

# **An Emerging “Holocaust Memorial Problem?”**

## **The Condition of Holocaust Culture in Britain**

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### **ABSTRACT:**

In 2021 and 2022, two major developments in Britain’s Holocaust culture are due to occur: the launch of completely revised Holocaust galleries at the Imperial War Museum London and the opening of a new national memorial and learning center alongside the Houses of Parliament. This article looks toward these events by way of examining trends and trajectories since the turn of the millennium. It argues that Holocaust culture in Britain is currently characterized by acute polarity and beset with a number of systemic issues. These include the collapsing of commemoration and education into one another, along with an emerging political agenda to tie Holocaust history and memory to “British values.” Borrowing from James E. Young, the article suggests that if these trends continue, then the early 2020s may well mark the arrival of a “Holocaust memorial problem.”

**KEYWORDS:** Holocaust consciousness, Holocaust education, memory studies, culture, Britain.

## **An Emerging “Holocaust Memorial Problem”?**

### **The Condition of Holocaust Culture in Britain**

Andy Pearce\*

Memory, which has followed history, will now be followed by still further historical debate.<sup>1</sup>

In his 1993 collection of essays *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, Saul Friedländer suggested that representation of the past “has to be imagined as a continuum: the constructs of public-collective memory find their place at one pole, and the ‘dispassionate’ historical inquiries at the opposite pole.” Explaining further, Friedländer wrote, “The closer one moves to the middle ground, that is, to an attempt at general interpretation of a group’s past, the more the two areas... become intertwined and interrelated. This middle ground may be defined as a specific category, that of ‘historical consciousness.’”<sup>2</sup>

Twenty-six years after Friedländer’s formulation, our knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust and our mnemonic engagements with it are, arguably, greater than ever before. Meanwhile, “the digital reconfiguration of remembering and forgetting” brought by the

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<sup>1</sup> James E. Young, “Germany’s Holocaust Memorial Problem—and Mine,” *The Public Historian*, vol. 24, no. 4 (2002): p. 80.

<sup>2</sup> Saul Friedlander, *Memory, History, and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe* (Bloomington & Indianapolis: Indiana University Press, 1993), p. viii.

“connective turn” has profoundly impacted both our construction of the past and our relationships with it in ways we have yet to comprehend.<sup>3</sup> Yet none of these advances render Friedländer’s model obsolete. On the contrary, in this article I wish to suggest that it remains a helpful tool for conceptualizing the dynamics and power constellations present within Holocaust cultures.

The title of this article is, in part, respectfully borrowed from an essay written by James E. Young at the turn of the millennium. Young uses it to refer to the process by which Germany sought to confront its “paralyzing Holocaust memorial problem” of how “a nation of former perpetrators [would] mourn its victims” and how “a divided nation [could] reunite itself on the bedrock memory of its crimes.”<sup>4</sup> At the same time, Young reconstructs his participation in this process, and his own “evolution from a highly skeptical critic on the outside of the process to one of the arbiters on the inside” after agreeing to join the panel charged in the late 1990s with finding a design for the national memorial planned for Berlin.

In adopting Young’s title, I am not suggesting that Germany’s memory culture is comparable to Britain’s. Instead, in borrowing from Young, I mean to point toward issues currently emerging in Britain and to suggest we consider how far they are laying the foundations for a “memorial problem” in the near future. It is a question that has immediacy: on the horizon lie the outlines of two major developments that will assume their final forms in the early 2020s. The first are the brand-new Holocaust Galleries at London’s Imperial War Museum (IWM) currently scheduled to open in 2021. These will replace the museum’s current Holocaust Exhibition, which opened in 2000 and has since entered the pantheon of

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<sup>3</sup> Andrew Hoskins, “The Restless Past: An Introduction to Digital Memory and Media,” in Andrew Hoskins, (ed.), *Digital Memory Studies: Media Pasts in Transition* (New York and London: Routledge, 2018), p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Young, “Germany’s Holocaust Memorial Problem,” p. 65.

international Holocaust museology. The second is the construction of a national Holocaust memorial and accompanying learning center, in gardens adjacent to the Palace of Westminster. This was the principle recommendation of the Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission, launched in 2014, and is now overseen by the United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Foundation (UKHMF). An international design competition for the project was held in 2017 and was won by a team headed by Sir David Adjaye and Ron Arad. In December 2018, the UKHMF submitted a formal planning application for the site to Westminster Council, and if successful, the site is due for completion in 2022.

Ordinarily, the occurrence of either one of these enterprises would demarcate an important moment in a nation's memory culture. Therefore, their synchronicity can be read as evidence of a culture undergoing substantial shifts and changes. This raises questions regarding what is changing, in what ways, for what purpose, and at whose wishes. To begin to answer these requires an appreciation of long-standing trajectories in British Holocaust culture, recognition of how commemoration and education have become conflated, an appreciation of other recent initiatives, and an understanding of the contexts in which they are happening.

This essay works toward these ends. In the process, it argues that despite some notable advances, in Britain the continuum described by Friedländer remains acutely polarized. An important driver in this has been the tendency of some figures in positions of influence to frame history and memory in essentialized, reductive terms. Sir Mick Davis, for example, chair of the Holocaust Commission, wrote in his official report that he and his colleagues were "conscious" of ensuring "the Holocaust does not move from living memory, with the depletion of the survivor generation, into a sterile history."<sup>5</sup> Others, such as Cabinet Minister

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<sup>5</sup> Mick Davis, foreword to *Britain's Promise to Remember: The Prime Minister's Holocaust Commission Report* (London: HMSO, 2015), p. 5.

Michael Gove, have privileged memory over history in similar, yet different terms, distinguishing between “living” or “lived history” and “just history.”<sup>6</sup>

Aside from hinting at misunderstandings of what history and memory are, this practice has consequences for public discourse and perceptions. It inculcates a prioritization of memory over history and the historical discipline, implying that intricacies and complexities of both are neither desirable nor necessary. Commonly, Friedländer explains, “Incremental knowledge acquired by historical research is usually integrated within the general framework of the prevailing historical consciousness of a group and moulded according to one of its extant frameworks of interpretation.”<sup>7</sup> Clearly, integration of any degree becomes difficult in a climate in which history and memory are set against one another. The atmosphere is made only more febrile when politicians and their mandarins look to instrumentalize Holocaust history and memory for their own ends, as has been the case in Britain throughout the last two decades.

Predicting the future is a fools’ errand. Bringing historical perspective to bear on the present can, with due caveats and caution, help to deepen our understanding of current issues and trends and awaken us to potential trajectories. If the current trajectories of Holocaust consciousness continue, then by the early 2020s, Britain may be confronted with multiple

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<sup>6</sup> Michael Gove, “The Necessity of Memory” (speech to the Holocaust Educational Trust, 10 September 2014), accessed 12 May 2018,

<https://www.conservativehome.com/platform/2014/09/the-necessity-of-memory-the-full-text-of-michael-goves-speech-to-the-holocaust-educational-trust.html>; see also Karen Pollock,

quoted in “Announcement of new Chairs of UKHMF,” Holocaust Educational Trust, accessed 12 May 2018,

<https://www.het.org.uk/news-and-events/711-announcement-of-new-chairs-of-ukhmf>.

<sup>7</sup> Friedländer, *Memory, History and the Extermination of the Jews of Europe*, p. viii.

Holocaust memorial problems, many of which will not be characterized by “endless debate and memorialization,”<sup>8</sup> but by the foreclosure of the former by prioritization of the latter.

