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The Anatomy of a relationship:
The Holocaust, genocide and education in Britain

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Introduction

On 21 September, 2015, the House of Commons Education Select Committee (an investigative body composed of eleven UK Members of Parliament) announced an inquiry into Holocaust education. The Committee, responsible for monitoring ‘the policy, administration and spending of the Department for Education and its associated arms length bodies’ (Parliament.uk) invited written responses to five stipulated issues from interested parties. Among these was ‘the focus on the Holocaust in the National Curriculum and the absence of teaching of other genocides (House of Commons Education Committee a 2016: 5).’

After an Oral Evidence session with invited witnesses, the Committee published a report of its investigation on 24 January 2016. Concluding its inquiry the Committee stated ‘in some schools learning about the Holocaust leads on to teaching about other genocides’, which it regarded as ‘a positive development, so long as the Holocaust continues to be taught well’ (3). It was a telling remark. In underlining the primacy of the Holocaust in the school curriculum over and above that of any other genocide, the Committee revealed its priorities. Fundamentally, ‘the teaching of other genocides should not come at the expense of failing to teach the Holocaust’ (16).

Responding to the Committee, as it was obliged to do, the British Government took on this issue directly. Arguing ‘the teaching of other genocides and atrocities is an important aspect of young people’s understanding of the modern world’, it claimed the National Curriculum allowed schools and teachers to explore these topics, should they so wish. More accurately, ‘other genocides’ were not part of the stipulated ‘body of essential knowledge which all children should be taught’ but rather were one of many ‘additional topics’ whose study was at the discretion of the teacher (HMSOb 2016: 4). In short, for the government, teaching about the Holocaust is non-negotiable; teaching about genocide is merely optional.

In this chapter I wish to use the Education Committee’s inquiry and findings as a launching pad for broader consideration of the how teaching about the Holocaust and teaching about genocide relate to one another in England. Given the long history of Holocaust education in Britain and its standing in the sphere of Holocaust politics internationally, the anatomy of this relationship has salience and international relevance. It is telling, therefore, that the present calibration between teaching the Holocaust and teaching genocide in the curriculum, the education sector, and culture more widely, can be characterised by disconnect and inherent dysfunctionality. With the notion the Holocaust is paradigmatic holding sway in the fields of Holocaust education and remembrance, as well as in political and historical culture, much pedagogy and policy abstracts the Holocaust from the phenomenon of genocide at the same time as positing it as *the* genocidal archetype. This process does little to truly advance students’ knowledge and understanding of what the Holocaust was, what genocide is, or how either are to be thought about, remembered, and responded to.

There are multiple reasons for this state of affairs. Some of these relate to the international sphere: to the particular way in which ‘Holocaust education’ as a realm of theory and practice emerged during the 1990s, and gained shape from the turn of the millennium onwards. Others are more nation-specific: they concern the post-war context of the Britain, sociocultural and

political trends, and the ways in which conceptions of and approaches to ‘genocide’ and ‘the Holocaust’ emerged. In this chapter I examine both sets of reasons. My overarching argument pivots on three assertions: first, that the rendering of the Holocaust as paradigm does not lend itself to developing deep understanding of either the genocide of the Jews, or genocide more generally. Second, since much Holocaust education has assumed a memorialising role, the distance between pedagogy and academic research has widened: the ‘yawning gulf between popular understanding of this history and current scholarship’ which the late David Cesarani (2016: xv) bemoaned, is partly such because teaching and learning is increasingly distanced from how academic research in Holocaust and genocide studies has advanced our knowledge and understanding of man-made atrocities. Finally, as much as being politically convenient, the marginalisation of genocide education and remembrance in Britain – intentionally or otherwise – must be understood as a reflection of its post-imperial culture and politics.

