one reporter noting that, 'The preservation methods invented and applied by the Poles over the years have not been enough, and indeed no museum in the world knows how to treat so large a quantity of hair against deterioration. At Auschwitz, in its glass-fronted display room in Block Four, the hair is now beginning to turn to dust.'<sup>111</sup> Such has been the extent of the

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<sup>108</sup> Charlesworth, A, 'Teaching the Holocaust through Landscape Study', in *New Perspectives on the Holocaust: A Guide for Teachers and Scholars*, Millen, R.L (ed), (New York, New York University Press, 1996), pp. 174-185, p. 183

<sup>109</sup> Robb, 'Violence and Recreation', p. 53

<sup>110</sup> Respondent 40, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: Wales Visit 2012', (12 March 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 7 July 2013)

<sup>111</sup> Ascherson, 'Remains of the Abomination.'

disintegration that now 'only the occasional braid signalled the remains of something unprecedented and awful.'<sup>112</sup> The increasing degradation of the hair means that it resembles 'a mass of grey more like wool' and can barely be distinguished as the human hair that it is. The placing of a long and recognisable plait at the centre of the display ensures that those who visit the display immediately know what it is that they are witnessing.

It has been claimed that, 'At Auschwitz-Birkenau, the Holocaust Dead teach tragic tales of persecution and genocide and display the conditions in which human survival became almost impossible.'<sup>113</sup> Yet the Holocaust dead do not teach about the Holocaust for they perished years ago and are unable to instruct. Despite this seemingly uncomfortable reality, however, the mysticism and symbolism attached to the belongings of those who were murdered in the name of National Socialism leads students to believe that they themselves are engaging with the reality of the Holocaust rather than with the remnant possessions of the dead which form a part of the representation of the Holocaust at the Auschwitz Memorial Museum. In a guide produced by the Trust for teachers who wish to take students to such a site it states that, 'One of the important mistakes made by educators taking groups to sites is to confuse the site today with what it was during the Holocaust itself. This confusion goes to the very heart of what can be expected from Holocaust education.'<sup>114</sup> This statement appears to acknowledge that the Trust, and the educators who teach for them, are aware of the distinction between the site today and the site as it existed during the Holocaust it is apparent that this distinction can become blurred in the imaginations and understandings of those students who visit the site. For whilst it is not the case that the Trust encourages students to consider that what they see during the course of their time in Poland is the same as seeing the site in its previous condition nor is the sentiment actively discouraged at any point in the visit. It is, however, apparent that students themselves are at times confused by the complexities of what they are seeing and appear to remain unaware of this difference. As one student concluded after participating in the project, 'I think by going to Auschwitz and seeing the destruction and death made it seem so much more real.'<sup>115</sup> Yet students are not seeing death. That they are there at all, viewing the site, ultimately means that the killing on the site has ceased.

The disparity between the realities of life and conditions in such camps, as it was then, and the way in which they are seen by visitors was a concern in the immediate aftermath of the

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<sup>112</sup> Curry. A, *As Auschwitz Crumbles*, (New York, New York City Inc, 2011), p. 1

<sup>113</sup> Stone, 'Dark Tourism and Significant Other Death:', p. 1577

<sup>114</sup> Leigh, *Holocaust Sites*, p. 6

<sup>115</sup> Student survey response as cited in, Institute of Education, *Lessons from Auschwitz Project Final Report*, p. 87

liberation when visits to the concentration camps were discussed within Parliament in May 1945 one member of the House of Lords, when asked about the viability of forcing German citizens to observe the horrors of the camp, responded by stressing the reality that, 'the whole camp has been cleared up. The filth and muck has been taken out of the huts and burnt...But the clearing up is going on steadily and rapidly, and when people go round them in some weeks time those camps will look very different from the way they look to-day.'<sup>116</sup> If the onset of time was a concern about witnessing the 'reality' of the camps in 1945 then the distance between those students from Britain visiting Auschwitz today and the 'reality' of the past appears even greater. Rather than encourage critical engagement with this situation it is apparent that the Trust, and the educators associated with them, encourage emotive responses which imply a proximity to the past which allows students to believe that they somehow know of the Holocaust through the remnants of destruction that they see. Both the Trust, and the participants, must ask themselves the very question that Griselda Pollock has posed, 'is seeing knowing?'<sup>117</sup> Certainly the catchphrase 'hearing is not like seeing' encourages the view that it is, nevertheless, it is also apparent that seeing the remains of Auschwitz does not mean knowing, 'You can't understand. You can only point "here is a pair of shoes", "here is some human hair." But this is a long way from understanding.'<sup>118</sup>

### *Auschwitz II: The Performance of Memory*

At the end of their visit to Auschwitz I the participants, some nursing feelings of disillusionment about how the somewhat sanitised and museum like atmosphere of Auschwitz I made them feel, the majority, deeply moved by the artefacts displayed, then board the coach which will take them to the final part of their visit, the site of Auschwitz II - Birkenau. Upon arrival, as they disembark from their coaches, students are each given a small memorial candle which they are told by their educators to keep safe for a latter point in the visit. From there groups tend to visit the guard tower where they can view the scale of the camp. Educators reinforce to students that they are able to view the camp from the perspective of the perpetrators, a view that no internee of the camp would have seen during its existence. After each member of the group has descended from the guard tower the guide and educator escort participants into the confines of the camp itself. The order of the visit varies depending on the time available to the Trust as the

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<sup>116</sup> Hansard, House of Lords Debate, Buchenwald Camp, (1 May 1945), Vol. 136, cc. 61-97, col. 73

<sup>117</sup> Pollock, G, 'Holocaust Tourism: Being Here, Looking Back and the Ethics of Spatial Memory', in Crouch, D & Lubben, N (eds), *Visual Culture and Tourism*, (Oxford, Berg, 2003), pp. 175-190, p. 180

<sup>118</sup> Pullar-Strecker, 'File under never to be forgotten.'

day draws to a close. Despite the best efforts of the Trust's logistics team, who work tirelessly throughout the day to ensure the smooth running of the visit, delays encountered at earlier stages of the visit, particularly at the pre-war Jewish site, tend to result in far less time than the 2 hours and 50 minutes allocated to this part of the day being able to be utilised.

Despite the time restrictions, however, the visit invariably involves entering the barracks and the latrines as well as spending time at the unloading ramp and the iconic railway lines, on which there now stands a refurbished cattle truck with which students are encouraged to engage. Unlike the visit to Auschwitz I, during which the busyness of the site renders the voice of the educator virtually obsolete, at Birkenau it is apparent that the voice of the educator becomes increasingly utilised. Not only do educators seek to prompt discussions within their groups but they also utilise poetry and survivor testimony to do so. During the visit to the cattle wagon, for example, students stand by the truck and listen to their educator as they read an extract from the testimony of Helen Lewis which describes the journey during which she was deported from Terezin to Auschwitz, 'We travelled in conditions designed to inflict the greatest possible suffering. Old and young, invalids and babies were all crammed together so tightly it was impossible to move. There was no water and one bucket.'<sup>119</sup> Students thus hear about the conditions of deportation whilst standing next to a life size artefact as educators seek to encourage participants to consider 'the value of using site specific testimony to help change our perceptions of a site.'<sup>120</sup>

From here the journey continues and, if time allows, students are also taken to the Gypsy Camp, where they discuss the persecution of other victim groups, and to the Birkenau memorial where issues surrounding memorialisation are raised. These two sites are, however, only visited if time permits and, as such, they are often omitted from the tour of the site. The tour concludes with a visit to the site of the former crematoria where, educator notes suggest, 'the concept of bearing witness comes to the fore' and the Sauna building where students are encouraged to look at the photographs and artefacts on display.<sup>121</sup> From here the participants are then escorted back to the site of the destroyed crematoria II where they are brought together to participate in 'a memorable ceremony' led by Rabbi Marcus.<sup>122</sup>

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<sup>119</sup> Lewis, H, 'A Time to Speak' cited within Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz Educator Notes: Auschwitz-Birkenau*, (Unpublished)

<sup>120</sup> Ibid.

<sup>121</sup> Ibid.

<sup>122</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: About the Visit', available at [www.ifaproject.org.uk/about-us/the-visit](http://www.ifaproject.org.uk/about-us/the-visit), (accessed 12 July 2013)

Designed as a means of giving participants ‘time to stop and reflect on what we have seen, heard and learnt’<sup>123</sup> the ceremony begins with selected students reading aloud poetry and other readings to the assembled group.<sup>124</sup> After each reading the Lead Educator expands on the reading and interprets the reason for its inclusion in the ceremony. The first reading, *My Key* by Rose Aüsländer is included in the ceremony to generate a link in student’s minds between the house keys displayed in Birkenau and their own daily life inferring that ‘This simple set of house keys brings home to us that although separated by time and distance we and the owner of the keys have much in common.’<sup>125</sup> Following the five readings control of the ceremony is then passed onto Rabbi Marcus who firstly gives a speech to the assembled audience and then proceeds to read the Psalm of David and the funeral prayer, *El Malei Rachamim*, which has been adapted in order to commemorate those who perished during the Holocaust. After the ceremonial prayers the Shofar horn is blown, the ceremony is at an end, and students are reminded of the candle they have been given which they are now encouraged to light and leave on the railway tracks as they walk back through the site to the buses which are waiting to take them to the airport and back to the UK.