### **Commemoration and education in the late twentieth century**

Understanding many of the current dimensions of Britain’s Holocaust culture requires an awareness of how commemoration and education have become enmeshed with one another over the past generation. Commemoration, argues Eelco Runia, is “the prime historical phenomenon of our time.”<sup>9</sup> Rejecting the antithetical framings of history and memory as ultimately unhelpful, Runia maintains that we see the “two diverging approaches to the past” as being between history and commemoration. For Runia, commemoration is an act of “self-exploration,” one that should entail “a confrontation with what we don’t like to be confronted with,” but one that today is a “soft-headed brand” that descends inevitably into identity affirmation and self-congratulation.<sup>10</sup> Accordingly, Runia depicts commemoration as “the creative—nay, *inventive*—recapitulation, the sacramental re-celebration, of a particular act of externalization” enabling us to create the past we desire for ourselves.<sup>11</sup> Whether this past is glorious or gruesome is immaterial, since “the more we commemorate what we [as a species] did, the more we transform ourselves into people who did not do it.”<sup>12</sup>

Following Marita Sturken, we can see “acts of public commemoration” as “moments in which the shifting discourses of history, personal memory, and cultural memory

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<sup>8</sup> Young, “Germany’s Holocaust Memorial Problem,” p. 80.

<sup>9</sup> Eelco Runia, “Burying the Dead, Creating the Past,” *History and Theory*, vol. 46, no. 3 (2007): p. 314

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*, pp. 316–317.

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 325.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 320.

converge.”<sup>13</sup> The precise formation of this convergence is commonly determined by what Barbara Misztal describes as “a unitary and coherent version of the past that still provides comforting collective scripts.”<sup>14</sup> It is here, some argue, that the differences between history and commemoration become palpable. As Barry Schwarz has written, “History’s goal is to rationalize the past; commemoration and its sites, to sanctify it. History makes the past an object of analysis; commemoration, an object of commitment.”<sup>15</sup>

It is well known and understood that commemoration has been a dynamo behind the spread of Holocaust memory within and between nations. As the above insights illustrate, we need not limit our conception of commemoration to acts like ceremonies and remembrance days; indeed, we should recognize that commemorative will and spirit are not reliant on such practices. At the same time, it is sobering to recall Martin Evans’ insight that “at a fundamental level...commemoration is about politics and ideology.”<sup>16</sup> This does not invalidate commemoration, but it does require us to be alive and alert to when conscious instrumentalization masquerades as the politics of memory.

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<sup>13</sup> Marita Sturken, “The Wall, the Screen and the Image: The Vietnam Veterans Memorial,” in Nicholas Mirzoeff, (ed.), *The Visual Culture Reader*, 2<sup>nd</sup> ed. (London: Routledge, 2002), p. 357.

<sup>14</sup> Barbara A. Misztal, *Theories of Social Remembering* (Maidenhead and Philadelphia: Open University Press, 2003), p. 127.

<sup>15</sup> Barry Schwartz, “Rethinking the concept of collective memory,” in Anna Lisa Tota and Trever Hagen, (eds.), *Routledge International Handbook of Memory Studies* (London: Routledge, 2015), p. 12.

<sup>16</sup> Martin Evans, “Memories, Monuments, Histories: The Rethinking of the Second World War since 1989,” *National Identities*, vol. 8, no. 4 (2006): p. 323.



Tony Kushner's sagacious history of the Holocaust in Britain has shown how, by and large, organized acts of Holocaust commemoration were confined to the Jewish community for much of the postwar period.<sup>17</sup> The creation of Britain's first Holocaust memorial in Hyde Park in 1983 did, in theory, break this trend, but it did not result in non-Jewish society engaging in commemorative activity. Indeed, it was not until 1995 and the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz that commemorating the Holocaust became a matter of interest among non-Jewish society, and it was only with the marking of the inaugural Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) in 2001 that we observe something like mass participation in Holocaust commemoration.

To a certain degree, the absence of collective commemorative acts for much of the postwar period reflects the status of the Holocaust within British historical culture since 1945. Still, we should not overlook the fact that the conceptual contours of "the Holocaust" did not exist before the late 1970s,<sup>18</sup> nor presume that the paucity of commemorative activity prevented awareness, interest, or engagement. Pasts do not depend on commemoration alone for their construction or perpetuation; within the technological societies of the post-industrial world, there are many modes and mediums for memory work.

This brings us to the role of education. Like civic commemoration, the capacity of educational systems to contribute to national interests, in particular identity formation and the development of collective memories, is well established.<sup>19</sup> The influence that educational

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<sup>17</sup> Tony Kushner, *The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination: A Social and Cultural History* (Oxford: Berg, 1994).

<sup>18</sup> Andy Pearce, "The Holocaust in the National Curriculum after 25 years," *Holocaust Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2017): p. 237.

<sup>19</sup> James V. Wertsch, *Voices of Collective Remembering* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), p. 68.

systems now exert over the public perceptions of the past may have been overtaken by mass media, the entertainment industries, and technology, yet formally organized and state-mandated forms of teaching and learning still retain importance. This is especially so when we see education with Michael W. Apple as being animated by questions around knowledge and its uses. For education is more than “the technical issues of how we teach efficiently and effectively” since it is inseparable from “economic, political, and cultural power.”<sup>20</sup>

It is perhaps with this in mind that Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth have suggested a particular kind of “instrumentalization” of memory occurs through state educational systems. “Here,” they contend, “collective memory comes close to official historiography.”<sup>21</sup> Certainly the history (and histories) young people encounter during their schooling can be—and are—extremely formative. Likewise, there no doubt that history curricula and history classrooms generally are infused in explicit and implicit ways by cultural politics.

Yet states do not have a monopoly over the representations of the past that young people are exposed to, and help construct, in their schools. The case of school history in late twentieth-century England is illustrative. In the 1980s, the content and the form of history teaching in schools was the subject of fierce debate.<sup>22</sup> For some, particularly those on the political right, learning history was a matter of cultural transmission: through didactic

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<sup>20</sup> Michael W. Apple, “Preface to the 25<sup>th</sup> Anniversary Third Edition,” *Ideology and Curriculum*, 3<sup>rd</sup> ed. (New York and London: RoutledgeFalmer, 2004), p. vii.

<sup>21</sup> Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, “Introduction: A European Memory?,” in Malgorzata Pakier and Bo Stråth, (eds.), *A European Memory? Contested Histories and Politics of Remembrance* (New York: Berghahn Books, 2010), p. 11.

<sup>22</sup> Robert Phillips, “‘The Battle for the Big Prize’: The Shaping of Synthesis and the Role of a Curriculum Pressure Group – The Case of School History and the National Curriculum,” *The Curriculum Journal*, vol. 3, no. 3 (1992): pp. 245–260.

instruction, young people were to learn a retrograde national narrative that smoothed over the ruptures and dislocations brought by a loss of empire, decolonization, demographic upheaval, and economic turbulence. For others, principally the profession of school history teachers, the experience of learning history was to be an initiation into the discipline and its epistemology as much as an exercise in knowledge acquisition. Significantly, despite sustained assault by successive Conservative administrations and their surrogates, by the turn of the 1990s, it was the disciplinary approach that had become embedded in schools. That this occurred at the same time as the creation in 1991 of a statutory national curriculum determined by the government exemplified how the state was not the only active agent in the teaching of history in schools.

Perceptions of the past—its nature and role, purpose and function—can and will influence approaches to teaching and conceptions of learning. Such perceptions need not be fixed, of course, and can change over time for a variety of reasons. Teaching and learning about the Holocaust is no different. A body of literature exploring the history of the Holocaust in English schools, both before and after the introduction of the national curriculum, need not be detailed here.<sup>23</sup> Notable for us is how the character of teaching about the Holocaust has evolved over time. At root, this concerns what the Holocaust was being taught *as* and what it was being taught *for*. Determining this retrospectively is hindered by a dearth of empirical data, but some insights are available.

