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## **The weak moral judgement, dissimulation, credulity, lower life expectancy, weak powers during the Middle Ages**

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### ABSTRACT

An analysis of the “Charter of the Press” by A. Valiev shows that the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic has taken serious steps to create a legal framework for the development of the press and journalism. Parliament October 30, 1919 "Press on the Statute" was adopted on a legal basis from the established media. This is the first legislative act regulating the activities of various printing and printing enterprises in the country. The charter consists of two parts. In the first part 20 points, and in the second three. The first paragraph of the Charter proclaims freedom of the press, saying that "the government will not demand the government." In the second paragraph, “not responsible for the proceedings” was brought to the attention. In the third paragraph, the Chief Press Officer of the Office of the Main Government was entrusted with administrative and general supervision. This legislation, which considers the freedom of speech and the press in Azerbaijan to be the main priority of the state and legally substantiates pluralism, identified “differences between the free press and the anarchist press”.

Keywords: morality, economy, crowd, moral economy.

### Introduction

If education is being overtly harnessed to project supposedly ‘British’ values to counter subversive elements in society in the so called ‘pre-criminal space’ then the use of the Holocaust as a way of asserting British identity is rather more subtly employed.<sup>65</sup> This is often achieved by drawing on powerful and emotive ‘symbols’ such as Holocaust survivors, who have become integral to education in Britain, to the point that they are referred to as being the “Heart of Holocaust Education.”<sup>66</sup> As the Holocaust Educational Trust tells students: “survivor testimonies are powerful because they challenge the process of dehumanization... we cannot imagine the numbers of people that suffered during the Holocaust....However, we can gain some understanding by focusing on the individual stories and testimonies of those who suffered and died.”<sup>67</sup> By using survivor testimonies to encourage a focus on the individual experience, educators are trying to ensure that the victims of the Holocaust are not simply reduced to abstract figures. It is believed that, if students are able to engage with individual testimony, their understanding of human experience within an incomprehensible event can be enhanced.<sup>68</sup>

The form of education promoted by these organizations within their Outreach programs has also helped to propel the survivor witness into the public eye, thereby ensuring that they are increasingly accessible to the public in commemorative events. The way survivors are encountered within British commemorative culture helps to perpetuate narratives of supposedly 'British' liberal democratic values. The visible position of naturalized British survivors during memorial days provides indisputable proof of the value of past British actions on the international stage whilst at the same time championing deeply ingrained self-perceptions of Britain that might end up hindering open discussion about less uplifting past and present aspects of British life.

The role of survivors in British Holocaust talk is particularly discernible in the way the theme of rescue epitomized by the Kindertransport features heavily in both education and memorialization. Referred to by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust as a "unique humanitarian programme" the Kindertransport was overlooked in British collective consciousness until the 50th anniversary of the transports.<sup>69</sup> Since that time, the Kindertransports have evolved so as to become "a source of great national pride within the British historical imagination."<sup>70</sup> The British scheme to allow approximately 10,000 children into Britain following Kristallnacht on 9 November 1938 has been seen as Britain "securing the future" of those Jewish children who came to Britain.<sup>71</sup>

That the Kindertransport has become enshrined within British cultural imagination as an example of the British people rescuing thousands of innocents in a time of adversity is unsurprising. The murder of 1.5 million children, understandably, carries significant emotive power. 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 enhanced by the decision to make the "Children of the Holocaust" the theme of Holocaust Memorial Day 2003, thus highlighting 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. This has been further reinforced by the creation of an interactive exhibition referred to as "The Journey" at The National Holocaust Centre & Museum in Nottingham. The exhibition, built primarily for the mediation of the Holocaust to primary-aged children, follows the story of 10 year old Leo Stein, a German Jewish boy who came to England as part of the Kindertransport. 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 those who came to Britain. Popular British understanding of the Kindertransport, mediated by politicians, the media and organizations 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.<sup>72</sup>

One widely publicized commemorative event reinforcing this memory of Britain as a place of refuge, and in which survivors appeared to play an integral part, was the 70th 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. On 1 September 2009, in order to commemorate this act, a train carrying 170 people, including 22 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>73</sup>

How can we interpret survivors' roles in the remembrance of this event? On the one hand their presence was vital. Without the survivors the journey could not have been relived and the memory would undoubtedly have resonated less widely with the public. Yet, conversely, whilst the survivors were necessary, their experiences were somewhat supplementary to the commemoration, which overwhelmingly centered on Winton himself. 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 promote narratives of British heroism and righteousness.