The inclusion of some sort of ceremony or memorial practice during the visit is not in itself surprising for, ‘In most traditions there is a recognised concept of honouring the dead at an appropriate place.’<sup>126</sup> In addition, the necessity of some kind of ‘end’ to the experience of visiting Auschwitz which allows individuals time for reflection is articulated by Mazga who expresses his belief that, ‘The gravity of the Auschwitz experience demands some ending point. The overwhelming nature of the Auschwitz experience seems to require an opportunity to reflect on what has been seen in an attempt to comprehend its scope and meaning.’<sup>127</sup> In their research exploring the impact of the project on teachers from Scotland, Maitles and Cowan assert that participant responses to the ceremony are overwhelmingly positive. Unquestionably, for many of the students the inclusion of a ceremony at the end of a day is seen as both a fitting tribute to those who perished whilst also providing them with an opportunity to reflect on all that they have seen. One student described how the ceremony allowed them to ‘feel lucky to

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<sup>123</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz Speaker Notes: Ceremony*, (Unpublished)

<sup>124</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, ‘Lessons from Auschwitz: About the Visit’, available at [www.lfaproject.org.uk/about-us/the-visit](http://www.lfaproject.org.uk/about-us/the-visit), (accessed 12 July 2013)

<sup>125</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>126</sup> Leigh, *Holocaust Sites*, p. 127

<sup>127</sup> Mezga, ‘The Imagery of Auschwitz’, p. 28

have been able to pay homage to all the innocent human beings that were killed during the Holocaust.<sup>128</sup>

Unlike the relatively strict script followed by the Trust's educators, the speech given by Rabbi Marcus during the ceremony exists purely as a prompt sheet rather than as a formalised speech. What is said has been expressed by the Rabbi many times before and, therefore, the content is rather fluid with the emphasis of the speech varying according to the particular sentiment Rabbi Marcus wishes to emphasise on that particular visit. A strong orator, the Rabbi speaks powerfully and emotively as he recalls the misery of thousands and the struggle against modern day antisemitism. A number of students even recall his skills noting that, 'Rabbi Marcus is an amazing orator who almost moved me to tears with his "never again" speech' whilst others pay tribute to the fact that he 'is an amazing speaker - he is clearly so passionate, so devoted to teaching us all he could, to helping us remember.'<sup>129</sup>

Within a guide produced by the Trust it is observed that, 'A ceremony creates a shared moment where controversies of interpretation can be put aside for a joint moment of reflection.'<sup>130</sup> Yet it is during the ceremony itself that controversies of interpretation are most notably expressed despite being a time intended to be devoted to reflection and commemoration. Despite Maitles and Cowan's assertion that, 'It would be unusual...where students, teachers or parents complained about this service' responses to the ceremony, to the content of the service and, in some instances to the very presence of Rabbi Marcus himself, are rather more negative than Maitles and Cowan infer, as both students and teachers increasingly utilise the anonymity of the online questionnaire they are asked to complete at the end of the project to offer their opinions on the ceremony itself.<sup>131</sup>

Some participants view the ceremony as the seeming imposition of religion on the project, the space of Birkenau and the Holocaust itself. Others find the introduction of religious practice sits uncomfortably with the rest of the visit as though squeezed onto the edge of the trip, which had appeared, relatively free of acute imposition. Whilst the Trust reinforces to students that they should 'not feel obliged to join in these prayers' and may instead prefer 'to remain silent for

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<sup>128</sup> Respondent 16, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: South East Visit 2011', (23 November 2011), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 8 June 2013)

<sup>129</sup> Respondent 40, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: London North Visit 2011', (6 November 2011), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 8 June 2013); Respondent 49, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: London South Visit 2012', (17 May 2012)

<sup>130</sup> Leigh, *Holocaust Sites*, p. 127

<sup>131</sup> Cowan & Maitles, 'It reminded me of what really matters', p.138

private contemplation' students are unable to move away from the commemorative space and, whether silent or not, are forced to be participants in the ceremony.<sup>132</sup> The prescriptive nature of this section of the visit, in which no option to step away from the memorial space is permitted, is noted by a number of participants. A student who participated in the 2012 North West visit stated that whilst;

'I understand this ceremony was conducted as a mark of respect to those who died, however, respect should still be given to those who are alive and of other religions or atheist - I felt rather uncomfortable listening to the Rabbi's Hebrew hymn at the end of the ceremony and I have spoken to others who also felt uncomfortable and would have preferred to have been allowed to step away from the ceremony at that point.'<sup>133</sup>

Other responses from both students and teachers reflect this sentiment. Some stated that whilst they saw the relevance of some sort of ceremony, 'LFA should realise that the majority of participants on the course were not Jewish.'<sup>134</sup> A student from the 2012 West Midlands course acknowledged that, 'I would have preferred to have the choice to join in with the ceremony or not' whilst a participating teacher recorded that they, 'Felt very uncomfortable during this part of the visit. Didn't appreciate being forced into this ceremony and this would have been the perfect time to be given the option of whether wanted to join in or go and sit quietly and reflect.'<sup>135</sup>

Despite sentiments such as these as Tom Jackson, Education Officer for the *Lessons from Auschwitz* course notes, 'Rabbi Marcus began running one-day visits to Auschwitz for Jews from the UK and, as a Rabbi, it would no doubt have been axiomatic to include a religious element to the ceremony.'<sup>136</sup> Yet whilst the inclusion of religion may have been viewed as axiomatic by Rabbi Marcus within his original visits it is clear that to a mainly non-Jewish audience, many of whom express their lack of religious faith, the ceremony is discerned as having 'slightly oppressive religious overtones' with the one student suggesting that the 'preachy' and 'condescending' tone of Rabbi Marcus felt unnecessary observing that, 'I know I wasn't the only students who was left staring at the floor unsure as to what to do when he led' the prayers.<sup>137</sup>

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<sup>132</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Ceremony Prayers: Educator Notes*, (Unpublished)

<sup>133</sup> Respondent 12, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: North West Visit 2012', (9 November 2012)

<sup>134</sup> Respondent 7, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: West Midlands North Visit 2012', (10 May 2012)

<sup>135</sup> Respondent 16, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: West Midlands South Visit 2012' (3 April 2012); Respondent 36, *Ibid*, (10 April 2012)

<sup>136</sup> Personal correspondence with Lessons from Auschwitz Education Officer Tom Jackson, (9 April 2013)

<sup>137</sup> Respondent 12, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: West Midlands Visit 2013', (15 March 2013), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 14 August 2013) ; Respondent 23, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: South East Visit 2011', (23 November 2011)

It has been suggested that those who criticise the ceremony on the grounds of its religious overtones misunderstand the intention that the ceremony is 'a collective form of remembering and a show of respect for the dead for participants of all faiths and for those without a faith.'<sup>138</sup> Certainly Rabbi Marcus subscribes to this view noting that, from his perspective, the speech and ceremony he gives at the end of each visit to Birkenau that he participates in with the Trust is, and should be, the same as he gives to Jewish groups who he accompanies on similar visits, 'I make the same speech that I do with a Jewish group that I make with the HET and that was part of the understanding that we work together and we've stuck to it and I would be very uncomfortable if anything was sanitised.'<sup>139</sup> Yet the presence of an overtly Jewish aspect of the ceremony not only poses many questions about the visit but also can be seen to confuse students as to the historical reality of the Holocaust. It was important, one student observed when commenting on their visit, 'to realize that the Jews didn't do anything wrong, they were just treated differently because of their religion.'<sup>140</sup> The concern about the misrepresentation of the Holocaust which could, and at times does, occur as a result of the inclusion of religion without greater critical engagement or explanation to those participants in the trip is articulated by one educator for the Trust who expresses his personal view that whilst, 'It could also be argued that as Jews were murdered for being Jewish there should be something in the ceremony that speaks to this. However, Jews were murdered because of who their parents were, not because of any religious beliefs they may, or may not, have held, which does somewhat undermine this rationale.'<sup>141</sup>

Given the relative lack of engagement with Jewish identity, culture or religion within British Holocaust education it could be argued that the inclusion of Jewish influences, such as the use of the Shofar horn and the singing of El Malei Rachamim, within the part of the ceremony undertaken by the Rabbi addresses the decontextualisation of Holocaust survivors from their Jewish identity which has plagued Holocaust education increasingly in recent years due, in part, to the move towards a more universal understanding of the Holocaust and through the domestication of the Holocaust within Britain which uses the Holocaust to promote lessons of multicultural tolerance which can be easily adapted within a British narrative. Yet the inclusion of the ceremony and the attempt to confront and explore notions of Jewish identity when in Poland gestures to one of the central contradictions of this programme as it exists alongside wider British Holocaust education and British historical consciousness. Not only does the visit

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<sup>138</sup> Cowan & Maitles, 'It reminded me of what really matters', p.138

<sup>139</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

<sup>140</sup> Respondent 40, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: Wales Visit 2012', (12 March 2012)

<sup>141</sup> Correspondence with Tom Jackson, (9 April 2013)

seemingly contradict the approach of decontextualisation taken in British Holocaust teaching outside of the project but also reveals contradictions within the project itself. For throughout the rest of the course discussion of Jewish life is one primarily dominated by a desire amongst educators to create a sense of commonality between student and victim and to bridge the differences between “us” and “them”. Whilst seemingly attempting to illustrate the ‘great diversity of Jewish life’ the dominant sentiment underlying each stage of the project is to reiterate that ‘we are not that different, even though the people shown in the photograph lived far away and a long time ago.’<sup>142</sup> Reflecting, rather than challenging, the way in which educational organisations often seek to approach Holocaust teaching.

Regardless of this reflection, however, the Jewish identity of the victims, subsumed under the sentiment that they were ‘just like us’, as explored in earlier chapters, is notably more visible during the *Lessons from Auschwitz* visit. In Britain, the Trust does not discuss the specificity of Jewish religion or Jewish culture. Whilst at Birkenau, however, the memory of those who perished is sculpted in such a way as to allow students to engage with the notion of a lost Jewish culture. The performance of memory within the ceremony at Birkenau, particularly through the evocation of Jewish prayer, is a crucial aspect of this engagement and in the promotion of a more Jewish orientated Holocaust memory. As such, the ceremony is the main articulation of Jewishness within any of the educational programmes carried out by the Trust.

For some, however, in spite of the need to contextualise Jewish identity, the presence of a ‘faith-led’ ceremony, their personal view of this aspect of the visit is that it, ‘smacks of tokenism and also places all victims of Auschwitz-Birkenau (not all of whom were Jewish or religious Jews of course) beneath a religious umbrella.’<sup>143</sup> A situation many would have been uncomfortable with and some offended by.’<sup>144</sup> Of course, reflecting Tom Jackson’s view of the original religious dimension of the visit, with the project having originated with a Rabbi who is still present on these visits one can observe that the continued inclusion of an emotive ceremony which highlights Jewish specificity is as a direct result of the continued presence of the Rabbi within the visits themselves. Certainly when Rabbi Marcus agreed to allow the Trust to base their *Lessons from Auschwitz* project on his own one day visits he made it clear that, ‘if they wanted

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<sup>142</sup> Lessons from Auschwitz Educator’s Notes: Orientation Seminar

<sup>143</sup> Respondent 5, ‘Lessons from Auschwitz: London North Visit 2012’, (29 November 2012)

<sup>144</sup> Correspondence with Tom Jackson, (9 April 2013)

to use my model I didn't want in any way the message to be diluted because the people going were of a different faith. I wanted the message that I crafted in the beginning to remain.'<sup>145</sup>

Yet the reasons for the inclusion of this overt expression, and performance, of Jewish identity are not nearly as significant for a greater understanding of the Holocaust in British historical consciousness as the reactions to it. For whilst the March of the Living, and subsequently the original one day visits to Auschwitz undertaken by Rabbi Marcus contain overt expressions of Jewish identity, and the performance of Jewish religious practices, it is apparent that they sit somewhat uneasily within an educational programme designed for a multicultural British audience. For the universal approach towards the Holocaust, in terms of the universal implications for contemporary society, has become so embedded within British historical consciousness of the Holocaust that any sense of specificity is ultimately rejected when the ceremony expressly articulates the suffering of the Jewish people alone.