In his 1987 survey of practice in schools in the United Kingdom, for example, John P. Fox found that some teachers who indicated they were choosing to teach the Holocaust adopted an approach that combined the “historical” with the “contemporary” and saw “the

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<sup>23</sup> See, for instance, Susan Hector, “Teaching the Holocaust in England,” in Ian Davies, (ed.), *Teaching the Holocaust* (London: Continuum, 2000), pp. 105–115; Lucy Russell, *Teaching the Holocaust in School History: Teachers or Preachers?* (London: Continuum, 2007).

historical subject of Nazi Germany and the Jewish Question” “related directly to the contemporary problems and policies of Israel...and more particularly the Palestinian problem.” Fox found others who would “take the historical example of Nazi Germany and its anti-Jewish policies as the starting-point for a discussion and examination of anti-Semitic and racist...attitudes and organizations in contemporary British and Western society.” In sum, Fox found that the Holocaust—if taught at all—was “employed...to impress upon young people the dangers and potentially terrible consequences of human prejudice and racialism.”<sup>24</sup>

With some justification, Fox’s survey has been criticized for its limited scale and scope.<sup>25</sup> Even so, it usefully reveals that teachers were motivated more by a sense of “Never Again” than by “Never Forget.” This is not to say teachers were dismissive of memory or remembering, but rather that Fox’s findings intimated teachers did not see remembrance as an end in and of itself. As Fox opined, “This present Survey clearly indicates...the Jewish imperative (shared by many non-Jews) of ensuring the subject *is* remembered and not forgotten is too often countered by a Gentile view which says ‘yes,’ but ‘not too much.’” Accordingly, “the problem, in education as in society at large, seems to be less that of ‘forgetting’...but rather one of *how* it should be remembered. And...the next question is *how* it should be taught?”<sup>26</sup>

### **The “education of memory”**

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<sup>24</sup> John P. Fox, *Teaching the Holocaust: A Report of a Survey in the United Kingdom* (Leicester: National Yad Vashem Charitable Trust and The Centre for Holocaust Studies, 1989), pp. 12–13.

<sup>25</sup> Hector, “Teaching the Holocaust,” p. 106.

<sup>26</sup> Fox, *Teaching the Holocaust*, p. 14.

Neither of these questions was resolved by the introduction of the national curriculum in 1991. If anything, the failure to address these matters while simultaneously making the Holocaust a mandatory subject in English schools only made them more marked. This was especially so once societal interest in and awareness of the Holocaust heightened in the mid 1990s. These wider developments—related, as they were, to trends in Europe and North America<sup>27</sup>—directly impacted the educational system in various ways. While the growth of representational and memory work in British society impressed itself upon teachers and students alike, education itself came to be perceived in broader culture as the principal conduit for the preservation and perpetuation of Holocaust memory.

This coming together of commemoration and education did not take place at a specific moment, due to a particular event, or because of the actions of any agents. Instead, it was a transnational, transcultural process whereby beliefs about the need to teach, learn, and remember the Holocaust were progressively subsumed into one another. Initially stimulated in the early 1990s by the events in the Balkans, the success of *Schindler's List*, and the Rwandan genocide, exercises in teaching and learning and acts of memory work were brought in closer union by a spate of memorial and museum construction, the commemorative spirit of 1995, and major developments in international Holocaust politics during the late 1990s. With these occurrences, the dual-aspect idea, as expressed by Elie

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<sup>27</sup> Andy Pearce, “Britain and the Formation of Contemporary Holocaust Consciousness: A Product of Europeanization, or Exercise in Triangulation?,” in Lucy Bond and Jessica Rapson, (eds.), *The Transcultural Turn: Interrogating Memory Between and Beyond Borders* (Berlin: De Gruyter, 2014), pp. 119–139.

Wiesel, that “education occurs through remembrance, and remembrance through education” increased in currency.<sup>28</sup>

To better understand how this principle translates into action we can utilize Graham Carr’s concept of “the education of memory.” Employed by Carr to discuss controversies around Canadian memories of World War II, the education of memory refers to the “process by which education, under the aegis of the state, works to compose, articulate and schematize social memory.” The goal, Carr explains, is not “opening up a conversation about the past” or promoting “unfettered inquiry”; the education of memory is instead “intended to pay homage to history by binding children to the past deferentially.”<sup>29</sup> What energizes this “cultural imperative” is “the desire to educate the collective memory of youth about the meaning of the war.” However, education is understood in a very particular way:

But whereas the history of the war was once understood, narrowly, to comprise a body of cognitive knowledge that had to be learned and memorized by successive generations, the emphasis of contemporary narratives is on activating memories and passing on experiences over time.<sup>30</sup>

As a philosophy and as a practice, the education of memory can be legitimately criticized on multiple grounds. Memory is not, as it assumes, a uniform, monolithic entity, able to be molded and manipulated to suit the will of the state; pedagogy is more than a simple transmission of predetermined meanings; and experiential approaches to teaching,

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<sup>28</sup> Ekkehard Schuster and Reinhold Boschert-Kimming, *Hope Against Hope: Johann Baptist Metz and Elie Wiesel Speak Out on the Holocaust* (New Jersey: Paulist Press, 1999), p. 80.

<sup>29</sup> Graham Carr, “War, History and the Education of (Canadian) memory,” in Katherine Hodgkin and Susannah Radstone, (eds.), *Memory, History, Nation: Contested Pasts* (New Brunswick: Transaction, 2006), pp. 67–68.

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 74.

learning, and remembering cannot guarantee buy-in or consensus. As a conceptual frame for policy analysis however, the education of memory prompts us to consider whether or not education is being configured for the transference of cultural memory, as well as the directions that memory is positioned toward.

This brings us back to the aims of teaching and learning about the Holocaust. With the absence of clear guidance from the state leaving these up for grabs, some in the latter 1990s came to see teaching and learning about the Holocaust as the principal bulwark against forgetting. It was presumed that knowledge would be transmitted and assimilated through teaching and learning, thus preventing any obliteration of memory. This presumed and required the existence of a coherent canon about what the Holocaust was—a narrative, in effect, that could be diffused to young people. Since emphasis was placed on simply absorbing knowledge, students did not need to reflect on how they might know what took place or engage in criticality.

Other perspectives saw teaching and learning through utilitarian lenses. Like any past that comes into being within a collective, the Holocaust had to legitimate its presence by being “usable”: its meaning had to be intelligible, its relevance self-evident, its value irrefutable. Previously, as Fox observed, this desire for contemporaneity meant that teachers in Britain sought to relate the Holocaust to issues in the Middle East and the cause of anti-racism. In the last third of the 1990s, this changed. With the encouragement of the Labour government after 1997, Holocaust education was increasingly framed as a means of addressing prejudice and intolerance, rejecting discrimination, and combatting social injustice. This would change again in the 2010s.

Despite the difference in objectives, these outlooks were not mutually exclusive. Indeed, for many—including those in government—these perspectives coexisted and reinforced each other. In this way, teaching and learning about the Holocaust was

increasingly charged with performing multiple, high-stakes tasks. The verb here is critical, for *fin de siècle* teaching and learning about the Holocaust was increasingly engaging in the dissemination of “meanings and representations” that are “performed, employed, and enacted to constitute realities.”<sup>31</sup> The growing performativity of Holocaust education thus entailed the sharing, cultivation, and absorption of social norms and rituals that were taking root in wider culture. This aligns with Paul Connerton’s argument that “images of the past and recollected knowledge of the past...are conveyed and sustained by (more or less ritual) performances.”<sup>32</sup>

As teaching and learning about the Holocaust were increasingly performing memory, they unavoidably risked becoming ritualized. This seemed to be confirmed both by the emergence of a lexicon of universal “Holocaust lessons” replete with “admonitory moral messages”<sup>33</sup> and by the spread in the early 2000s of memorial days explicitly framed as being at once commemorative and educational. Far from being an observer in this process, Britain was one of the leading architects behind the transnational spread of Holocaust remembrance days to follow the Stockholm Declaration of 2000.

### **Cultural warring in the early 2000s: HMD and the IWM**

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<sup>31</sup> Michalis Kontopodis, Christoph Wulf, and Bernd Fichtner, “Introduction: Children, Development and Education – A Dialogue Between Cultural Psychology and Historical Anthropology,” *Children, Development and Education: Cultural, Historical, Anthropological Perspectives* (Dordrecht: Springer, 2011), p. 7.

<sup>32</sup> Paul Connerton, *How Societies Remember* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989), p. 4.

<sup>33</sup> John Bendix, “The Livid Analytic: Layers of Meaning(fullness) in the Context of the Holocaust,” *History of the Human Sciences*, vol. 17, no. 2/3 (2004): p. 126.