The press contributed considerably to the perpetuation of the narrative emphasizing the salvation provided to the children admitted into Britain, many of whom are still living in this country. The BBC discussed the enactment under the heading "Czech evacuees thank their saviour."<sup>74</sup> In fact so dominant is the memory that the man who organized the transports from Czechoslovakia is often referred to in the British media as the "British Schindler."<sup>75</sup> These 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>76</sup> Sentiments such as this expressing appreciation towards Britain are frequent and extremely important when considering the role of survivors in British understanding of the Holocaust and of Britain's role within it. Survivors' 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.<sup>77</sup>

Due to the emotiveness of the subject, the expressions of gratitude expressed by survivors and the political pride articulated during commemorative activities, the Kindertransport and the Winton Train have been absorbed within British historical consciousness as acts of rescue representative of tolerance and liberalism at a time when other nations were embracing Fascism. 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. It was not so much the Jewish children but the British man who rescued them who took center stage during the commemorative events. As a result, the survivors are necessary to the story not because of what their experiences reveal about the Holocaust but because of what their presence in Britain reinforces about British identity and past benevolence. 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 contextualized and historically nuanced understanding. Instead, the way in which the Kindertransport and British attitudes towards immigration are remembered circumvent difficult questions and risk turning a complex and multifaceted event into a simple redemptive narrative. As Louise 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 who required it.<sup>78</sup>

Despite the presence of survivors, the historical consciousness promoted is not one primarily about their experiences but, increasingly, about British pride. This positive narrative does not account for the fact that, as Mark 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>79</sup> Thus, the position of the survivor in contemporary Holocaust discourse allows for the continuation of a somewhat mythical remembrance both of the Holocaust and of British treatment of the “Other.” This constellation is at the core of statements such as, for example, that of Ian Austin MP:

“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 values of the UK.”<sup>80</sup>

The domestication of Holocaust survivors and their experiences in education, together with the relative de-contextualization of the Holocaust in the commemorative sphere, combine to reinforce a narrative that, whilst emphasizing the centrality of the Holocaust, also runs the risk distancing Britain from Europe in British imagination.

#### European Holocaust Consciousness or Domesticated Holocaust Identity?

The way in which the Holocaust has come to be absorbed into British consciousness since 2001 reflects the inherent tensions between the decontextualized narrative that has evolved in British Holocaust education and commemoration, and the subsequent impact this narrative has had on contemporary conceptualization of British national identity. These conceptualizations based on representations of the Holocaust also intersect with dominant narratives of the Second World War and influence understandings of Britain’s place in Europe. British narratives of the war and the Holocaust present distinctive features. As Mark Donnelly noted, despite being “a global conflict which killed some 60 million and which left the legacy of Auschwitz, Hiroshima and countless acts of barbarism [the war] has evoked nostalgia, pride and even sentimentality in Britain.”<sup>81</sup>

It is certainly difficult to separate the memory of the Holocaust 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 50th 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>82</sup> Since the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day, however, the Holocaust has become increasingly central to popular understandings of the past and interpretations of British identity. As Andrew Dismore MP 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>83</sup> Subsequently, the association between Britain, the Second World War and the Holocaust in cultural imagination contribute to a sense of identity built on pride in British heroism during this time not only in resisting Fascism but also for liberating Holocaust survivors, and the rest of Europe, from the yolk of Nazism. That this pride has not abated and that this narrative has continued to be perpetuated, was illustrated by an Early Day Motion, tabled in 2006, concerning the recognition of the newly established Veterans Day (renamed Armed Forces Day in 2009) which asserted that the House of Commons recognizes 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>84</sup>

The narrative presented by this EDM is, of course, extremely simplistic, if anything for its failure to reflect the complexities of the immediate post-liberation period during which almost 14,000 people died within the camp.<sup>85</sup>