Certainly the fact that the ceremony at Birkenau was orientated around Jewish victims led a number of participants to consider that other victims of the Nazis were excluded from the ceremony and they articulated their desire for a more inclusive understanding of the Holocaust to be expressed at this point in the visit rather than a commemoration which, some felt, was exclusive and orientated solely on the Jewish victims of the Nazi regime. When asked for suggestions as to how the project may be improved one student noted that, 'A slight suggestion I have is that, while it is very important to remember Jewish victims, I sometimes felt that Jewish victims were focused on to the exclusion of all other groups who suffered during the Holocaust.'<sup>146</sup> Another expressed similar concerns that 'he didn't really mention other groups such as the gypsies or prisoners of war, mostly just the Jewish victims' whilst one respondent not only questioned his lack of reference to other victims but also questioned his prioritisation of contemporary antisemitism over other acts of violence committed elsewhere stating that, 'I do not feel that he discussed other genocides enough: the Nazis also attempted to exterminate the Romany, amongst others, and the alleged genocide in Darfur seems a far more serious problem than modern anti-Semitism which is currently less violent.'<sup>147</sup>

Such responses echo traditional British narratives of the Holocaust, explored within previous chapters, which prefer to consider the Holocaust within a wider frame of suffering as opposed to

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<sup>145</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

<sup>146</sup> Respondent 61, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: South East Visit 2011', (31 December 2011)

<sup>147</sup> Respondent 45, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: West Midlands South Visit 2012', (15 April 2012); Respondent 42, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: London North Visit 2011', (7 November 2011)

expressly acknowledging the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust in order to ensure that British liberal culture does not expressly articulate the suffering of one group at the potential expense of detracting from the suffering of another. Yet, as a worksheet produced by the Trust in order to counter some of the ‘myths and misconceptions’ which surround the Holocaust they rigorously states, ‘Although certain groups other than Jews (including Roma and Sinti (Gypsies), people with disabilities, Soviet prisoners of war and Polish elites) were victims of Nazi mass murder and many others were persecuted, only Jews were targeted for complete extermination. The Holocaust specifically describes the murder of Europe’s Jews.’<sup>148</sup>

Despite the persecution of many different groups within German-occupied Europe, the Holocaust itself is an exclusive event in history in which the Jewish people were the sole group targeted for extermination during the Nazi regime. Yet in research carried out by the Institute of Education it is clear that after participation on the project, ‘the largest shift in broad terms was from an ‘exclusive’ to an ‘inclusive’ understanding of the Holocaust.’<sup>149</sup> Thus, for participants, after taking part in the course the way in which they feel the Holocaust should be remembered and considered is as an event which encapsulates the experience of many persecuted groups as opposed to those who were specifically marked for complete extermination. This shift in conceptual understanding suggests that, despite the attempt to articulate the specificity of the Holocaust during the project, the continued reference to universal implications is also interpreted by those participating as encouragement to view the victims of the Holocaust inclusively as well as indicating that learning about the Holocaust leads students to reject the exclusive interpretation of Holocaust memory.

Having heard from their Polish guides about the suffering of other groups under the Nazi regime, and the continual reference to universality of the Holocaust as being applicable to all, the rather narrow emphasis on Jewish victims expressed at Birkenau is, therefore, rejected in favour of a more all-encompassing interpretation of the ‘Holocaust’. A student who participated on the 2013 Eastern trip illustrated this sentiment when they recorded their disappointment that during the ceremony Rabbi Marcus, ‘only focused on the death of the Jews, Other groups had vast numbers wiped out e.g. prisoners of war, Roma.’<sup>150</sup> Thus, the reiteration of the universal implications of the Holocaust for contemporary society, visible throughout the project, as well as within wider Holocaust education, which abstracts Jewish victims from their Jewish identities,

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<sup>148</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Common Myths and Misconceptions Resource*, (Holocaust Educational Trust, London, 2013)

<sup>149</sup> Institute of Education, *Lessons from Auschwitz Project Final Report*, p. 92

<sup>150</sup> Respondent 26, ‘Lessons from Auschwitz: Eastern Visit 2013’, (28 February 2013)

can be seen to dilute the understanding amongst many participants of the specificity of the historical event itself. Whilst the liberal narrative of the Holocaust perpetuated within Britain, despite the seeming move away from this narrative in recent years, can still be seen to exist through the way in which participants react to, and reject, the Jewish framing of the ceremony.

As Salmons notes, 'Where the prime goal of the educator is to teach lessons rather than the history, there is sometimes a disregard for the past that can be harmful, actually distorting the historical narrative.'<sup>151</sup> The supposed contemporary "lessons" of the Holocaust dominate, as the very name suggests, the *Lessons from Auschwitz* course with the emphasis on the importance of these lessons reiterated at each stage of the four part course. Yet it appears as if this emphasis on the universality of the contemporary lessons which can be gleaned from the Holocaust has begun to distort the way in which the specificity of the historical event itself is being mediated to students which, in turn, has begun to distort the historical consciousness of the Holocaust itself. This distortion echoes that which occurs when one considers the emphasis on commonality and identification when students encounter survivors. As such the memorialisation of the Holocaust enabled through the increasing distillation of the historical understanding and interpretation of the Holocaust, in favour of a more universal commemorative mode of remembrance and education based on contemporary lessons, ultimately means that the expression of specificity is often rejected in favour of a more universal interpretation of the historical event itself.

### *Iran, Israel and the Rejection of Political Sentiments*

The seeming emphasis on Jewish suffering at the expense of greater commemoration of other victim groups within the ceremony is most acutely expressed when Rabbi Marcus chooses to evoke concern about the threat to the Israeli Jewish community from the President, and people, of Iran. When asked about the purpose of the inclusion of such sentiments Rabbi Marcus observes that, in his view, '70 years ago they said that Hitler was a madman and now they say that Armajinadad is a madman – you know have we not learned anything?'<sup>152</sup> Yet the universalised approach, adopted throughout the visit and within wider educational practices, ultimately means that the articulation of specific, and contemporary, Israeli concerns, alluded to in the Rabbi's speech in terms of the difficult relationship between Israel and Iran, appear to suggest a diversion from previous sentiments expressed. Framed in this way students often

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<sup>151</sup> Salmons, P, 'Teaching or Preaching? The Holocaust and Intercultural Education in the UK', *Intercultural Education*, Vol. 14, No. 2, (June 2003), pp. 139 – 149, p. 141

<sup>152</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

interpret the speech as being in some way the competition for victim status and the misuse of the ceremony as a forum in which to express political sentiments in a bid to encourage students to support the Israeli cause.

Despite a rather fractured relationship between Britain and Iran, particularly in the wake of the 2009 Iranian election protests, one student, who participated in the project in 2012, felt that whilst discussions about contemporary antisemitism were valid the lens through which the ceremony was conducted was, 'Too political, felt like an attempt to justify Israeli foreign policy.'<sup>153</sup> Echoing this sentiment another participant expressed their disappointment, 'when he started talking about Iran and President Ahmadinejad. I felt that it was inappropriate and unnecessary to launch a personal attack on Iran and to me it simply felt like a message of hatred was being spread.'<sup>154</sup> Another went even further in their criticism stating that the Rabbi, 'turned what should be an entirely impartial, educational visit; political...I would like to make a request that Mr Rabbi Marcus should not be allowed to attend anymore LFA trips, I do not feel that the presence of an over-zealous Rabbi, intent on influencing young students will be beneficial to anyone.'<sup>155</sup>

In response to the suggestion that some found the inclusion of discussions about Israel and Iran unnecessarily divisive, Rabbi Marcus states that, 'I know that maybe it is not the most popular but I am not in this you know as some kind of competition and you've got to tell it like it is, as I see it, and I've been talking and doing that, I make the same speech that I do with a Jewish group that I make with the HET and that was part of the understanding that we work together and we've stuck to it and I would be very uncomfortable if anything was sanitised.'<sup>156</sup> For Rabbi Marcus linking the Holocaust with modern day antisemitism, particularly associated with Israel and the Middle East, is integral to the visit stating that, 'I need to have students and teachers just make that little connection that people who were gassed, murdered, starved in Auschwitz, Treblinka, Sobibor and other camps are the same people who are walking around the earth today, we are a lot more depleted but again we are very often the targets of antisemitism and a lot of it is unfortunately driven today from the Middle East and it's under the guise of anti-Israel sentiment.'<sup>157</sup>

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<sup>153</sup> Respondent 15, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: South East Visit 2012', (22 March 2012)

<sup>154</sup> Respondent 26, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: Eastern Visit 2012', (9 April 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 7 July 2013)

<sup>155</sup> Respondent 37, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: North West Visit 2011', (18 November 2011), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 8 June 2013)

<sup>156</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

<sup>157</sup> Ibid.