The international context

The architectural framework for transnational Holocaust education was forged in the 1990s. It was during this decade that, thanks to a confluence of factors, the Holocaust transitioned from ‘European historical memory’, through ‘transnational memory’, to ‘universal norm’ (Assmann 2010: 99-109). At a time when ‘the coin of human rights’ was being reminted within the ‘humanitarian paradigm’ (Moyn 2014: 87), the growth in Holocaust consciousness went hand in glove with the transcultural arrival of ‘an ethics of Never Again’ (Baer & Sznajder 2017). The role ascribed to education in this process was a dual one. Through education, memory of the Holocaust would be preserved and perpetuated, making Holocaust education integral for the ‘shaping’ of ‘historical memory’ (Marrus 2016: 149). At the same time, so as to meet the utility and usability criteria which governs any entry into collective memory (Wertsch 2002: 70), history and memory within Holocaust education was increasingly polished to a universal,

contemporaneous sheen – symbolised, in many respects, by the increased currency of lesson-centric educational and mnemonic discourses.

These movements appeared to draw legitimacy and urgency from the outbreak of ethnic cleansing and genocide in the Balkans and sub-Saharan Africa. As Rebecca Jinks (2016) argues, atrocities in Bosnia, Rwanda, Srebrenica and later Kosovo, ‘gave new meaning and relevance to the Holocaust’ (31). As much as they further popularised the ‘Holocaust imaginary’, Jinks shows this in itself contributed to an emergent ‘genocidal imaginary’ (44), one that made genocide more recognisable and so helped facilitate significant developments like the Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 1998. To the casual observer, the 1990s thus appeared to not only bring about a transnational spread and expansion of Holocaust consciousness (in which educational initiatives were increasing in frequency and currency), but through it a heightening of genocide consciousness. Moreover, it looked as though there was both consensus and commitment to furthering these enterprises within the international community.

Events early in the new millennium seemed to confirm this. First, in 2000, the Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust expressed its signatories belief that advancing efforts in Holocaust education, remembrance and research was key to ‘plant[ing] the seeds of a better future amidst the soil of a bitter past’. ‘With humanity still scarred by genocide, ethnic cleansing, racism, antisemitism and xenophobia’, stated the Declaration, ‘the international community shares a solemn responsibility to fight those evils’. Second, in 2004, the fourth and final Stockholm International Forum took ‘Preventing Genocide: Threats and Responsibilities’ as its theme. Beyond its semiotic potency, this colloquium, centred on ‘how can we commit ourselves to cooperating and supporting remembrance, research and education that will promote awareness of genocidal dangers amongst a wider public’ (Regeringskansliet 2006: 7), concluded with another Declaration which spoke of ‘educating the youth and the

wider public against genocidal dangers of all kinds through formal and informal educational structures' (26). Finally, as noted in the Preface to this book, in November 2005 the United Nations (2005) introduced International Holocaust Remembrance Day, with its steer that Member States 'develop educational programmes that will inculcate future generations with the lessons of the Holocaust in order to help prevent future acts of genocide'.

On the surface, each of these developments were statements of commitment to advance teaching, learning and remembering the Holocaust and genocide. Cumulatively they were powerful proclamations, each building on the last, to create the impression Holocaust and genocide education were of paramount importance to the international community. To some degree this much was true, and in this respect the Stockholm Forum of 2004 was particularly symbolic. Yet on closer analysis the developments also spoke of difference and disparity between the status of Holocaust education and remembrance on the one hand, and genocide education and remembrance on the other.

Within both the Stockholm Declaration of 2000 and the UN resolution of 2005, for example, it was clear to see the Holocaust being positioned as 'the hegemonic model of genocide' (Apsel 2004:109). In the former, the Holocaust was explicitly framed as 'unprecedented' with 'universal meaning' (Declaration of the Stockholm Forum 2000), while the latter both accented the Holocaust in the naming of its remembrance day and invoked its perceived exemplary nature with the directive of using 'Holocaust lessons' to prevent genocide. This notion of the Holocaust as 'the paradigmatic genocide' (IHRA 2010) only grew in popularity as the 2000s progressed.