Of course national ‘myths’, and the subsequent interpretations of identity they inspire, tend not to develop around negative actions of the state and are instead shaped around the affirmation of a positive self-identity through the assertion of supposed national values such as heroism, liberal democracy or tolerance. Yet this is also achieved by positioning the perceived characteristics of the nation against the actions and characteristics of the ‘Other’. In the immediate aftermath of the war and the liberation of the camps “Britain and its allies had begun to carve out for themselves a new role as the moral teachers of a defeated Germany.”<sup>86</sup> The British government and the British public embraced the role of moral guide, fueled by the sense of entitlement resulting from being the nation that had not succumbed to Nazism. Rather than considering key figures such as Irma Grese and Josef Kramer as being solely responsible for the crimes that they had committed, they were also “dismissed as typical Germans, the products of a warped and diseased nation.”<sup>87</sup> The acts of those SS guards within the camps were now being viewed by the British public as representing an entire nation of depraved and bestial “barbarians” who needed to be re-educated before they could be reintegrated into international society.<sup>88</sup> Situated against prevailing sentiments regarding British heroism and valor such depravity exemplified the superiority of British national character.

The way in which the Holocaust was encountered in these early months has helped to shape a self-perception of Britain as a nation of tolerance situated against the negative characteristics of the ‘Other’. This self-image, drawn from the domesticated narrative of the past and of Britain’s perceived role within history, encourages a particular sense of entitlement to international leadership, particularly with regards to issues with moral or humanitarian implications. 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>89</sup> This evocation of British values during the Second World War and British actions in ‘liberating’ survivors of the Holocaust thus allows politicians, and the British public, to maintain a position of moral superiority within the global arena whilst encouraging the view that other countries should be grateful for British heroism and disinterested benevolence. As one MP declared in 2012:

“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>90</sup>

Reflecting the Early Day Motion discussed previously, this rhetoric is also rooted in misconception. The reality is of course that Britain did not go to war for the liberty of the Jewish people, and the government were at pains to prove the opposite at the time;

moreover, whilst Mosley was rejected, antisemitism was still a potent if less violent force in British society; furthermore, although the Kindertransport memory is one in which Britain takes solace, resistance towards further Jewish immigration was rife. Nor does this pride in British values take into account issues surrounding immigration either past or present in British society or Britain's own role in acts of genocide and colonial violence.

The 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 as the Second World War to sustain pride in British national character. The unfortunate outcome is that introspective analysis of both historical events and British actions (or lack thereof) in the present is lacking. The Holocaust is certainly not alone in being represented in this way. Even the Armenian genocide, which as previously discussed Britain has not officially recognized, is sculpted around a highly selective narrative that seeks to characterize Britain's historical response as equally positive. When discussing the genocide in 2015 the Minister for Europe reflected on the fact that "the British Government of that time robustly condemned the forced deportations, massacres and other crimes. We continue to endorse that view. British charities, as we look back, played a major part then in humanitarian relief operations."<sup>91</sup>

The period after the General Elections of 2010 saw a newly invigorated political impetus towards a domestic commitment to ensuring the future of Holocaust remembrance, education and commemoration in British society and culture. This renewed sense of commitment to Holocaust education was not necessarily anticipated. Although the establishment of Holocaust Memorial Day had achieved cross-party support, the decisive shift towards the greater institutionalization of Holocaust memorialization and education in the first decade of the 21st century had overwhelmingly been championed by the Labour governments led by Tony Blair and Gordon Brown. Following the General Election of May 2010, however, the Labour Party's 13 years in power came to a close after the creation of a coalition government led by the Conservative Party alongside the Liberal Democrats. Like the rest of the country, those invested in Holocaust education and remembrance faced a period of considerable uncertainty about what the future would hold for Britain as they waited to hear how the shift in governmental control of the country would impact the future direction of these spheres of Holocaust memory. Their concern was understandable and was reinforced by the fact that in 2008 *The Guardian* had reported that the then leader of the Conservative party David Cameron referred to day trips to Auschwitz as among some of the many 'gimmicks' funded by the sitting Labour government. The inference that this popular program was simply a "short term gimmick" generated a swift popular, and political, backlash that was played out across the pages of the national press.<sup>92</sup>

Contrary to these concerns, however, the new government not only pledged their support for the Lessons from Auschwitz program but also expressed its determination to augment the place of the Holocaust within British consciousness. Reflecting this shift was the announcement of an Envoy for Post Holocaust Issues in June 2010. The statements accompanying the announcement of this role, and the sentiments they expressed, were revealing about the way in which Britain was choosing to situate itself in regards to the wider European context of Holocaust memorialization. Following his appointment, the new Envoy Sir Andrew Burns claimed that "the UK already plays a leading and active role in promoting Holocaust education, remembrance and research, in tackling and resolving outstanding issues and claims and in raising public awareness

of the continuing relevance of the lessons and legacy of that terrible moment in European history.”<sup>93</sup> The explicit reference to the UK as being a leading figure in the sphere of Holocaust education and remembrance was reiterated by Burns’ successor, Sir Eric Pickles, who used his opening statement as an opportunity to praise the fact that “the UK is a leader internationally in ensuring the Holocaust is properly commemorated and the lessons learnt” and to pledge his commitment “to ensuring we retain and build on this position over the years to come.”<sup>94</sup>