Not all points raised about the inclusion of discussion about Iran and Israel were against the inclusion of this subject into the ceremony. Some welcomed the introduction of the subject but nonetheless noted that to ensure that the introduction of the conflict in the Middle East into this project had educational value if, 'modern political issues such as Iran's antisemitic stance were to be talked about, more background was needed. Perhaps in one of the sessions there could have been some context about modern Israel and its creation in the aftermath of the Holocaust.'<sup>158</sup> The State of Israel is clearly felt by the Rabbi to be an integral aspect of Holocaust education which should be utilised in an attempt to bridge, in the minds of the participants, the gap between those who perished during the Holocaust and those Jewish inhabitants in Israel and the diaspora across the world. Yet in other areas of Holocaust education, particularly with regards to the educational resources and ethos of the Holocaust Educational Trust, the subject of Israel is conspicuous by its absence and if it is brought up by students in the classroom is quickly dismissed as not being relevant to Holocaust education. Its presence, therefore, in discussions in Auschwitz appears at odds with the Trust which, as an organisation, views discussion of the subject to impede greater understanding of the Holocaust through encouraging a potentially divisive subject into the educational sphere and, thus, highlights the complexities of the evolution of the project when considered within wider Holocaust education. As one educator for the Trust observes when discussing the Rabbi's utilisation of Israel during the visit, 'much of the content is in contrast to HET's views on teaching the Holocaust.'<sup>159</sup> When asked about the Trust's reasons for not permitting discussions about Israel in the classroom the educator went on to observe that, 'When survivors are giving their testimony they are there to talk about their experiences relating to the Holocaust, which is something they can talk about with authority. Their opinions on Israel do not form part of their Holocaust-related experiences and so are not relevant.'<sup>160</sup> Within guidelines produced by the Trust for Outreach educators it also states that, 'The Holocaust ended in 1945. The State of Israel was established in 1948.'<sup>161</sup> The distance between the cessation of one historical event and the establishment of another seemingly nullifies the significance of Israel in the minds of Holocaust organisations.

This should not infer, however, that the Trust itself does not express certain views about Israel and the Holocaust which are, in themselves, highly politicised. Given their position in both the public eye, and political sphere, it is likely that as an organisation the Trust is in many ways

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<sup>158</sup> Respondent 5 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz: London North Visit 2012', (29 November 2012)

<sup>159</sup> Correspondence with Tom Jackson, (3 April 2013)

<sup>160</sup> Personal correspondence with Lessons from Auschwitz Educator Officer Tom Jackson, (14 May 2013)

<sup>161</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Guidelines for dealing with Antisemitism / anti-Zionism in the Classroom*, (Unpublished)

*expected* to express particular, and politically charged, opinions about Israel and the Holocaust by those who support and fund their educational initiatives. Alongside this position, the subject of Israel also highlights the dual role of the Trust as both an educational and lobbyist organisation that has considerable political, and an extremely high profile, media influence. The Trusts' condemnatory response to the comments made by David Ward MP in 2013, during the build-up to Holocaust Memorial Day, demonstrates their prominent position in British society whilst also illustrating both their willingness to articulate their own politicised position and views whilst also demonstrating their attempts to dismiss opinions which are in opposition to their own. Whilst Ward, on his parliamentary website, recorded his view that those who suffered during the Holocaust should be both honoured and remembered on 27 January he also documented his view that;

'Having visited Auschwitz twice - once with my family and once with local schools - I am saddened that the Jews, who suffered unbelievable levels of persecution during the Holocaust, could within a few years of liberation from the death camps be inflicting atrocities on Palestinians in the new State of Israel.'<sup>162</sup>

Responding to Ward's comments Pollock, on behalf of the Trust, issued a statement in which she claimed to be 'deeply saddened that at this sombre time, when we remember those murdered by the Nazis, Mr Ward has deliberately abused the memory of the Holocaust.' Pollock then went on to state that, 'The comments are sickening and unacceptable, with no place in British politics.'<sup>163</sup>

Regardless of the appropriateness, or otherwise, of Ward's comments it is clear from Pollock's statement that the Trust viewed, or were expected to view, the utilisation of the Holocaust in this manner as an 'unacceptable' manipulation of the Holocaust, and its legacy, for more contemporary political purposes. Yet by publically dismissing Ward's comments as being representative of politicised and 'sickening' views, rather than engaging with them, the Trust is not only preventing further discussion about the perceived relationship between the Holocaust and contemporary problems in Israel, echoing its position within its educational programmes, but they are also overlooking their own relationship to the memory of the Holocaust and the fact that all Holocaust memory is in some way politicised including the messages of universalised lessons for humanity, and the domesticated narratives of British heroism, promoted by the Trust

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<sup>162</sup> 'Lib Dems condemn MP's criticism of Israel ahead of Holocaust Memorial Day', (25 January 2013), available at [www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21194991](http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/uk-politics-21194991), (accessed 30 January 2014). The statement itself has subsequently been removed from Mr Ward's website.

<sup>163</sup> Beattie, J, 'MP: Jews' Atrocities', *Daily Mirror*, (26 January 2013)

itself. This politicisation, however, is not acknowledged although given the position of the Trust and the expectations of those who support their work this should perhaps be anticipated.

Yet during the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project, despite the position of the Trust that discussions about Israel are irrelevant in terms of Holocaust education, it is inevitable that the decision by Rabbi Marcus to utilise Israel as a means of reinforcing the importance of Holocaust education, and of visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau ultimately means that the ceremony becomes a stage on which the political complexities of Holocaust remembrance are performed. Concurrently, it is also the lens through which the inherent contradictions in the Trust as an educational organisation, with specific and highly politicised agendas, are exposed. Ultimately, however, the politicised nature of both Holocaust education and memory are only acknowledged by students when confronted with political views expressed by Rabbi.

It is in part as a result of this seeming performance of political identity that the increased rejection of the conceptualisation of the Holocaust as an exclusive event can be discerned. For the way in which the subject of Israel was utilised by the Rabbi, without contextualisation at any other point in the course, led to some expressing the sentiment that this part of the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project was itself 'much more like a politically motivated history lesson than a personal journey to Auschwitz.'<sup>164</sup> As another participant on the 2012 Wales visit observed, 'I felt a little uneasy at the words/tone of Rabbi Marcus...One of my students commented "he seemed to be telling us what to think."<sup>165</sup> Such sentiments also gesture to another possible reason why there appears to be an increased rejection of the exclusive conceptualisation of the Holocaust, alongside the focus on contemporary lessons and existing British Holocaust memorialisation based on multicultural tolerance and British liberalism which, traditionally, has explicitly and deliberately rejected any significant expression of group specificity. Certainly one can see that as participants felt that the expression of Jewish identity was being carried out for political, as opposed to commemorative, objectives one can discern an increasing rejection of the message of specificity being promoted and performed at this stage of the visit.

Despite some expression of resentment at some of the sentiments expressed during the ceremony it must be noted that the performance of religion, nationalism or politics at Birkenau through ceremonial practice is not unique to the ceremony which takes place as part of the project. Birkenau has become the location on which commemorative ceremonies have long

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<sup>164</sup> Respondent 4 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz: Eastern Visit 2013', (14 February 2013)

<sup>165</sup> Respondent 38 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz: Wales Visit 2012', (12 March 2012)

been performed and in which political and religious divisions have been articulated. For neither Auschwitz nor Birkenau are a neutral space, and nor should they be considered as such. Like all memorials, 'Auschwitz also functions as a performance space, a political stage' and reflects the meanings ascribed and attributed to it by those who seek to utilise the consumption of the Holocaust for their own means.<sup>166</sup> As illustrated by the utilisation of Auschwitz by both the Soviet Union and, increasingly, by the West the space is not neutral as a result of the harnessing of the site for the purposes of those who mediate their own agendas within it. Indeed, one can see that 'the site has functioned as an arena for commemoration, public education, or even conflict, and for more than fifty years, visitors to that arena have assumed the multiple roles of mourner, spectator, and activist.'<sup>167</sup>

The well documented Carmelite controversy of the 1980s and early 1990s, which saw the relocation of a Carmelite convent into an old building adjoining Auschwitz I, perhaps most poignantly reflects and expresses the tensions which both surrounded, and indeed still surround, the question of who owns the site of Auschwitz and whose narrative should be allowed to be expressed at these sites.<sup>168</sup> During this period the tensions of religious and national concerns were actively played out on the stage of Birkenau at commemorative ceremonies and through the very presence of the convent itself. With each delegation feeling that their own memories of suffering were competing with others to ensure that their misery was not simply subsumed under the wider narrative of the suffering of the "Other". As Jacobs asserts due to 'Birkenau's significant role in the murder of so many Nazi victims, the camp has become one of the most important arenas of spiritual healing in post-Holocaust society' whilst the sheer size of the site which can 'easily accommodate large crowds' have ensured that it is within Birkenau that the performance of memory can be most acutely observed.<sup>169</sup>

The March of the Living, the voyage which inspired Rabbi Marcus to undertake the daunting task of arranging one day visits, is itself a performance of memory and overt expression of identity. As Feldman asserts, the 'ritual re-enactment of survival,' the performance of which is designed

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<sup>166</sup> Young, J, *The Texture of Memory: Holocaust Memorials and Meaning*, (London, Yale University Press, 1993), p. 144

<sup>167</sup> Huener, J, 'Antifascist Pilgrimage and Rehabilitation at Auschwitz: The Political Tourism of Aktion Sühnezeichen and Sozialistische Jugend', *German Studies Review*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (October 2001), pp. 513-532, p.513

<sup>168</sup> The question of whose experiences and narrative should be represented at the site of Auschwitz-Birkenau is a complex one. Please see Rittner, C & Roth, J.K (eds), *Memory Offended: The Auschwitz Convent Controversy*, (New York, Praeger Publishers, 1991); Wollaston, I, 'Sharing Sacred Space? The Carmelite Controversy and the Politics of Commemoration', *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 28, No. 3-4, (1994), pp. 19-27; Kertész, I, 'Who Owns Auschwitz?', *The Yale Journal of Criticism*, Vol. 14, No. 1, (Spring 2001), pp. 267-272

<sup>169</sup> Jacobs, 'From the Profane to the Sacred', p. 315; Dwork & Van Pelt, *Auschwitz*, p. 367-368

to reinforce and sustain a sense of Jewish identity and a connection to the state of Israel.<sup>170</sup> It can be seen that the 'concept of group solidarity is often reinforced through tours to Israel that generally occur as part of organized Holocaust tourism excursions.'<sup>171</sup> During the March itself it is apparent that 'Poland is a theatre prop in a Jewish pageant about national catastrophe and redemption' and the main site on which this pageant is performed is the site of Birkenau.<sup>172</sup> For those participating in *Lessons from Auschwitz* the performance of memory expressed during the ceremony in Birkenau, and indeed, throughout the project, is less the 'ritual re-enactment of survival' to which Feldman refers and more the pinnacle of the emotive engagement with the Holocaust which is encouraged throughout the one day visits. And whilst it may be considered that national values and unifying sentiments can be found within the March of the Living alone one can also discern that many of those participants who are flown out of Britain and return from Poland return articulating the rhetoric that it is immersed within national values and discussions of British citizenship.