At the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, Britain's Holocaust culture was "conflicting and conflictual."<sup>34</sup> While replete with representational work, educational activity, and mnemonic enterprises, political tensions over the purpose and meaning of Holocaust consciousness ran high, thanks, in no small part, to the Labour government's concerted attempts to instrumentalize Holocaust history and memory. To return to Friedländer, if the poles of the public-collective and the academic were far apart, then the middle ground between them had never been so eclectic and electrified.

As major national projects launched in the early 2000s, HMD and the IWM's permanent Holocaust exhibition were prominent lodestones amidst this cultural warring. Since both were concerned in one way or another with the history and memory of the Holocaust, their approach to commemoration and education warrants attention. In the case of HMD, commemoration and education made up its *raison d'être*: it was to be "a national day to learn about and remember the Holocaust" that would "provide to all persons opportunities to learn about and reflect on the crimes against humanity committed by or on behalf of Nazi Germany between 1933 and 1945."<sup>35</sup> This was necessary, according to then-prime minister Tony Blair, because "the Holocaust, and the lessons it teaches us for our own time, must never be forgotten." The aging of survivors added immediacy,

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<sup>34</sup> Andy Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness in Contemporary Britain* (New York and London: Routledge), p. 209.

<sup>35</sup> United Kingdom, House of Commons, Holocaust Remembrance Day Bill, *Sessional Papers 1998-99*, Internet Publications, accessed 12 May 2018, <https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm199899/cmbills/131/1999131.htm>.

according to Blair, in that “it becomes more and more our duty to take up the mantle and tell each new generation what happened and what could happen again.”<sup>36</sup>

The establishment of HMD created a narrative and performative template that has deviated little in the intervening years. It was a framework that featured many of the elements of the education of memory: in its Statement of Commitment, its aims and objectives, the day operated to “schematize social memory” of the Holocaust in Britain while performing memorialization and expressing civic politics. In so doing, HMD embodied the particular dialectic of “educating to remember” and “remembering to educate.” Where the former seeks “to ensure the pledge to ‘Never Forget’ is perpetually fulfilled,” the latter “casts the process of remembering as avowedly didactical” with both heavily invested with moral and ethical weight.<sup>37</sup>

Meanwhile, the IWM Holocaust Exhibition sought from its inception to explicitly reject the memorial museum model that was finding concrete form across Western nations in the 1990s. Its objective was “to educate rather than commemorate,”<sup>38</sup> a principle that kept the exhibition in line with the museum’s self-identity and positioned it toward its identified key constituents: teachers and students.<sup>39</sup> Yet, in the words of Rachel Donnelly,

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<sup>36</sup> Tony Blair quoted in “Blair unveils Holocaust memorial plan,” *BBC News*, 26 January 2000, accessed 12 May 2018, [http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk\\_politics/619244.stm](http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/uk_politics/619244.stm).

<sup>37</sup> Andy Pearce, “Introduction: Education, remembrance, and the Holocaust: Towards pedagogic memory-work,” in Andy Pearce, (ed.), *Remembering the Holocaust in Educational Settings* (London and New York: Routledge, 2018), pp. 8–11.

<sup>38</sup> Suzanne Bardgett, “The Genesis and Development of the Imperial War Museum’s Holocaust Exhibition Project,” *Journal of Holocaust Education*, vol. 7, no. 3 (1998): p. 36.

<sup>39</sup> K. Hannah Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews: History and Identity in the Museum* (London and New York: Routledge, 2011), p. 21.

“While IWM did not set out to create a memorial space, for many survivors and their families the exhibition became precisely that: a place of memory.”<sup>40</sup> Moreover, since museums are cultural constructs engaged in “externalizing the mental function of remembering” for the production of “meaning and understanding,”<sup>41</sup> the IWM’s exhibition was never going to be able to escape memory. The issue was what memory or memories would be made manifest, what they would consist of, and the ends they would be put to.

Museums, observes Vera Zolberg, are “institutions closely intertwined with the collective memory of the nations in which they are created.”<sup>42</sup> The opening of the IWM exhibition thus represented an important moment, one that reflected the status of Holocaust memory in Britain at the same time as it seeking to change it. As a public institution, the IWM performed a public service, providing “a strong narrative that guides the visitor through a very complex and historiographically challenging terrain,” thus ensuring they are “helpfully initiated into the history of the Holocaust.”<sup>43</sup> Given that levels of knowledge of the Holocaust among the general British public have historically been average at best, this was a valuable contribution and significant exercise in public education. At the same time, because of its institutional setting, the exhibition’s narrative

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<sup>40</sup> Rachel Donnelly, “Imperial War Museums: Reflecting and shaping Holocaust memory,” in Pearce, (ed.), *Remembering the Holocaust in Educational Settings*, p. 110.

<sup>41</sup> Susan A. Crane, “The Conundrum of Ephemerality: Time, Memory, and Museums,” in Sharon Macdonald, (ed.), *A Companion to Museum Studies* (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2011), pp. 102, 108.

<sup>42</sup> Vera L. Zolberg, “Museums as Contested Sites of Remembrance: The Enola Gay Affair,” in Sharon Macdonald and Gordon Fyfe, (eds.), *Theorizing Museums: Representing Identity and Diversity in a Changing World* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 76.

<sup>43</sup> Holtschneider, *The Holocaust and Representations of Jews*, p. 41.

naturally and unavoidably spoke of the public it was positioned toward. This was particularly in evidence with the exhibition's representations of Britain and Britishness—in relation to Holocaust history specifically, but not exclusively.<sup>44</sup>

How education and commemoration were conceptualized and approached by HMD and the IWM was inseparable from the type of memory work each expected its users to undertake. A determining factor here concerns the stakeholders in such initiatives and their priorities. It is salient then that both HMD and the IWM were in some way or another related to the state, financed from public funds, and duly subject to a degree of governmental influence. Yet the extent of this influence varied. HMD, for example, was directly administered by and run out of the Home Office during the period between 2000 and 2005; at the IWM, fourteen of the 21 board members are appointed by the prime minister or secretaries of state, with the remaining members being high commissioners from Commonwealth governments and the president an appointee of the queen.

These differences in governance had a tangible effect in terms of how far each institution was tied to governmental politics. This was evidenced from 2000 to 2001, with the furor that accompanied the exclusion of the Armenian genocide from HMD illustrating how the day was impacted far more by political considerations and calculations than the IWM was.<sup>45</sup> As a national day of commemoration ordered, organized, and overseen by the government, HMD naturally performed a ritualized, didactic form of memory work aimed at conformity and consensus through the education of memory. Though the IWM's

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<sup>44</sup> Tom Lawson, "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.

<sup>45</sup> For more on the Armenian controversy, see Robert Fisk, *The Great War for Civilization: The Conquest of the Middle East* (London: HarperCollins, 2005), pp. 423–425.

exhibition was not immune to national Holocaust politics, its aims and operation were encased within, and therefore impacted by, the museum's institutional and cultural parameters. This did not make the exhibition less political, but it did separate it from party politics and ground it in a historical approach—one that also benefited, through the employment of historical consultants and advisors, from academic insight. One of these scholars—David Cesarani—also provided HMD with his expertise, authoring theme papers for a number of years and also acting as one of its champions. Nevertheless, while Cesarani's consultancy for HMD did have some impact, this was tempered by the day's overarching aims, structures, and proprietors.

### **Beyond institutionalization**

HMD and the IWM exhibition were neither the cause nor sole manifestations of cultural conflict around the Holocaust in early-millennial Britain. They were, however, excellent examples of the growing entwinement of education and commemoration and the unavoidable tensions emerging out of this trend.