Whilst acknowledging that “the UK has taken an increasingly active approach to preserving the memory of the Holocaust,” the new Foreign Secretary William Hague went on to suggest that although “this has worked well to date [...] I am concerned that the UK is not taking the leading role it should in these international discussions or best representing the interests of the many Holocaust victims and their families in the UK affected by these issues.”<sup>95</sup> The expression of such sentiments not only implies the need for Britain to show greater initiative in international discussions about the Holocaust but also articulates idea that the UK can, and should, be taking a leading role within the international community. The sense of British exceptionalism encountered within historical conceptualizations of the Second World War appears to be situated alongside an on-going quest and “deep craving” for leadership which, Anne Deighton suggests, is “one facet of what has remained of Britain’s post-imperial political culture.”<sup>96</sup>

The danger of connecting the Holocaust with overt expressions of British identity is that it allows the perpetuation, and indeed evolution of, a post-imperial identity based on positive notions of liberal democracy and tolerance that ignores or omits critical evaluation of Britain’s own past actions of atrocity and state crimes whilst also helping to defend limited responses to humanitarian crises in the current time. It is certainly the case, as Bloxham and Kushner have observed, that in “Britain racism is often seen as someone else’s problem - particularly the Germans since the Second World War - yet it does not take a fascist regime for the proliferation and implementation of racism to take place.”<sup>97</sup> Through the repetition of such sentiments a considered and critical self-reflection is discouraged whilst also distancing Britain from Europe by drawing on past ‘achievements’ such as not being invaded during World War Two (aside from the Channel Islands) and through acts such as the Kindertransport or the Winton Train. As Mark Levene observed in 2006, “the underlying spuriousness, indeed mendacity of Britain’s recent foreign policy record destroys any moral basis upon which it can make claim, let alone offer leadership on the basis of any Holocaust association.”<sup>98</sup> Considering the conflicts which Britain has participated in in the years since this article was published, and the apathetic if not outright callous treatment of refugees fleeing conflict in Syria in 2015 and 2016, one is entitled to question the truthfulness of British claims to moral distinction and the extent to which Holocaust ‘lessons’ can really be said to be learnt.

The years after 2010 were, however, defined by the establishment of initiatives similar to that of the Envoy designed to expand, develop and reinforce the British government’s commitment to, and leadership in, Holocaust education and commemoration. Following a plea from the Auschwitz-Birkenau Foundation, the UK pledged 2.1 million pounds of financial assistance to enable restorative work to take place at the site to ensure the preservation of the camps as a place of commemoration, education and remembrance.<sup>99</sup> Such financial commitment was also to enter the domestic landscape with the Prime Minister committing an additional £300,000 worth of funding for the Lessons from Auschwitz project in 2013. The Holocaust Educational Trust were not only to feature as recipients of financial support but were also to feature significantly in this drive by returning more visibly to their earlier lobbyist roots by encouraging further public commemoration of the Holocaust, the survivors and the

liberators. In 2009, MPs drafted Early Day Motion 1175 calling for “Recognition for British Heroes of the Holocaust” in honor 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 initiated acts of rescue had been honored within Britain itself. Despite this omission, as the Jewish Chronicle reported, “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>100</sup> The creation of this award was the result of many months of forceful campaigning by the Trust for institutional recognition of their actions.

In a similar vein it was announced in 2015 that Holocaust survivors across the United Kingdom were to receive commemorative medals “to mark 70 years since the end of the Holocaust.”<sup>101</sup> The medals, another initiative of the Holocaust Educational Trust, featured the inscription ‘Liberation 1945’ emerging through barbed wire on one side and on the other an inscription to commemorate the British forces who liberated the camp of Bergen-Belsen and “a stylised eternal flame” that, it was claimed, “has come to memorialise the Holocaust victims.”<sup>102</sup> The medals were awarded to Holocaust survivors at a special ceremony presided over by the Chancellor of the Exchequer who stated that, “here we stand in Downing Street in tribute to fight against Nazism. In tribute to the millions who died. In tribute to the brave survivors. In tribute to the liberators.”<sup>103</sup> Echoing the Heroes of the Holocaust awards the emphasis on Britain as liberators and as defenders of freedom and liberty dominated the official rhetoric of the day as Holocaust survivors were, once again, absorbed into a domesticated narrative of national distinctiveness and superiority.