Helmreich has observed that for those who take part in the March, 'Being able to leave a place where one knows millions have perished and traveling immediately to a built-up and relatively prosperous Israel, permanently engraves the event in the consciousness of those who go. The result is a greatly increased awareness of Israel's importance to the Jewish people.'<sup>173</sup> For those who participate in the one day visit to Auschwitz the ability to leave Poland, whilst not necessarily echoing the March's role in generating increased awareness of Israel's importance to the Jewish people, does reinforce the importance of returning to a tolerant and democratic society which, in turn, feeds into the rhetoric articulated by educational organisations across Britain that the Holocaust holds invaluable lessons for contemporary society. Certainly it would be naïve not to consider that the project in some way renews a sense of pride in British multiculturalism and as a nation which did not persecute the Jewish people, as previously discussed and as reflected in wider British cultural understandings of the Holocaust. As a student who participated in the 2012 Glasgow trip noted, the visit to Auschwitz, 'made me proud to be British.'<sup>174</sup> Whilst another student felt that when they returned from Poland they had 'gained

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<sup>170</sup> Feldman, *Above the Death Pits*, p. 3

<sup>171</sup> Podoshen. J & Hunt. J, 'Equity Restoration, the Holocaust and Tourism of Sacred Sites, *Tourism Management*, Vol. 32, (2011), pp. 1332-1342, p. 1333

<sup>172</sup> Kugelmass. J, 'Bloody Memories: Encountering the Past in Contemporary Poland', *Cultural Anthropology*, Vol. 10, No. 3, (August 1995), pp. 279-301, p. 281

<sup>173</sup> Helmreich. W, 'Visits to Europe, Zionist Education and Jewish Identity: The Case of the March of the Living', *Journal of Jewish Education*, Vol. 61, No. 3, (1995), pp. 16-20, p. 20

<sup>174</sup> Respondent 4, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: Glasgow Visit 2012', (21 September 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 8 July 2013)

respect for the diverse society we live in.<sup>175</sup> Whilst students may only first articulate their feelings that they are ‘being told what to think’ when they are confronted with political sentiments, which may be at odds with their own moral normality and conceptualisation of world affairs, it is apparent that underlying the project itself is a very politicised sculpted prescriptiveness which reinforces traditional British narratives.

### *Emotional framing and Prescription of Holocaust “lessons”*

After the ceremony has been completed, weary with both emotion and tiredness after the long day, students walk slowly up the ramp, carefully placing their lit candles along the railway tracks as they go, to the sanctuary of the coaches which will take them to the airport from where they will return to Britain. Whilst they are only halfway through the *Lessons from Auschwitz* course it is clear that for the majority it is the visit to Poland which is the most important aspect of the project. The visit has concluded; however, the students ‘journey’ through the Holocaust is not yet at an end. For the performance of memory which takes place through the expression of identity and commemoration does not cease with the site visit itself. The performance of memory which takes place at Birkenau is continued through the rest of the course including the way in which students are encouraged to perform the memory of the Holocaust themselves through the way they consider the contemporary relevance of the Auschwitz within the Follow Up Seminar and within their Next Steps work. The performance of memory enacted within the ceremony is continued through the historical consciousness of the participants and the way in which they choose to express and ‘perform’ this consciousness, and the resulting “lessons” inferred from it, within a wider commemorative, and educational, sphere.

As has previously been discussed, the focus on contemporary “lessons” is a significant aspect not only of this project, but also of wider Holocaust education. The contemporary relevance of the Holocaust, and of Auschwitz-Birkenau, is one of the main justifications for the continuation of funding for the Holocaust Educational Trust’s project and the mandatory position of the Holocaust on the National Curriculum. Upon their return to Britain, therefore, within the Follow Up seminar participants are encouraged to reflect on their experiences at Auschwitz through the lens of the ‘Historical Conclusions and Contemporary Lessons’ resource provided by the Trust during a post-visit seminar activity in order to decide how best they will continue the

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<sup>175</sup> Respondent 12, ‘Lessons from Auschwitz: South West Visit 2010’, (21 May 2010)

performance of Holocaust memory within their Next Steps work.<sup>176</sup> As discussed within the second chapter of this study this resource actually provides students with some of the contemporary “lessons” the Trust believes students should take from the Holocaust. Not only does this suggest that the Trust views there to be specific and acceptable “lessons” that the Holocaust teaches but it also gestures to a certain prescriptiveness in terms of what the Trust believes can be learnt from the Holocaust itself.

The prescriptiveness of the “lessons” which the Trust appears to promote throughout the project, whilst seemingly suggesting that they are encouraging students to think for themselves, is discernible during the time in Poland through the emotional framing of the visit itself.

Thurnell-Read has articulated the concern that ‘dark tourism acts to trivialise collective memory, perhaps, more likely stems from fears that sites can become overly scripted, with alternative interpretations increasingly less likely.’<sup>177</sup> Certainly, due to the frequency of the visits and the authoritativeness of the notes provided to educators it is clear that for some the Trust is itself in danger of providing an ‘almost rehearsed manner of visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau.’<sup>178</sup> Increasingly, the prescriptive and, at times, overly scripted education performed by educators during the visit does not allow for alternative interpretations of the site to be expressed or explored whilst, in addition, encouraging an emotive, as opposed to critical, response from participants.

It has been suggested that ‘unexpected and unplanned learning can be the most valuable part of visits for pupils.’<sup>179</sup> Supporting this notion Charlesworth states that, ‘By allowing students to discover the sites themselves, with maps and some basic orientation, they are more likely to make discoveries and assess those discoveries.’<sup>180</sup> This observation is echoed by the responses of students themselves who frequently observe that, during the visit, they feel unable to form their own opinion of the site, and of the Holocaust in general, due to the continual presence of the educators, the readings they are expected to engage with and subsequent discussions which they encourage participants to have with regards to their feelings towards the site. One student suggested that whilst at Birkenau they would have appreciated, ‘some free time alone- we were

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<sup>176</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz Resource: Historical Conclusions and Contemporary Lessons*, (Unpublished)

<sup>177</sup> Thurnell-Read, T, ‘Engaging Auschwitz: An Analysis of Young Travellers’ Experiences of Holocaust Tourism’, *Journal of Tourism Consumption and Practice*, Vol. 1, No. 1, (2009), pp.26-52, p. 47

<sup>178</sup> Respondent 10, ‘Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: East Midlands Visit 2012’, (13 March 2012), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 8 July 2013)

<sup>179</sup> Snelson, ‘I understood before but not like this’, p. 7

<sup>180</sup> Charlesworth, A, ‘Children, Do Something Different’: Reflections on Running a Holocaust Field Trip, *The Journal of Holocaust Education*, Vol.7, Nos.1-2, (Summer/Autumn 1998), pp.126-132, p. 128

in a group all day- not enough time to explore and reflect alone.<sup>181</sup> A participating teacher on visit in 2013 echoed this sentiment proposing that, 'Allowing us to roam around alone, or in smaller groups would be much more beneficial.'<sup>182</sup> In part this continual educator accompaniment is a result of the limited time accorded to the trip, particularly in winter, when the early fall of darkness restricts the amount of time Birkenau students are able to wander the site. Students, it could be asserted, must be accompanied around the site in order to ensure that they do not linger for too long in one space and, therefore, miss one of the key elements of the visit. Yet by denying participants time to explore the site themselves, without mediation and without discussions about emotional engagement, educators are in many ways limiting the educational value of such a visit and could be viewed as being at risk of prescribing the way in which students could, and should, relate to the site and the way in which the lessons from it should be interpreted.

Certainly a sense of prescription has been articulated by a number of participants who recorded that, 'in the group sessions it felt like I was shepherded into thinking certain things.'<sup>183</sup> At times, other participants noted that the role of the educators was, 'sometimes quite overbearing' suggesting that it 'would be much better if we were not told how to feel but were given the information and allowed to decide how and how much we wanted to feel at different points.'<sup>184</sup> As one student commented in 2011, 'as much as I appreciated the poems and other things that were given to us or read out during the visit, sometimes it felt like we were supposed to feel a certain way about the Holocaust.'<sup>185</sup> It is clear that the inference some gained throughout the visit was that there was a right and a wrong way to feel and engage with the Holocaust and that the Trust framed this through the prescriptive nature of the way in which their educators presented the material the participants were to engage with. Echoing this sentiment a student who participated in a 2012 visit observed that, as a result of the continual reference to the enormity of the Holocaust by the educators, the framing of the visit 'made it seem like I was being told how I should feel.'<sup>186</sup>

The emphasis on feelings and emotions echoes wider trends in Holocaust education. The IHRA, for example, points to the belief that, 'Authentic sites provide a unique atmosphere, which can

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<sup>181</sup> Respondent 19, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: Test Valley and Chilterns Visit 2011', (21 March 2011), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 9 June 2013)

<sup>182</sup> Respondent 4 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz: Eastern Visit 2013', (14 February 2013)

<sup>183</sup> Respondent 23, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: South West Visit 2010', (21 May 2010)

<sup>184</sup> Respondent 3 (Teacher), 'Lessons from Auschwitz: London North Visit 2012', (27 November 2012)

<sup>185</sup> Respondent 57, 'Lessons from Auschwitz Online Evaluation Survey: Eastern 2011', (9 March 2011), accessed via [www.surveymonkey.com](http://www.surveymonkey.com), (accessed 9 June 2013)

<sup>186</sup> Respondent 10, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: East Midlands Visit 2012', (13 March 2012)

create a special desire to learn and which evokes strong emotions.<sup>187</sup> Reinforcing this sentiment Council for Europe guidelines suggest when visiting an atrocity site, 'People often expect the experience to be special, powerful and emotional.'<sup>188</sup> To not discuss the possible emotions students may have on the visit would be remiss. The subject can be portrayed in extremely graphic terms and it is possible for individual students to be visibly upset by what they have seen. Yet the continual emphasis on emotional engagement could be interpreted not only as too persistent but also as prescriptive in its insistence that students should engage with the space of Auschwitz, emotively. Standing on the tracks by the refurbished cattle truck which was donated to the former camp site, for example, one educator during the 2011 London North visit repeatedly pressed students to respond to how they felt being so near the cattle wagon after they had heard a reading from survivor testimony which described conditions within the wagon. Eventually, after their question elicited no response from the participants, the educator became increasingly exasperated eventually demanding that, 'surely you must feel something!'<sup>189</sup> In some instances, as one students' recollection of their experience of their educator reveals, this sense of emotional prescriptiveness was even more acutely felt, 'He kept on telling us there were 'no right or wrong answers' and then responded fairly aggressively if anyone said anything he thought was wrong, which made contributing to the conversation even more daunting for the rest of us.'<sup>190</sup> One student expressed their concerns about the emphasis on emotion stating that;