Another place in which this process occurred, albeit in different ways, was the educational system. At the turn of the millennium, the curriculum content of state-maintained schools in England was still determined by the government-prescribed national curriculum. Within this framework, the Holocaust was framed in ways that accorded it growing significance, but the specifics of Holocaust education remained unwritten in curriculum stipulations. Accordingly, the ways in which the Labour government spoke about Holocaust education and commemoration in other areas became increasingly important as a means of conveying how those in power understood the nature and purpose of teaching, learning, and

remembering. Of these, the discourse around Britain's intervention in Kosovo in 1999 and the early years of HMD were influential and revealing in equal measure.<sup>46</sup>

Labour's attempts to institutionalize the education of Holocaust memory occurred in conjunction with related trends in the international sphere. Critically, because of the government's enthusiasm for Holocaust politics, Britain was an active agent in these transnational processes. We've mentioned Britain's promotion of Holocaust memorial days through the medium of the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA); the country's involvement in "Liaison Projects" has also been shown by Larissa Allwork to have functioned as "a form of Anglo 'soft power' which corresponded with the objectives of British foreign policy in the late 1990s and early 2000s."<sup>47</sup> These objectives shifted with British involvement in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq. On this, Mark Levene has pointedly argued that the latter of these conflicts cast Labour's Holocaust politics as "a blind, a false post-cold war advocacy for what it really does in the world, rather than what it purports to do in favour of peace, environmental stability, or social justice."<sup>48</sup>

Levene's strident critique underlines that during the early millennium, Britain's Holocaust culture had distinct foreign policy dimensions. And though the so-called War on Terror had no tangible association with Holocaust memory and education, the alignment of British Holocaust policies to arcs within the broader international community meant Labour was inevitably open to charges of double standards and hypocrisy. Similarly, having tied

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<sup>46</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness*, pp. 141–143, 204–206.

<sup>47</sup> Larissa Allwork, *Holocaust Remembrance between the National and the Transnational: The Stockholm International Forum and the First Decade of the International Task Force* (London: Bloomsbury, 2015), pp. 111–131.

<sup>48</sup> Mark Levene, "Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day: A Case of Post-Cold War Wish-Fulfillment, or Brazen Hypocrisy?," *Human Rights Review*, vol. 7, no. 3 (2006): p. 53.

Holocaust commemoration and education at the turn of the century to idealized visions of citizenship, tolerance, and civic virtue at home, Labour's domestic agenda was sullied both by the smoke and the ash wafting from the sectarian conflict engulfing post-invasion Iraq, as well as by the government's own increasingly draconian counter-terrorism policies.

If these developments increasingly occupied the government's attention, it did not necessarily spell the end of state-sponsored Holocaust initiatives. Illustrative here is Labour's enthusiasm for the Holocaust Educational Trust's (HET) *Lessons from Auschwitz* Project (LFA). Originating as a private initiative in the late 1990s, the program—with its centerpiece of a one-day visit to Auschwitz—was adopted by the Trust and run as a small-scale project up to 2005.<sup>49</sup> In November of that year, the government committed itself to supporting the project by providing £1,500,000 per year for three years, with this increased in 2008 to £4,650,000 for another three-year period.<sup>50</sup>

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<sup>49</sup> Kara Critchell, "Remembering and Forgetting: The Holocaust in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Britain," *Quest: Issues in Contemporary Jewish History*, vol. 10 (2016), accessed 12 May 2018, <http://www.quest-cdecjournal.it/focus.php?issue=10&id=383>.

<sup>50</sup> "Holocaust study trips extended," *BBC News*, 10 November 2005, accessed 12 May 2018, <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/education/4422722.stm>; "Memorandum submitted by the Holocaust Educational Trust," Select Committee on Education and Skills Written Evidence, March 2006, accessed 12 May 2018,

<https://publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm200607/cmselect/cmeduski/147/147we30.htm>;

Department for Children Schools and Families, Press Notice, "£4.65M For School Visits to Auschwitz," 4 February 2008, accessed 12 May 2018,

<https://moderngov.kingston.gov.uk/documents/s12221/CxMattersarisingAnnexHolocaust%20education.pdf>.

These funds galvanized a massive expansion of the program, enabling it to reach thousands of sixteen- to eighteen-year-old students from state-maintained schools. The project itself was also overhauled, with its format revised to encourage its participants to return to their communities, share their experiences of hearing survivor testimony and visiting Auschwitz with their peers, and become more civically active. Labour's investment in the LFA program thus had tangible effect and semiotic potency. It increased the scale and scope of the project significantly, enabling it to reach thousands of young people. As much as this enabled the premise of students learning the "lessons" of the Holocaust by listening to survivors and going to Auschwitz to be further diffused, it also further reified the emerging performativity of Holocaust education.

Another initiative that benefited from government involvement was the establishment in 2008 of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education. Jointly funded by the government and Pears Foundation, the Centre was founded on the principle of research-informed practice. To that end its first act, it conducted large-scale empirical research into teaching practices in England. When its findings were published in 2009, a number of concerning practices were revealed. Teachers were found to be unsure about what content to cover in the limited time available, curricula appeared skewed toward "perpetrator-orientated narratives," many practitioners exhibited significant gaps in subject knowledge and a predilection to draw on "popular rather than academic discourse," and the majority of teachers held inclusive understandings of victimhood at the same time as pursuing abstract, civic-centered, "lessons"-laden, teaching aims.<sup>51</sup>

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<sup>51</sup> Alice Pettigrew, Stuart Foster, Jonathan Howson, Paul Salmons, Ruth-Anne Lenga, and Kay Andrews, *Teaching about the Holocaust in English Secondary Schools: An Empirical Study of National Trends, Perspectives and Practice* (London: Institute of Education, 2009), pp. 7–9.



The Centre's research findings indicated that Holocaust education in Britain was blighted by a number of pressing issues. But in evidencing the influence that wider culture had on teachers, their understandings, and their practice, the research also reflected prevailing trends and tendencies in Britain's Holocaust consciousness more generally. In its portrait of teaching practice, the research demonstrated the effect that the tying of teaching, learning, and remembering the Holocaust by politicians and others to agendas of communitarianism, multiculturalism, and the promotion of tolerance was having.

Given that HMD had initially been framed by Labour as a way to realize its civic aims, it is salient that in 2005 responsibility for the day was passed from the Home Office to a newly established charitable organization. The foundation of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) was salient for how governance of HMD and power over its strategic direction was now the purview of public figures and representatives from Holocaust-related organizations rather than civil servants and politicians. By some measure, this depoliticized HMD, making it less susceptible to governmental wont and will. But by no means did the day become apolitical. The Trust's Statement of Purpose made clear that its priorities remained memorialization, education, and contributing to civic aims and social improvement. Indeed, in the years after 2005, HMD became progressively characterized by a "communitarian activism" and "civic orientation."<sup>52</sup> These tendencies were politically legitimized by the continued close relationship between HMDT and its financial benefactor, the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government.

Cumulatively, the expanded LFA program, the establishment of the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education, and the formation of the HMDT moved Holocaust consciousness in Britain beyond its institutionalization phase of the 1990s and early 2000s. Yet while these three events had commonalities, they were also marked by distinct differences. They all

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<sup>52</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness*, p. 220.

benefited from political will and public funds, and—on paper—were all concerned in some way, shape, or form with the history and memory of the Holocaust. But in their approaches to and understandings of history, memory, and education these endeavors reflected different positions on Friedländer’s continuum. Their coexistence thus said something about the condition of Holocaust culture in Britain; they suggested that though the white heat of cultural warring seen at the turn of the millennium may have dissipated, underlying tensions and points of division were still very much in existence.

### **The 2010s and beyond**

As Britain moved into the 2010s, a number of important occurrences took place in its Holocaust culture. There was, for example, a discernible spike in Holocaust activity in certain quarters and a handful of important events. At the same time, as new projects were undertaken, new dimensions in public narratives and political discourse also began to appear. These developments were interrelated, of course, and were themselves inflected by the emergence of new and unforeseeable social, cultural, economic, and political contexts.