The Home Secretary’s desire for Britain to take a more “active approach to preserving the memory of the Holocaust” during this period was also achieved within the educational system.<sup>104</sup> In February 2013 the Department for Education published its draft proposals for the reform of the National Curriculum. The suggested reforms for Key Stage 3 history (when pupils are between 11 and 14 years of age) proposed that pupils should be taught about the “Nazi atrocities in occupied Europe and the unique evil of the Holocaust.”<sup>105</sup> The deliberate framing of the Holocaust as an event of “unique evil” caused astonishment amongst historians, educationists and teachers, many of whom raised concerns about how the Holocaust was being utilized politically and positioned historically.<sup>106</sup> Tony Kushner interpreted the proposals as a demonstration of the extent to which “crude ethical readings of the Holocaust have now permeated the sphere of pedagogy in Britain.”<sup>107</sup> Others raised 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 ignore other genocides, but also encourage the view that, as one history teacher observed, 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>108</sup>

Although this line was removed after the initial consultation, the original decision to define the Holocaust as being an event of ‘unique evil’ is revealing about the way in which the Holocaust has been absorbed into sections of British society.<sup>109</sup> Reference to genocide had been made in 2008 in a previous revision of the curriculum, explaining teachers that students should explore the “changing nature of conflict and cooperation between countries and peoples” including “the Holocaust and other genocides.”<sup>110</sup> Although the Holocaust was the only genocide explicitly named, the introduction of ‘other genocides’ into the curriculum offered the opportunity for greater

contextualization of the Holocaust within this field. In contrast, the term 'genocide' was notable by its absence in the 2013 revisions.

In 2011 the newly appointed Envoy for Post Holocaust Issues had claimed that "Britain is a very cosmopolitan society... and so the events that have taken place in other countries that are of comparable dreadfulness, in Cambodia or in Rwanda or in Bosnia, Sudan are issues which the British public are interested in and care about."<sup>111</sup>

Whilst these sentiments are not wholly without foundation they do perhaps invest the British population with greater awareness and understanding about these genocides than might be the case in reality. Research conducted by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in 2014 found that "half the UK population cannot name a genocide that has taken place since the Holocaust despite millions being murdered as a result of persecution in Cambodia, Rwanda Bosnia and Darfur."<sup>112</sup> The figures shocked many and the Daily Telegraph responded by expressing their barely concealed outrage at the sheer "scale of ignorance of major world events among young people" after reporting that for those aged 16-24, only eight out of ten were able to name an act of genocide to have taken place since World War Two.<sup>113</sup> The exclusive emphasis on the Holocaust and the concurrent removal of genocide from the National Curriculum, however, might not necessarily be the best way to counter this lack of awareness.

As part of the government's renewed drive towards a more rigorous domestic engagement with the Holocaust, a Parliamentary Inquiry into Holocaust education was launched in 2015. The Education Committee responsible for overseeing the Inquiry requested written submissions from interested parties to investigate a range of issues relating to the scope and quality of Holocaust education in Britain. The Committee asked for submissions specifically addressing 'the focus on the Holocaust in the national curriculum and the absence of teaching of other genocides' for, as they were later to report, "the teaching of other genocides and atrocities is an important aspect of young people's understanding of the modern world."<sup>114</sup> Ironically the launch of an inquiry into the absence of genocide in education was carried out by the very same government that had removed reference to genocide from the curriculum.

Yet it is not simply a matter of the Holocaust relegating the memory of other genocides to the periphery of public consciousness. The way in which the Holocaust has been represented in Britain has exerted a significant influence on public engagement with other genocides. For example the popularity of initiatives like the Lessons from Auschwitz program, and the subsequent political and financial value attached to them, has certainly inspired the creation of other organizations, such as Remembering Srebrenica to campaign for the institutionalization of a Srebrenica Memorial Day, which was achieved in 2013. If not fueling public engagement with the genocides themselves the success of the way in which organizations committed to Holocaust memory have structured themselves, and framed the history that they want to remember, has certainly inspired those invested in the promotion of the importance of remembering other acts of atrocity and genocide.