'I feel the seminar was too much focused on the sadness of the site itself, I found there was a lot of talking about the feeling at the site. This, therefore, built my expectations up and when I got there, I didn't feel anything like what the seminar had said, therefore even though it was very interesting I found the trip a little disappointing. If there is less talk about the feeling at the site I think this would be more beneficial.'<sup>191</sup>

Not only does this response imply that there was too much emphasis on the potential emotiveness of the site but, in addition, it also infers that some students perceive that the Trust indirectly attempts to shape the way in which they engage with the site. Through the line 'I didn't feel anything like what the seminar had said' the student articulates the complexities of emotive based education conducted at a site such as Auschwitz. The same student went on to voice the opinion that 'there was too much talk about our feelings and what we might feel. I

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<sup>187</sup> International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance, 'Guidelines for Study Trips to Holocaust-Related Authentic and Non-Authentic Sites', available at [www.holocaustremembrance.com/node/533](http://www.holocaustremembrance.com/node/533), (accessed 24 April 2013)

<sup>188</sup> European Union Agency for Fundamental Rights, *Excursion to the Past, Teaching for the Future: Handbook for Teachers*, (Austria, FRA, 2010), p. 32

<sup>189</sup> Observation by author during visit of 19 October 2011.

<sup>190</sup> Respondent 23, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: South East 2011', (23 November 2011)

<sup>191</sup> Respondent 12, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: Wales Visit 2012', (7 March 2012)

think this talk may be better at the after seminar as then when the students go to the camps they can feel anything they want without feeling pressured into feeling a certain emotion.’<sup>192</sup>

The implication that participants were told how the visit would affect them implies a dictating of emotional understanding and engagement with the Holocaust before students even set foot in the atrocity site. Yet during the Orientation Seminar educators also tell students that ‘there is no wrong or right way in how you should respond to what you see.’<sup>193</sup> Notwithstanding this sentiment the Trust implicitly encourages the view that there should be an emotional engagement with the site which is, in itself, rather leading in its inference. Even the booklet which students are given on the outbound flight to accompany their visit points to the emotiveness of the visit telling participants that, ‘It is impossible to ever be fully prepared for a visit to Auschwitz-Birkenau.’<sup>194</sup> Thereby implying that the visit will be so affecting that despite taking all precautions one cannot prepare oneself for it. This implication indirectly encourages students to infer that they will, and should, be emotionally affected by the experience of visiting the sites, encouraging an emotive response to Auschwitz, and the Holocaust, from the outset of the visit.

Concerns about the apparent emotive framing of the visit were highlighted in the report conducted by the Institute of Education which noted that there were a number of negative comments made about ‘the emotional framing of the project, in particular the visit to Poland, on the basis that the focus was too emotionally biased and students were emotively led.’<sup>195</sup> As previously explored the heightened emotional engagement which was seen to take place during a one day visit was viewed positively by the originator of the one day visits. More than this, the ‘very high impact’ emotional experience, was viewed to be an integral aspect of visiting the site.<sup>196</sup> Despite the aims and intentions of this ‘high impact’ experience it is apparent that for those anticipating an educational learning experience when visiting Auschwitz-Birkenau the emotive framing of the project, and the subsequent emotive leading of the participants, is increasingly felt amongst some to be detrimental not only to the understanding of the site itself but also to the way in which students are encouraged to interpret the implications of the Holocaust in the contemporary world.

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<sup>192</sup> Ibid.

<sup>193</sup> Lessons from Auschwitz Educator’s Notes: Orientation Seminar

<sup>194</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Your Visit*, p. 2

<sup>195</sup> Institute of Education, *Lessons from Auschwitz Project Final Report*, p. 73

<sup>196</sup> Interview with Rabbi Marcus.

DeWitt and Storksdieck state that, 'While major gains in cognitive understanding are unlikely in the short time span of most school field trips, brief experiences can certainly evoke strong emotional responses.'<sup>197</sup> Yet whilst 'emotional engagement provides a critical energy that can motivate students...it can also lead to identification with one side or a theoretical retreat.'<sup>198</sup> Although emotional responses can enhance the significance of the Holocaust in participants' historical consciousness a lack of cognitive or substantial critical understanding of the historical event, or the site of Auschwitz, ensures that the dominant narrative of the mythical Holocaust referred to by Cole, dominated by the symbols which have come to define the Holocaust, is able to be maintained and the simplistic view that the Holocaust can provide easily accessible "lessons" for contemporary society can continue. When asked about their response to the course one teacher categorically stated that, 'I don't feel that the students really gained much because the LFA is looking for an emotional reaction and is looking for something very visual which isn't really engaging with the Holocaust or Shoah. I was horrified that the main lesson seemed to be just 'be nice', the response that seemed to be the favoured response from our educator.'<sup>199</sup>

Yet it should not be considered that it is only teachers who have raised concerns about the emotional framing of the visits. A number of students have expressed their concerns about the way in which they are asked to engage with the sites during the visit with one participant asking the Trust to, 'Please make it more educational, I know it's supposed to be about improving our understanding of individual stories but I felt my knowledge of Auschwitz and the Holocaust was only improved slightly by a few minor details about the sites themselves.'<sup>200</sup> Another student, when discussing the role of their educator during the project echoed this sentiment observing that, 'Although they asked some thought-provoking questions and at times gave guidance on Next Steps, I felt that in Auschwitz they were too melodramatic and cavalier; I would have preferred less emotion and readings and more facts - the facts are shocking and emotional enough themselves.'<sup>201</sup>

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<sup>197</sup> DeWitt. J & Storksdieck. M, 'A Short Review of School Field Trips: Key Findings from the Past and Implications for the Future', *Visitor Studies*, Vol. 11, No. 2, (2008), pp. 181-197, p. 183

<sup>198</sup> Brina. C, 'Not crying, but laughing: The ethics of horrifying students', *Teaching in Higher Education*, Vol. 8, No. 4, pp. 517-528, p. 527

<sup>199</sup> Respondent 5, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: Eastern Visit', (24 March 2012)

<sup>200</sup> Respondent 29, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: West Midlands North Visit 2012', (20 May 2012)

<sup>201</sup> Respondent 31, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: West Midlands South Visit 2012', (8 April 2012)

### Reflections on the Lessons from Auschwitz Project

The complexities of performing education in a site of the Holocaust, as has been illustrated, are considerable. Tensions exist not only in regard to the concept of visiting sites such as Auschwitz itself, articulated within the recent debates included within the pages of *Teaching History* and *History Today*, but also the way in which the content of the visit is presented, engaged with and utilised by educators, guides and the participants themselves.<sup>202</sup> The programme as it was initially designed was not viewed as an educational one and, as such, was not constructed through either an educational or analytical lens. The adoption of the programme by the Trust could have seen the reorientation of the project so as to more effectively educate students about the Holocaust yet the seeming emphasis on the idea that ‘seeing is knowing’ and that commemoration of victims through the overtly emotional framing of the project appears to place the heightened emotional experience that Rabbi Marcus hoped to achieve with the one day visit in which Auschwitz was removed from “normal life” continues to take precedence over the critical engagement of the site which, one could argue, could be more educationally effective.

Through an emotive engagement which defies critical or objective interpretation of the site, and its relevance in contemporary Britain, one can see that the emotive symbolism of Auschwitz which permeates wider British narratives of the site, expressed through recognisable icons and the sense of authenticity which the site is felt to impart, is also discernible within the narrative of the Holocaust perpetuated within the *Lessons from Auschwitz* course. Far from attempting to challenge existing historical consciousness associated with the Holocaust in order to articulate the importance of the site in British memory an emotive engagement is encouraged throughout the project in order to continue the dominant form of Holocaust memory which has developed around the site of Auschwitz both inside, and outside, the educational arena. In a report produced by the Institute of Education those teachers surveyed were clear that the establishment of memory featured rather low on the list reasons as to why their school or college had participated in the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project. Of 98 teachers only 4 viewed memory as a significant reason for participation in the programme.<sup>203</sup> Yet despite this it is apparent that what students engage during the site, in particular the victims’ possessions and

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<sup>202</sup> Andrews, K, ‘Finding a place for the victim: building a rationale for educational visits to Holocaust-related sites’, *Teaching History*, Vol. 141, (December 2010), pp. 42-49; Lay, P, ‘The Holocaust and the Unknowable Past’, *History Today*, (16 October 2013); Jackson, ‘Lessons of the Holocaust.’

<sup>203</sup> Institute of Education, *Lessons from Auschwitz Project Final Report*, p. 31

the ceremony performed at Birkenau, encourage the formation of a distinct historical consciousness of the event which has become one of the most significant aspects of the trip.

Reflecting on the original one day visits it is apparent that sustaining memory was a significant part of the reason why the trips were established, not as a result of educational concerns, but in order to broaden people's historical consciousness and to ensure that the victims were not forgotten. As Rabbi Marcus stated, to visit Auschwitz is to, 'strengthen our resolve not to forget the memory of the 6 million who were so mercilessly butchered'.<sup>204</sup> Whilst remembering the victims is a part of the visit it is clear that the centrality of the intonement to remember is somewhat at odds with what teachers say about their own intentions regarding participation. Again, when asked about their aims of wanting to be involved only 19 of 94 respondents articulated their aim as being to ensure their students do not forget about the victims of the Holocaust, their concerns instead refer to teaching students about the wider implications of the Holocaust.<sup>205</sup> It is apparent, however, that the focus on commemoration and memory formation over educational engagement is consistent throughout the *Lessons from Auschwitz Project*.