Space does not allow us to extensively detail the origins of this 'Holocaust-based' (Moshman 2010: 71) conception of genocide, but we should emphasise it represents a particular reading of the Holocaust's phenomenological nature and status. Depicting the destruction of Europe's Jews as paradigm is a move which – wilfully or otherwise – necessarily stakes a claim for its

uniqueness among other genocides; asserting, in effect, that the Holocaust is ‘uniquely unique’ (Heinsohn 2010). Yet ‘subscribing to the idea of the Holocaust’s special difference’, even if employing ‘euphemisms and ‘near-synonyms’ rather than the word “unique” (Bloxham 2013: 64), has become ever-more untenable given advances in genocide studies and, to a lesser extent, post-colonial studies in recent decades. Despite this, the paradigm thesis has lost none of its social, cultural, or political capital.

As transnational Holocaust education acquired greater form during the early 2000s, the implications of the paradigmatic approach became more pronounced. In the summer of 2010, the former UN Secretary General, Kofi Annan, took to the pages of the *New York Times* to offer a forceful critique. For Annan (2010), it had become necessary to question some of the elemental expectations of, and “traditional” approaches towards, teaching, learning, and remembering the Holocaust. It had to be asked, he suggested, if ‘programs focusing on the Nazi system and ideology’ are really ‘an effective response to, or prophylactic against, the challenges we face today’; it was necessary to contemplate if a victim-focused approach was really effective in comprehending what motivates perpetrators and “bystanders”; and it was essential to consider ‘does the teaching of the history of the Holocaust...sufficiently link it to the root causes of contemporary racism and ethnic conflict?’ At base, Annan indicated, was a need to revisit aims and rationale, for

If our goal in teaching students about the Holocaust is to make them think harder about civic responsibility, human rights and the dangers of racism, then presumably we need to connect the Holocaust with other instances of genocide, and with ethnic conflicts or tensions in our own time and place [...] The time has surely come to ask some hard questions about “traditional” Holocaust education, and perhaps to rethink some of the assumptions on which it has been based.

The crucial qualifier here was ‘if’, of course, but given the sociocultural and political rhetoric which had calcified around Holocaust memory and education from the mid-1990s onwards, Annan’s presumption was valid. All told, it was a blistering broadside from a man who just five years previously championed the creation of the International Holocaust Remembrance Day. However, if Annan’s previous employment made his remarks all the more damning, it did so while implicating the UN and the international community in what he described as the continued failure to prevent ‘instances of genocide and large-scale brutality’ (Annan 2010).

Recent changes and continuities

Coming a decade after the Stockholm Declaration of 2000, the weight of Annan’s charge was considerable. The intervening years had certainly brought some positive developments: Holocaust remembrance and education increased its global scope, while human rights continued to become a matter of matter of international politics and relations. Meanwhile, following the historic opening of the ICC in 2002, war criminals such as Radovan Karadžić, the so-called ‘butcher of Bosnia’, had been arrested and prosecuted, suggesting the West’s new ‘human rights culture’ (Ignatieff 2001: 7) was growing some teeth.

Yet the 2000s also acquired a far less congratulatory face. In this ‘decade without a name’ (Garton-Ash 2010) the ‘acrid smell of war’ (Moyn 2014: 124) death, and destruction wafted westwards from the Middle East, commixing with evidence of gratuitous human rights violations by the United States and its allies to indelibly stain Western claims of moral probity and rectitude. Meanwhile, fears around Islamic fundamentalism, horrific incidents of terrorism, and growing ethnic tensions potently combined with increasing economic turbulence to send an ever-widening circle of countries into spirals of political instability; the results of which are now readily apparent from our current vantage point of 2018.

Though no one had ever claimed outright that teaching, learning, and remembering the Holocaust would cure all ills, amidst the heady *fin de siècle* optimism many had seen Holocaust education and remembrance as fundamentally progressive enterprises that couldn't fail to change attitudes and human behaviour; it was as if encountering the horrors of the Holocaust, through whatever medium, would naturally and inevitably have transformative effects. Such confidence did not shatter in the first decade of the 2000s, even though the assumptions, precepts, and premises it was based on were challenged by a changing, frightening, and ever-more fearful world. Perhaps unsurprisingly, for all the clamour of Annan and others concerned about the direction of Holocaust education, there was no real overhaul or substantial revision of the theories, practices, or principles around teaching and learning.