Some of the most significant happenings took place at the level of central government. One such initiative was the creation in 2010 of the position of United Kingdom Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues. Announced a matter of weeks after the Conservative-Liberal Democrat coalition entered into government, then-Foreign Secretary William Hague explained that the post was created as a means of building upon and breathing new life into a particular sphere of British foreign policy.<sup>53</sup> As such, the envoy was part of a broader process centered on “improving the machinery of foreign policy-making,” but for the pursuit of “an active and activist foreign policy in Europe” and the “use of soft power to promote British

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<sup>53</sup> Hansard, Written Statements, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Volume 511, 9 June 2010.

values.”<sup>54</sup> The newly installed envoy, Sir Andrew Burns, was given a broad brief. He was to “drive forward policy on...a wide range of post-Holocaust issues,” most of which fell under the bracket of “Holocaust education, remembrance and research.”<sup>55</sup> Generally speaking, the rationale behind the envoy represented continuity in terms of Britain’s approach to international Holocaust politics over the previous fifteen years. That said, it was revealing that one of the very first acts of this new administration was to create a position intended to “provide a clearer UK international profile, presence and influence.”<sup>56</sup>

The coalition government also showed interest with the position of the Holocaust in formal education. In February 2013, after a protracted review process, draft proposals for a new national curriculum were published. Under these revisions, it was proposed to radically alter how the Holocaust was framed: it was to be depicted as a “unique evil” emblematic of “Nazi atrocities in occupied Europe.”<sup>57</sup> After criticism of this rendition was expressed during the ensuing consultation period, when the final curriculum appeared in September 2013, this appellation had been removed. However, while no longer a “unique evil,” the Holocaust

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<sup>54</sup> Rhiannon Vickers, “The Con-Lib Agenda for Foreign Policy and International Development,” in Simon Lee and Matt Beech, (eds.), *The Cameron-Clegg Government: Coalition Politics in an Age of Austerity* (Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2011), pp. 208–209.

<sup>55</sup> Sir Andrew Burns, quoted in Foreign and Commonwealth Office, “Announcement: UK appoints post-Holocaust Issues Envoy,” 9 June 2010, accessed 12 May 2018, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-appoints-post-holocaust-issues-envoy>.

<sup>56</sup> William Hague, Hansard, Written Statements, Foreign and Commonwealth Office, Volume 511, 9 June 2010.

<sup>57</sup> Department for Education, *The National Curriculum in England: Framework document for consultation* (London: HMSO, 2013), p. 171

became the only named event in the entire curriculum for eleven- to fourteen-year-olds, with its historical contexts—namely, World War I, interwar years, and World War II—all reduced to the status of optional topics.<sup>58</sup> There is nothing to suggest that this toying with the Holocaust in the curriculum was intentionally inflammatory. Still, by adopting the positions it did in both the draft and final curriculum, policymakers demonstrated considerable naiveté about the state of Holocaust scholarship and the importance of context in history.

Far and away, the most significant governmental initiative of the 2010s was the launching of the Holocaust Commission. Initially announced in September 2013 by Prime Minister David Cameron, the Commission was born out of the perceived “need to work harder than ever to preserve the memory of the Holocaust from generation to generation” and “to continue to learn and apply the lessons of the Holocaust to our society at home and abroad.”<sup>59</sup> Delivering his announcement at a dinner celebrating the HET’s 25<sup>th</sup> anniversary, Cameron outlined the work of the Commission while simultaneously tying Holocaust commemoration and education to events in the Middle East—specifically the use of chemical

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<sup>58</sup> Department for Education, *National Curriculum in England: History Programmes of Study*, accessed 12 May 2018,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study/national-curriculum-in-england-history-programmes-of-study#key-stage-3>.

<sup>59</sup> David Cameron, “25<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Holocaust Educational Trust: Prime Minister’s speech,” 16 September 2013, accessed 12 May 2018,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/25th-anniversary-of-the-holocaust-educational-trust-prime-ministers-speech>.

weapons by the Assad regime in the Syrian civil war, concerns over Israeli national security, and the “genocidal intent” of the Iranian government.<sup>60</sup>

Setting Holocaust commemoration and education against this foreign policy agenda infused Cameron’s announcement with an unwelcome and unshakeable scent of instrumentalization. Three months later, when Cameron officially launched the Commission at HMD 2014, he spoke in reverential tones. It was, he said, “a day when we remember the darkest hour of our human history, the Holocaust; a day when we decide to put away all and fight all forms of prejudice and hatred.” It was also a day when meeting survivors had made him “realise what a sacred task the Holocaust Commission has to carry out.”<sup>61</sup> Cameron’s emphasis on sacrality served the purpose of “transcending faith community affiliations” and positioning the Holocaust as “a new moral singularity within an increasingly unstable religious-secular landscape.”<sup>62</sup> But it was also entwined with a new, emerging discourse about Britain’s relationship with the Holocaust as history and memory.

This new discourse was first visible in the Holocaust Commission’s Terms of Reference. The Terms stipulated the Commission was to “include a clear focus on the role that Britain played,” through the *Kindertransport*, liberation of Belsen, and the postwar settling of survivors, and the Commission was also to provide “deliverable recommendations

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<sup>60</sup> Ibid.

<sup>61</sup> David Cameron, “David Cameron’s Holocaust Speech,” 27 January 2014, accessed 12 May 2018,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/david-camerons-holocaust-commission-speech>.

<sup>62</sup> David Tollerton, “‘A New Sacred Space in the Centre of London’: The Victoria Tower Gardens Holocaust Memorial and the Religious-Secular Landscape of Contemporary Britain,” *Journal of Religion and Society*, vol. 19, no. 4 (2017).

which will ensure the Holocaust and its lessons remain relevant for future generations.”<sup>63</sup> Later, in the Commission’s final report, the zeal for a British focus saw Britain’s historical relationship with the Holocaust framed in a telling way. While there was an admission, of sorts, that Britain’s historical connections were “not wholly positive,”<sup>64</sup> this partial concession was counterbalanced by the affirmation that Britain had done its fair share—and, in the process, demonstrated “what it means to be British.”<sup>65</sup>

The clearest indication of the ends the Holocaust was being deployed toward came with the implication a “striking and prominent new Memorial” was necessary not just as a “focal point for national commemoration of the Holocaust,” but also because it would “stand as a permanent affirmation of the values of British society.”<sup>66</sup> This was something new, and it marked a distinct break with the legislative, normative, and discursive approach of the Labour governments during the previous thirteen years.

A year after these recommendations were published and accepted, Cameron announced that the site the new memorial and learning center had been decided. “It will stand beside Parliament,” he told the House of Commons, “as a permanent statement of our values as a nation.”<sup>67</sup> Cameron’s pronouncement confirmed that as much as his initiative may have been

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<sup>63</sup> The Prime Minister’s Holocaust Commission, “Terms of Reference,” accessed 12 May 2018,

[https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/275198/Terms-of-Reference-PM-Holocaust-Commission.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/275198/Terms-of-Reference-PM-Holocaust-Commission.pdf).

<sup>64</sup> Cabinet Office, *Britain’s Promise to Remember*, p. 22.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 23.

<sup>66</sup> Cabinet Office, *Britain’s Promise to Remember*, p. 41

<sup>67</sup> David Cameron, quoted in “Press release: PM: Holocaust memorial will stand beside Parliament as permanent statement of our British values,” accessed 12 May 2018,

catalyzed by some sense of duty or obligation, it was at least as much concerned with using the Holocaust for the purposes of fashioning national identity. David Tollerton has indicated, “We might wonder whether a narrative of Holocaust-memory-as-purveyor-of-‘British values’ amounts to a novel form of political Christianization” and this certainly warrants consideration.<sup>68</sup> At the very least, the affixing of “British values” to the UKHMF project is problematic for how it openly and unabashedly instrumentalizes Holocaust memory and relies on a selective reading of Holocaust history.

At the level of government, so far the 2010s have been marked by a slew of new initiatives and a servicing of the Holocaust to buttress ideas of nationhood. These occurrences cannot be viewed in isolation from the sociocultural and political contexts brought forth by the EU referendum result of June 2016. In the aftermath of the vote for Brexit, ethnic intolerance, racial tension, and hate crimes have increased exponentially; reported incidents of antisemitism have risen; and nationalism has been cultivated both by sections of the British media and some parliamentarians.<sup>69</sup>

This does not, of course, invalidate the UKHMF or its work. One could argue, for instance, that if the process of realizing its project were to affect major re-evaluations in understandings and practices of Holocaust commemoration and education, then these would be very positive developments. Moreover, were this to occur, it would do so before a watching world: the UKHMF’s project has provoked considerable international interest, and

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<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/pm-holocaust-memorial-will-stand-beside-parliament-as-permanent-statement-of-our-british-values>.