This lack of critical engagement is discernable at each stage of the project, particularly within Auschwitz I, where students are led through exhibitions carefully designed to present a particular narrative of the Holocaust through iconographic relics of the deceased including shoes, baby clothes, glasses and of course the mounds of disintegrating human hair. Yet the lack of time available to the educators, and the numbers of those within the museum itself, means that questions relating to authenticity or the reconstructed nature of certain aspects of the site are overlooked as participants are encouraged to engage emotively with what they are seeing rather than reflecting on the complexities of the past being conveyed to them. As participants pass through the gates of Birkenau it is clear that the voice of the educator becomes more prominent and, as such, the possibilities for critical reflection are greater. Yet the emotive framing of this stage of the visit, culminating in the powerful, if controversial, ceremony and the repeated attempts to encourage students to react viscerally to the site through the continual reading of poems and survivor testimony actually obscures, rather than enhances, the educational value of the educators voice. Whilst poetry and survivor testimony is certainly valuable the incessant presentation of this to students actually encourages the view amongst many that the Trust themselves are not only encouraging an emotive response but are also

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<sup>204</sup> Marcus, *You are Witnesses*.

<sup>205</sup> Institute of Education, *Lessons from Auschwitz Project Final Report*, p. 35

prescribing how students should react to the site and how they should view the Holocaust in the contemporary period.

Regardless of the concerns surrounding the course it is apparent that many participants find the visit a profoundly moving experience. Respondents to the online survey carried out at the end of the visit frequently express their gratitude to the Trust for having facilitated their visit and for providing them with such an experience. As one student observed, 'I personally have found this experience incredibly life-enhancing and life-changing. It has been incredibly emotional however I feel that it has been the most worthwhile challenge I will ever do.'<sup>206</sup> Yet whilst responses such as these are numerous they should be viewed with an acknowledgement that, 'an overemphasis on feeling also clearly runs the risk of descending into moralising and manipulation' of those to whom the visit, and its meanings and implications, are directed. For, as Stone notes, 'it is hard to resist turning the Holocaust into a morality play' particularly when faced with a group of eager and impressionable students keen to keep the message and the significance of the Holocaust alive in historical consciousness when they return to Britain.<sup>207</sup>

Karen Pollock has claimed that the purpose of the visit to Auschwitz is, 'not about making them [participants] cry, it's about helping them to reflect on what it means.'<sup>208</sup> Nevertheless, not only does the icon heavy, 'hearing is not like seeing' approach to the visit encourage students to react to the site emotionally but, also, the emotional framing of the project and the subsequent reverence that both the trip, and the site itself, inspires within participants appears to create a certain sentiment of guilt amongst students. The 'overemphasis on feeling' evident throughout the visit and not countered by any significant critical engagement appears, in many ways, to risk manipulating their responses to the visit as a means to impart a message about the significance and enormity of the Holocaust. As Kennedy observes society, 'started off with taking neo-Nazis and Holocaust deniers in order to somehow confront the reality of the camps in order to learn the errors of their ways. It's now extended to perfectly innocent children. To take them there so this awful thing can be imprinted on their young minds and never forgotten.'<sup>209</sup>

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<sup>206</sup> Respondent 12, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: East Midlands Visit 2012', (13 March 2012)

<sup>207</sup> Stone, D, 'Day of Remembrance or Day of Forgetting? Or, Why Britain Does Not Need a Holocaust Memorial Day', *Patterns of Prejudice*, Vol. 34, Vol. 4, (2000), pp.53-59, p. 58

<sup>208</sup> Pollock, K, as cited in 'UK School Trips to Auschwitz to Continue', (30 June 2010), available at, [www.fightthatred.com/fighting-hate/organizations/755-uk-school-trips-to-auschwitz-to-continue](http://www.fightthatred.com/fighting-hate/organizations/755-uk-school-trips-to-auschwitz-to-continue), (accessed 19 May 2013)

<sup>209</sup> Kennedy, K, 'Battle of Ideas: Memorialising the Holocaust – The Challenge of History? (31 October 2010) available at [www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2010/session\\_detail/4095](http://www.battleofideas.org.uk/index.php/2010/session_detail/4095), (accessed 21 January 2013)

The visit to Auschwitz, and the emotional frame through which the site is presented, certainly imprints itself on the minds of those who participate and, for some, generates a sense of guilt. This guilt tends to be focused around the notion that the problems they are experiencing in their current lives are nothing in comparison to those who suffered during the Holocaust. One student expressly articulates this view observing that 'if you put it into comparison with the life of a girl/boy of the same age during the Holocaust, my stresses are nowhere near as legitimate as theirs would have been. From now on, I will always think 'is what I am experiencing really that bad or am I over-exaggerating?' As a majority of the time I am in fact over exaggerating' whilst another states that the 'trip was very life changing it made me think a lot about myself and my life, the things I take for granted and the way I live it.'<sup>210</sup> This sense of guilt, along with other emotions such as anger at those who committed atrocities, it is implied, can be alleviated through the embracing of the notion of Holocaust lessons and, as Holocaust witnesses, spread the 'message' of the Holocaust thus contributing to a very British interpretation of what is understood by the Holocaust.

As students sit subdued and tired during the return flight to the UK they are told by the Lead Educator of the trip that, 'Although we have had a long and tiring day I have left Auschwitz-Birkenau with a stronger commitment to celebrating life and freedom. I hope you feel this too.'<sup>211</sup> The guilt they feel as a result of the visit can be turned into a proactive celebration of life and freedom in Britain, thereby reinforcing a belief in the tolerance of British liberal democracy in contrast to the oppressive symbol of intolerance they have encountered within Poland. Participants' commitment to continuing Holocaust memory through the 'performance' of their Next Steps work is, when seen through this lens, almost a penance for their own fortuitousness in having not experienced the Holocaust themselves. The indelible imprinting of the site of Auschwitz on the minds of young students and the resulting sentiments of guilt that are expressed can be seen, as Kennedy notes, as being 'the opposite of education. It is the opposite of thinking historically, the opposite of thinking critically....you don't need to go to Auschwitz and I question the role of it in education.'<sup>212</sup> For despite the emotiveness of the Holocaust if 'a desire to preach about prejudice overcomes a commitment to teaching about history' it is possible to discern that not only is the historical consciousness of the Holocaust which is taught reflective of the mythical narrative of the Holocaust which dominates popular understanding but that, also, the emotive emphasis placed on responses to the visit could risk manipulating the

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<sup>210</sup> Respondent 22, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: Wales Visit 2013', (7 March 2013) ; Respondent 12, 'Lessons from Auschwitz: South West Visit 2010', (21 May 2010)

<sup>211</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, *Lessons from Auschwitz Speakers Notes: Inbound Flight*, (Unpublished)

<sup>212</sup> Kennedy, 'Battle of Ideas: Memorialising the Holocaust.'

way in which participants respond to the role of the Holocaust in contemporary Britain, and in their own lives.<sup>213</sup>

Much like the March of the Living, the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project takes place when the participants are, 'At a pivotal stage in their development when they are most susceptible to romantic ideals.'<sup>214</sup> As such it is clear that participants are more susceptible to the ideals that their guilt and anger towards the Holocaust can somehow be transferred into both the role of witness charged with continuing the memory of the victims and promoting the benefits of a liberal society and democratic nation. More significantly perhaps the exploration of the project reveals the extent to which the emphasis on contemporary lessons has gradually started to erode the understanding of the historical reality of the Holocaust as participants move towards a more inclusive and historically inaccurate conceptualisation of the Holocaust, and of the persecution of other victim groups under the Nazi regime.

This project, and all of its inherent contradictions, reflects the complex realities of British Holocaust education in the twenty-first century. As responses to the expression of Jewish identity during the visit reveal, the educational and cultural emphasis on universal applicability of the Holocaust has come to manifest itself as a more inclusive interpretation of the Holocaust itself whilst expressions of Jewishness are often rejected as a being seen as politicising the Holocaust for personal interest. Yet this ignores the reality that the accepted British Holocaust narrative presented during the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project, within wider Holocaust education and within British culture is, in itself, a highly politicised domesticated construction both reinforcing traditional assumptions of British liberal democracy and the emphasising the crimes and separateness of the "Other".

The main structure and orientation of the educational visits has not changed to a significant degree since the original one day visit took place and without continual re-evaluation of the course it is likely that the historical consciousness of the Holocaust which emerges from such visits will continue to be that articulated through emotive engagement with the iconic symbols of death and destruction. Once these historical artefacts, such as the hair of the victims of the gas chambers, are no longer with us, however, as a result of the natural passage of time, it is unclear as to how educational organisations like the Trust will seek to impart the 'reality' of the Holocaust to students. The adage of 'hearing is not like seeing' will become ever more difficult as

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<sup>213</sup> Salmons, 'Teaching or Preaching', p. 142

<sup>214</sup> Feldman, *Above the Death Pits*, p. 255

time erodes the site and the remains which it currently so prominently displays. Conversely, as the number of survivors continues to recede the emphasis on the role of sites such as Auschwitz-Birkenau in the educational sphere will undoubtedly grow more considerable. How this increased dependency will affect the future of Holocaust education is, as of yet, unclear yet without a significant reorientation of the one day project it is apparent that if the educational, and commemorative, focus is to remain on an emotive and prescriptive engagement with Auschwitz-Birkenau in the future not only will the constructed form of dominant Holocaust remembrance continue but that British education, and subsequently British historical consciousness, will continue to edge further away from the historical realities of the Holocaust itself.

## Conclusion

For those organisations involved in both the establishment, and sustainment, of the field of Holocaust education the battle to achieve a place for the Holocaust in education has, for the foreseeable future, been won. From a time in which the Holocaust featured rarely on the educational calendar, now the Holocaust is not only a mandatory part of the National Curriculum but educational initiatives attributed to organisations such as the Holocaust Educational Trust receive the accolades of politicians, the media and the wider population. The Government not only funds the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project but it has also recognised the emotive value of visiting sites of historical significance and have sought to utilise this model in their commemorations of the centenary of the outbreak of World War One in 2014. Alongside such initiatives on 27 January 2014 it was announced that a cross party Holocaust Commission was to be established with the sole purpose of ensuring that 'Britain has a permanent and fitting memorial to the Holocaust and educational resources for future generations.'<sup>889</sup> Yet whilst the presence of the Holocaust in education, and in wider British consciousness, shows no sign of abating it is clear that the battle for the future of British Holocaust consciousness has, in many ways, only just begun.