The renewed frenzy towards Holocaust remembrance and education culminated in the establishment of a cross party Holocaust Commission in 2014. The Commission, the Prime Minister declared, had to carry out the "sacred task" of ensuring that the country "has a permanent and fitting memorial to the Holocaust and educational resources for future generations."<sup>115</sup> The memorial will be designed to "serve as a focal point for the national commemoration of the Holocaust and stand as a permanent affirmation of the values of British society" and will be accompanied by the creation of a Learning Centre overseen by the newly established UK Holocaust Memorial Foundation (UKHMF) dedicated to the advance of Holocaust learning.<sup>116</sup> As the language employed here shows, despite the reservations expressed following this announcement, the Holocaust is still being used as a means by which to reinforce

interpretations of British identity through the evocation of 'British' values.<sup>117</sup> The location of the new memorial, directly alongside the Houses of Parliament also appears as an attempt to physically demonstrate the centrality of the Holocaust in the British imagination and the importance to remembering the event to the British people.

Sharon Macdonald has argued that the shift from a focus on 'the war' to an emphasis on 'the Holocaust' "allows for a less nation- and more European-based form of commemoration. The fact that Holocaust Memorial Day has been achieved as part of a European initiative, to coincide with commemoration in other European countries, is expressive of European cooperation."<sup>118</sup> This claim is partially true; at the same time, however, the way in which the Holocaust has been remembered and taught does not simply imply a growing proximity to Europe in British imagination. The Holocaust then, particularly when viewed through the lens of heroism, liberation and moral tenacity, subscribes to, and reinforces, wider notions of Britain being somehow distinct from Europe in terms of identity whilst paradoxically positioning itself as a European leader in Holocaust memory. Even those committed to the future of Britain in Europe and the consolidation of a broader European identity evoke the imagery of exceptionalism through allusion to an identity based on victory in the war. Former Prime Minister Tony Blair, who was certainly an advocate for greater European integration and identity, described Britain as "the victor in WWII, the main ally of the United States, a proud and independent-minded island race (though with much European blood flowing in our veins)..." during a speech delivered in Warsaw.<sup>119</sup> The lack of critical engagement inherent in the narrative encountered within Britain, however, fails to encourage deeper understandings of the politics of British, European and international identity, and resists confrontation with Britain's imperial past.

#### Conclusion

Discussion about the Holocaust and its place in British society has grown since the first Holocaust Memorial Day took place. This growth is marked by some defining features: the increasingly symbiotic relationship between Holocaust education and commemoration, the decontextualized narrative projected by these institutionalized representations, and the way in which they have come to intersect with existing interpretations of British identity. As a result, British Holocaust commemoration and education has helped to solidify a sense of exceptionalism and disconnection from Europe whilst, paradoxically, centralizing a European event into British domestic imagination.

The terms of reference for the recently established Holocaust Commission state that "The Holocaust is unique in man's inhumanity to man and it stands alone as the darkest hour of human history."<sup>120</sup> As Tom Lawson rightly observes, "this is an absurd statement, and it immediately ignores or consigns to lesser importance all other incidents of genocide, some of which might be more challenging and more difficult to deal with in Britain."<sup>121</sup> Yet despite the absurdity of the statement the sentiment that "there is nothing equivalent to the Holocaust" has gained powerful political, cultural and societal value drawing as it does on the inherent connection between the Holocaust and the British public's perception of their own national identity framed through the lens of World War Two as the heroic liberators of Europe.<sup>122</sup> Such interpretations of identity allow the British public and the government to assume a position of leadership built on supposed British values whilst avoiding engagement with more sensitive issues like colonial genocides.

Of course this narrative has not gone unchallenged. Academic criticism of the direction of mainstream Holocaust consciousness has accompanied Holocaust

Memorial Day consistently since its establishment. Public discussion about the omission of Armenia from the commemorative day accompanied the first event in 2001, and has perhaps grown in intensity since then. Survivors themselves have also become increasingly willing to voice some of the more negative experiences they encountered and endured within Britain, even when these stories run counter to the narrative of the country as welcoming and tolerant. It is clear that inherent tensions continue to haunt the relationship between remembering the Holocaust and navigating identity in 21st century Britain.

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