<sup>68</sup> Tollerton, “A New Sacred Space,” p. 11.

<sup>69</sup> Alan Travis, “Lasting rise in hate crime after EU referendum, figures show,” *The Guardian*, 7 September 2016; Katie Forster, “Hate crimes soared by 41% after Brexit vote, official figures reveal,” *The Independent*, 13 October 2016.

this was borne out with 100 entrants from 26 countries submitting entries into its design competition. That the final shortlist of ten could boast some of the most eminent figures in memorial architecture and artistic representations of the Holocaust was further proof of the international salience of this project, all of which only makes attempts to lay claim to the memory of the Europe's murdered Jews as an affirmation of British values all the more peculiar. There is also much irony in the decision of Britain to join the rest of the continent in fixing Holocaust memory in ballast and concrete at the very time that it fumbles, ever more ungraciously and ever more enveloped by factionalism and parochialism, toward the exit door of the European club.

Sites of memory are crucial props in the perpetuation of "imagined communities,"<sup>70</sup> but we also know memorials and monuments (however tasteful or poignant) cannot "remember." Instead of being determined by the particular alignment of stone or the landscape of gardens, what is remembered and how is determined by those who dwell in these spaces: the visitors. This places an onus on a level of public knowledge and understanding being of a decent level, a requirement itself related to the depth and nuance of Friedländer's middle ground.

Importantly, efforts have been made over the last decade to address this particular shortcoming. In 2013, for example, the British Association for Holocaust Studies (BAHS) was founded with the purpose of providing "effective links between scholars, teachers and other researchers and educators in order to enhance the teaching and study of the Holocaust in the UK."<sup>71</sup> Since its establishment the organization has provided a forum for these

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<sup>70</sup> Benedict Anderson, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, new ed. (London: Verso, 2006).

<sup>71</sup> "About," British Association for Holocaust Studies, accessed 12 May 2018, <http://britishholocauststudies.blogspot.co.uk/p/blog-page.html>.



constituencies through its annual conference, while members of its Committee provided consultancy for the Holocaust Commission.

This practice has continued with the UKHMF, which for some time consulted with an Education Advisory Group and a Memorial Advisory Group. The same is true of the HMDT, which has a number of advisory bodies, including a Partnership Group (comprising of organizations in the fields of Holocaust and genocide commemoration and education) and an Expert Reference Group composed of academics, “educators, [and] journalists” who advise the Trust.<sup>72</sup> Meanwhile, following an overhaul of its Ambassadors Programme, the HET now stages an annual conference for students who have participated in its LFA Project, through which they come into contact with “experts in the field of Holocaust research and commemoration.”<sup>73</sup>

From one perspective, these moves indicate a willingness to bring the two “poles” of Britain’s Holocaust consciousness into closer contact. For this, they are to be viewed positively and encouraged. From another perspective, these steps have not prompted key organizations to abandon lesson-centric approaches to commemoration and education or to revise their understandings of the Holocaust as *the* genocidal paradigm. Nor have they so far usurped the tone and tenor of governmental initiatives. Such paradoxes and contradictions are not unknown in Britain. Rather, they are wholly in keeping with deeply embedded, long-term cultural tendencies.<sup>74</sup>

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<sup>72</sup> “Who we are: Advisory Groups,” Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, accessed 12 May 2018, <http://www.hmd.org.uk/page/advisory-groups>.

<sup>73</sup> Holocaust Educational Trust, “Ambassador Conference,” accessed 12 May 2018, <https://www.het.org.uk/ambassadors/ambassador-conference>.

<sup>74</sup> Pearce, *Holocaust Consciousness*, p. 209.

However, new insights into levels of historical knowledge and understanding among young people have placed the condition of British Holocaust consciousness firmly under the microscope yet again. Research by the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education published in 2016 found that “despite the Holocaust being a staple in the curriculum for almost 25 years, student knowledge and conceptual understanding is often limited and based on inaccuracies and misconceptions.”<sup>75</sup> As Tom Lawson observes, school students are “the one group in society that are systematically required to remember and reflect upon” the Holocaust, meaning “failures of understanding, of memory, may very well not be despite this focus on the Holocaust in British culture, but *because* of it.”<sup>76</sup> If we follow Lawson in this interpretation, as indeed we should, then we must recognize that established forms of memory and educational work that are tuned to the sound of the education of memory have resulted in levels of knowledge and understanding that are wholly inadequate.

## **Conclusion**

It would be hyperbolic to claim that, at the time of writing, Britain is afflicted with a Holocaust memorial problem. But what is apparent is the existence of a number of issues growing both in their significance and potential ramifications. Some of these were well illustrated by events in October 2017.

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<sup>75</sup> Stuart Foster, Alice Pettigrew, Andy Pearce, Rebecca Hale, Adrian Burgess, Paul Salmons, and Ruth-Anne Lenga, *What Do Students Know and Understand about the Holocaust? Evidence from English Secondary Schools* (London: UCL IOE, 2016), pp. 2, 59–67.

<sup>76</sup> Tom Lawson, “Britain’s Promise to Forget: Some Historiographical Reflections on *What do Students Know and Understand about the Holocaust?*,” *Holocaust Studies*, vol. 23, no. 3 (2017): pp. 345–346.

At the beginning of that month, tensions between the UKHMF and the IWM over their respective projects manifested themselves in the public sphere. In a report in *The Guardian*, the director-general of the IWM, Diane Lees, called for “the reconsideration of the creation of the UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation’s learning centre, less than a mile away from us, as it will very much divide the public offer on learning about the Holocaust.”<sup>77</sup> Responding to the call, Sajid Javid, then the secretary of state for the government department in charge of the UKHMF, dismissed Lees’ claims. The two projects “will have complementary aims,” he said, “and can collaborate to offer visitors expert and engaging experiences, helping us all to consider the lessons of the Holocaust for future generations.”<sup>78</sup>

It was not the first time that the UKHMF’s project had been criticized. Although the recommendations of the Holocaust Commission had substantial cross-party support, some had voiced concern. For most, the principal objection was the proposed location. Local residents opposed the scale of the plan on account of the disruption it would bring to the area and duly organized into the Save Victoria Gardens Campaign.<sup>79</sup> The issue was also championed in the Houses of Parliament “by as many as 40 MPs and peers,” who wrote to members of the House of Lords urging them to join them in opposition.<sup>80</sup> Alongside those

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<sup>77</sup> Quoted in Harriet Sherwood, “Imperial War Museum in clash over planned Holocaust memorial,” *The Guardian*, 7 October 2017.

<sup>78</sup> Quoted in “Row erupts between ‘competing’ Holocaust education centres over planned memorial,” *Jewish News*, 9 October 2017.

<sup>79</sup> See petition: “Save Victoria Gardens: no building in this precious park!,” Change.org.uk, accessed 12 May 2018, <https://www.change.org/p/sir-peter-bazalgette-save-victoria-tower-gardens-no-building-in-this-precious-london-park>.

<sup>80</sup> “Row over new £50m holocaust memorial as MPs say it will ruin Victoria Tower Garden,” *The Daily Telegraph*, 14 April 2017.

who rejected the project because of its site were a handful of commentators who expressed skepticism about the initiative's ability to actually deliver on its aims.<sup>81</sup>

What was new in the autumn of 2017 was the open exchange of words between two institutions engaged in major public projects. At least as significant, however, was what the remarks made by the respective camps revealed about how those involved viewed and understood what they were respectively trying to do. Where Lees seemed perturbed by a potential marketization of Holocaust education, Javid's priority was that we consider the lessons of the Holocaust. The contrast between these positions was not coincidental. It spoke of very different understandings of the Holocaust as history and memory, and of the purpose of teaching, learning, and remembering it.