This thesis has explored the role of Holocaust education in the creation of British historical consciousness of the Holocaust. Throughout this study it has been shown that Holocaust education, as it exists in Britain today, reflects the British context in which it has evolved whilst also illustrating how it has also been fundamentally shaped by this same context. The significance of maintaining an awareness of context and contextualisation has been gestured to throughout each chapter of this study. For, whilst there are overarching international concepts of how Holocaust education should be carried out, it is apparent that British Holocaust education complete with all its inherent contradictions and complexities can only be understood through an understanding of the British context in which it was formed and the more localised narratives which have shaped the way in which the Holocaust has come to be understood. Far from global narratives subsuming national narratives it is clear that the universally recognisable Holocaust memory which has come to dominate British historical consciousness is in fact, also, highly domesticated.

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<sup>889</sup> 'Prime Minister Launches Holocaust Commission', (27 January 2014), available at [www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-launches-holocaust-commission](http://www.gov.uk/government/news/prime-minister-launches-holocaust-commission), (accessed 1 February 2014)

This study has also stepped away from traditional encounters with Holocaust education which have tended to overlook both the considerable influence of charitable educational organisations in the transmission of Holocaust teaching and the significance of Holocaust education in the formulation and perpetuation of Holocaust consciousness in Britain. As such, this research has taken the first steps towards addressing this omission in the existing literature and has sought to encourage greater engagement with Holocaust education as a fundamental component in the development of British historical consciousness of the Holocaust rather than as being simply a supplementary by product of greater engagement with the Holocaust in Britain. For education is a significant sphere in which memory is performed and, subsequently, in which historical consciousness is developed. Despite its significance, however, it is clear that notwithstanding the unique position it holds in British imagination, Holocaust education has rarely been considered as a formative player in the realm of British Holocaust consciousness. Whilst Holocaust education can only be understood through a contextual understanding of how wider British society has engaged with the Holocaust, conversely, the way in which British understandings of the Holocaust have developed, particularly since the 1990s, can only be understood through an awareness of the role of Holocaust education.

Through an analysis of the role and representation of the survivor within both education and wider culture, situated against a backdrop of discussions surrounding the increasing universalisation of the Holocaust and the subsequent unmooring of the Holocaust from the historical context in which it took place, the first section of the study demonstrated that Britain has absorbed the survivor experience into a longer narrative of British identity based on a belief in a tolerant liberalism and heroic democracy towards immigrants and refugees. Specific Jewish persecution may be more widely acknowledged than in the immediate post-war years, however, the Jewishness of victims is still downplayed within education through the universal meanings they and their testimony are seen to impart and the way in which identification with their experiences is framed through the lens of commonality. Liberal culture and a pre-established sense of what it means to be British has led to the dilution of Jewishness and the move towards a more universalised, yet domesticated, narrative accessible to all in British Holocaust education. As the response to the articulation of Jewishness by Rabbi Marcus at Auschwitz reveals the British people still appear reluctant to engage with Jewish specificity, or a Jewish narrative, for fear of excluding the other victims of the Nazi regime. To do so would be to be seen to politicise the memory of the Holocaust itself, however, as the embracement of the Holocaust survivor and Auschwitz-Birkenau as symbols of the perils of fascism and the tolerance of British democracy

show both Holocaust memory, and Holocaust education within this sphere of memory, contain inherent political value.

Such politicisation was also evident within the second part of this study which explored the “distancing” of the Holocaust in popular imagination through an examination of the growing significance of sites of atrocity, in particular Auschwitz-Birkenau. Within this part of the study it was shown that Holocaust education has not only reflected the cultural move towards Auschwitz in British imagination but that it has also been instrumental in the movement of the Holocaust eastwards in popular imagination and historical understanding through continued emphasis on Auschwitz-Birkenau in educational initiatives. The emphasis on Auschwitz as the major site in both Holocaust education and wider British remembrance reflects the fact that images of the site transcend language barriers and, as such, it has become a universal symbol of the Holocaust. Nevertheless, this emphasis on Auschwitz-Birkenau has not only disassociated Britain in cultural imagination from the crimes of Nazism itself but has also reinforced the move of the Holocaust further east in British consciousness drawing on preconceived notions and fears about the “Other” as a means of articulating the positivity of British tolerance and democracy. Despite the political investment in Holocaust teaching many either do not notice or acknowledge this politicisation as the politically acceptable messages Holocaust education imparts, conforms to wider national values concerning tolerance and liberal culture. As such, the politicisation of the Holocaust is oft only discussed by students or the public when a different political sentiment, such as the discussion of Israeli security by Rabbi Marcus during the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project, is articulated.

The gradual imperial decline of Britain in the wake of the cessation of hostilities in 1945 has ultimately meant that politicians and the wider population have clung to the lingering memories of the past so as to sustain pride in British actions and British national character which both prevents and obscures introspective analysis. British actions before the outbreak of hostilities such as the elicitation of the Kindertransport and in the liberation of Bergen-Belsen in 1945 have lingered in British consciousness not for their reality but for what the representation of these acts articulates about Britain. This thesis has shown that Holocaust education, like British cultural consciousness, chooses to subsume that which would disrupt the domesticated Holocaust narrative which perpetuates an accepted British account of both the Holocaust and the Second World War which was being constructed even as the Final Solution to the Jewish question was being carried out.

A universal narrative of the Holocaust, honed and shaped through a very British lens, has not only surpassed the historical realities of the Holocaust but has also allowed the perpetuation of a mythical Holocaust based on iconic symbols. An acceptable Holocaust “myth” which can be repeated and evoked as a means of reinforcing British identity both through defining itself through what it is and what it is deemed not to be, defining itself against the “Other”. Yet it has also been the position of this thesis that the emphasis on universal “lessons” in which current modes of British Holocaust teaching are immersed are dehistoricising the Holocaust by unmooring the historical event from the context in which it took place in favour of imparting “lessons” and meaning for contemporary society.

As the Holocaust has moved to the centre stage of British education and, subsequently, British imagination so too has it become more problematic. The approach which Holocaust education currently takes is extremely emotive and extremely popular, not only amongst British school children, but also teachers and the wider audiences, that it informs. Yet to use this popularity as a justification for continuing the current mode of Holocaust teaching without greater critical self-reflection, or without resituating the Holocaust within a more historicised narrative, is problematic. For Holocaust educators have come to assume a position of authority in British culture and are in a seminal position to guide and increase Holocaust knowledge rather than to simply subscribe to the format preferred by those partaking in Holocaust learning due to its emotiveness. Future research in this area would not only be valuable it is also necessary. At the current time there is very little regulation of the work carried out by these organisations and, as a result, there is very little awareness of how the emotive and pathos laden approach to this subject impacts on engagement of the Holocaust as an historical event.

There are, of course, further areas of research which cannot, due to limitations of space, be explored within this thesis and which would benefit from further study. Such research would enhance understanding of the role of Holocaust education in sculpting the future of Holocaust consciousness. Whilst this thesis has analysed two particular symbols which have emerged as dominant icons in British education it would be instructive for further research to be undertaken comparatively to observe which symbols other nations have absorbed into their popular consciousness and whether other countries have equally domesticated these symbols so as to evoke meaning and significance for their own purposes. A comparative exploration would undoubtedly reveal wider transnational trends in both Holocaust education and would pose some interesting questions as to how and why both Holocaust consciousness, and Holocaust

education, have developed in the way in which they have on both a global, and more localised, stage.

Equally it would be interesting to note whether the field of Holocaust education, as it is carried out in Britain largely through educational organisations devoted to the purpose of transmitting the Holocaust's legacy, exists in other countries and, more significantly, whether these organisations have had as much influence in shaping the way in which the Holocaust is remembered. Much of the research in this study has focused on the suppression of engagement with Jewish culture in Holocaust education and a lack of engagement with the Jewish identity of survivors in both education and wider British culture. Further study into how the Holocaust is taught within predominantly Jewish educational environments as a means of discovering the extent to which universal narratives and British domestication have infused Jewish educational narratives of the Holocaust would, therefore, also be beneficial.

Due to the relationship between Holocaust education and Holocaust consciousness a greater examination of the former would, subsequently, enhance understandings of the role of the Holocaust in British society and culture, an area which has surprisingly been the subject of relatively little academic exploration. Further research into both Holocaust education itself, and the role of Holocaust education in the creation of historical consciousness, is increasingly urgent. The role of survivors in the transmission of Holocaust teaching has been of such importance that it is clear that, when they are no longer able to mediate their experiences within the classroom, organisations devoted to encouraging this mode of education will face the difficult reality of establishing a very different form of Holocaust education and, ultimately, Holocaust remembrance. Without a closer understanding of the complexities and contradictions which are inherent within the field of Holocaust education, as the second generation initiative gestures towards, organisations risk perpetuating the screen which surrounds the Holocaust as an historical event and which obscures the possibility of critical self-reflection, thereby preventing any sense of introspective analysis.

As Richard Evans observed, 'If we want to help young people to develop a sense of citizenship, they have to be able and willing to think for themselves. The study of history does this. It recognises that children are not empty vessels to be filled with patriotic myths. History isn't a myth-making discipline, it's a myth-busting discipline, and it needs to be taught as such in our

schools.<sup>890</sup> Yet despite the aspirations of Evans it is apparent that Holocaust education at least is currently contributing to a patriotic British narrative whilst perpetrating a rather mythical and redemptive interpretation of the Holocaust as opposed to one rooted within historical understandings. As has been illustrated, the seminal position of the *Lessons from Auschwitz* project within popular and political consciousness reinforces this symbolically laden and politically infused representation of the past. As Holocaust educators find themselves at the crossroads of the future of Holocaust education this study shows that they perhaps need to utilise their own power and influence to counter, rather than to simply reinforce, popular misconceptions and the politically acceptable messages which the Holocaust is seen to impart and, instead, to re-historicise the Holocaust to ensure that the legacy of the survivors whom educational organisations so value is not reduced to the rhetoric of “lessons” whilst their personal stories are lost in favour of abstract identification. By re-historicising the Holocaust and challenging the dominant Holocaust narrative which situates British identity against the ‘Other’ educators could become the transformative organisations they have always aspired, and indeed claimed, to be.

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<sup>890</sup> Evans, R, ‘Myth-busting’, *The Guardian*, (13 July 2013)

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