A few weeks later, the UKHMF was in the news again: this time, with Adjaye and Arad as the winning entry for the design competition. The successful concept proposal, which bore strong resemblance to the team's previously unsuccessful submission for the Canadian National Holocaust Monument, was praised by judges for its "beauty and sensitivity," its accent on a "sensory experience," and its promise of acting as "an entry point for greater national understanding of the Holocaust and its contemporary relevance."<sup>82</sup> For his part, Adjaye explained that his team believed that

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<sup>81</sup> Ian Jack, "We need new ways to ensure our history is not forgotten," *The Guardian*, 4 February 2017; Rowan Moore, "Britain's Holocaust memorial shortlist: right time, wrong place?," *The Guardian*, 5 February 2017.

<sup>82</sup> Quoted in UKHMF and Cabinet Office, "Press Release: Adjaye Associates and Ron Arad Architects win UK Holocaust Memorial International Design Competition," 24 October 2017, accessed 12 May 2018,

<https://www.gov.uk/government/news/adjaye-associates-and-ron-arad-architects-win-uk-holocaust-memorial-international-design-competition>.

[T]he complexity of the Holocaust story, including the British context, is a series of layers that have become hidden by time. Our approach to the project has been to reveal these layers and not let them remain buried under history. To do so, we wanted to create a living place, not just a monument to something of the past.<sup>83</sup>

Adjaye's remarks were intriguing on account of their distance from the fields of Holocaust and Memory Studies. The notion, for instance, that the Holocaust's complexity has somehow been obscured from our view by the passage of time was a peculiar one, given the evolution of Holocaust historiography during the postwar years and its veritable explosion in the last quarter of the twentieth century. Likewise, the idea that forgetting occurs because of history obviates the role of human agency in determining what collectives remember and what they forget. To be sure, we are still learning about the complexities of both the Holocaust and "the British context," but two generations of scholarship have established the elementals; now our encounters are more a matter of nuance than revelation.

To berate Adjaye for his conceptual proposal would be churlish. He, of course, is an architect, not a scholar, and in any case, in announcing his victory, the UKHMF asserted they were "at an early design stage" ahead of "further development through discussion with Holocaust experts, survivors and other victim groups, and local residents, Westminster City Council," among others.<sup>84</sup> Time, therefore, will tell how far his conceptual vision may be positively refined through consultation. Yet the reality of implementing the Adjaye and Arad design will not only be shaped by the comments of interested parties and constituents, but also by the not-inconsiderable requirements of the government. The reinforcement of British values is foremost among these and is challenging enough in itself, yet the comments of Javid

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<sup>83</sup> Ibid.

<sup>84</sup> Ibid.

welcoming the Adjaye announcement indicated there were other expectations. In addition to speaking about the project generally, Javid remarked on the learning center, a space, he asserted, that “will not only remind us of mankind’s capacity for darkness, through the story of the Holocaust, and other genocides—crucially it will also remind us of our incredible capacity for good.”<sup>85</sup>

The notion of a learning center working to remind and remember spoke to an understanding of commemoration and education that we have encountered repeatedly through this article. This, as we have seen, is problematic in itself. It is exacerbated, however, by a second issue: the desire for the “story of the Holocaust, and other genocides” to be one shaded light and dark in equal measure. The uncomfortable and unpalatable truth is that with each advance in our knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust specifically and the phenomenon of genocide generally, we are confronted with the reality of our own innate capacity as a species for committing horror and atrocity. This cannot be sugarcoated or ignored. Or, rather, it can—if our objective is commemoration instead of education.

Since this article was originally written, a number of further developments have occurred. For example, there has been a rapprochement between the UKHMF and the IWM, with the former claiming that it is “firmly committed to working with other institutions across the UK supporting Holocaust commemoration and education” and the latter pledging to “work together” with the UKHMF “to present complementary narratives on learning about the Holocaust in order to avoid dividing the public offer.”<sup>86</sup> Meanwhile, the UKHMF has

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<sup>85</sup> Ibid.

<sup>86</sup> Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government and United Kingdom Holocaust Memorial Foundation, “Press release: UK Holocaust Memorial to reaffirm Britain’s commitment to stand up against antisemitism, prejudice and hatred,” 4 December 2018 accessed 23 January 2019, <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/uk-holocaust-memorial-to->

formally published a mission statement that is notable not least for its depiction of the Holocaust as “history’s worst example of the disintegration of democratic values,” but also its promise through a thematic exhibition to address “the complexities of Britain’s ambiguous responses to the Holocaust, avoiding simplistic judgements and encouraging visitors to critically reflect on whether more could have been done, both by policymakers and by society as a whole.”<sup>87</sup> Yet if some of these developments appear like potential steps forward, they have been coupled with a continued growth in opposition to the scheme. Interestingly, objections now encompass not just the location, but also the memorial’s design and the way in which the project has generally been handled by the government and its advocates.<sup>88</sup>

In the above ways, the UKHMF project so far serves to reanimate long-standing issues in Britain’s Holocaust culture while simultaneously heralding new ones. As a matter of principle, this may not be objectionable; the issue is the extent to which this is leading to “historical debate,” as Young would call it, or the further polarization of Britain’s Holocaust culture. According to Sir Eric Pickles, speaking in October 2018 in his capacity as co-chair of the UKHMF and current Special Envoy for Post-Holocaust Issues, through the learning center, “We are going to look at our history in an unblinkered way,”<sup>89</sup> a commitment that, if borne out in reality, could lay foundations for informed public debate. However, given how

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[reaffirm-britains-commitment-to-stand-up-against-antisemitism-prejudice-and-](#)

[hatred#mission-statement](#); Lee Harpin, “Rift over planned Shoah memorial ends,” *Jewish Chronicle*, 4 December 2018.

<sup>87</sup> Ministry of Housing, “Press release: UK Holocaust Memorial to reaffirm.”

<sup>88</sup> “Critic of Westminster Holocaust Memorial accuses supporters of ‘railroading’ plans through,” *Jewish Chronicle*, 17 October 2018.

<sup>89</sup> Quoted in Lee Harpin, “Pickles outlines plans for ‘unblinkered’ Holocaust learning centre,” *Jewish Chronicle*, 2 October 2018.

entwined the memorial project has become with notions of Britishness and British identity, it remains to be seen how far candor and confrontation with the past is really possible. In that case, the IWM may once again function as a counterweight to a large-scale governmental project. After all, the museum has committed itself to “presenting the complex narrative of the Holocaust within the context of the Second World War” both “physically and intellectually”<sup>90</sup> and promised to “tell more of the story of the immigration policies and attitudes in Britain towards Jews during the 1930s—what the British media reported and what the people of Britain understood and thought.”<sup>91</sup> These are bold and potentially provocative moves, for they have potential to shatter culturally ingrained mythologies. While they have echo with the UKHMF’s new pledge to tell a warts-and-all history, the absence of an expressed political agenda from the IWM means it may be better positioned to deliver on its promise. Should this occur, and should the UKHMF project produce a narrowly focused, “Ladybird” history<sup>92</sup> of Britain’s relationship with the Holocaust and its legacies, then by the early 2020s Britain’s “Holocaust memorial problem” will have arrived in earnest.

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<sup>90</sup> Diane Lees, Imperial War Museum, “Second World War and Holocaust Galleries,” accessed 12 May 2018,

<http://www.iwm.org.uk/corporate/support-us/donate-now/second-world-war-and-holocaust-galleries>.

<sup>91</sup> Imperial War Museum, *Transforming IWM London: Phase 2 – Second World War and Holocaust Galleries*, p. 14, accessed 12 May 2018,

[http://www.iwm.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2017\\_05\\_22\\_transforming\\_iwm\\_london\\_2.pdf](http://www.iwm.org.uk/sites/default/files/documents/2017_05_22_transforming_iwm_london_2.pdf).

<sup>92</sup> In this context, “Ladybird” refers to Ladybird Books, a famous brand of children’s books, known for being pocket-sized, colorfully illustrated, and easily accessible on account of their



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vocabulary and entertaining approach to their subject matter. The brand's series of history books spawned an array of publications.