In certain quarters one could observe rising interest in teaching and learning genocides beyond the Holocaust. This trend was tied to a longer-term 'marked increase in general awareness regarding genocides that have taken place around the world' (Charny 2016:9); a development related to growing Holocaust-related activity, but also a product of new atrocities taking place under the watching gaze of a hyperconnected global media. In a strange and unforeseeable way, genocide consciousness was heightening and affecting something of a boomerang effect: originally indebted to the spread of Holocaust consciousness, new-found interest and awareness of genocide in the 21st century was now posing new existential questions to the fields of Holocaust education and remembrance. As the IHRA's Education Working Group succinctly put it:

A central concern raised by many educators and students is why teach and learn about the Holocaust when there have been so many other instances of mass suffering of target groups throughout history? Further, why teach and learn about the Holocaust when other crimes against humanity are perpetrated today? (2010: 1)

These remarks opened the Working Group's guidance on 'The Holocaust and Other Genocides'; a welcome publication in terms of providing 'information and recommendations for educators who wish to teach about the Holocaust, genocide and crimes against humanity in a comparative fashion' (2). Still, while supporting teachers in broaching 'other genocides' in their classrooms was encouraging, this very framing was laden with implications of stature and standing. Though the guidance was adamant 'it can be valuable to offer...a comparative approach' (3), it was equally clear the Working Group regarded the Holocaust with primacy and as exemplar for all study of genocide. By any measure this was a somewhat skewed understanding of the nature of comparative study; one less tuned to 'analytic comparison' than 'dogmatic comparison...contrived to push the learner towards a predetermined conclusion' (Stevick 2017: 214).

This approach is not exclusive to the IHRA. Following a number of resolutions between 2005-2015, the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), produced a multi-pronged programme aimed at fostering 'knowledge about the history of the Holocaust and, more broadly, genocide and mass atrocities in ways relevant to particular national and local histories and contexts' (UNESCO 2017: 16). In its most recent publication – a guide for policymakers – UNESCO acknowledged Holocaust education and genocide education are 'increasingly interconnected', but distinguished them on account that:

“Genocide education” deals with the phenomenon of genocide, while education about the Holocaust focuses above all on the causes and dynamics of the genocide of the Jewish people and responses to it. (31)

Calling for precision and specificity is no bad thing. However, in what read like a rider to this formulation, the guide explained ‘each approach [Holocaust education and genocide education] holds value’ but maintained ‘scholars continue to examine the relationship between the two fields’ and, ‘in any case, the Holocaust has been the most researched, documented, and widely taught case of genocide’ (31).

As major players in transnational Holocaust and genocide education, the way the IHRA and UNESCO handle the issue of the Holocaust and “other genocides” matters. Their recent move to recognise and advocate teaching and learning about genocides other than the Holocaust is, therefore, symbolic and not without practical effect. However, it is revealing this has not necessarily translated into a major recalibration of the Holocaust as paradigm. By way of comparison, it is worth noting how these concerns have been explored and examined in various programmes conducted by the Salzburg Global Seminar. Looking to engage particularly with countries outside the IHRA, the Salzburg Global Seminar’s Holocaust Education and Genocide Prevention series has, since 2010, resulted in various colloquia where issues arising from the relationship of Holocaust education and genocide education have been discussed and explored. So, for instance, in 2012, an ‘international symposium examined the role of the Holocaust as a reference point for educators around the world who teach about human rights and other genocides’ (Salzburg Global Seminar 2012). This included discussing if the Holocaust can ‘function as a reference point for understanding contemporary genocides’; the applicability of the IHRA guidance on teaching the Holocaust and “other genocides”; and ‘the benefits and drawbacks of embedding Holocaust education within a curriculum that includes a human rights perspective and/or the teaching of other genocides’ (Salzburg Global Seminar 2013: 4).

In providing a forum for such questions to be discussed, the Salzburg series had value. Though its conferences did not resolve fundamental quandaries around how Holocaust and genocide education relate and are related, they did underline the need for this nexus to be thought through

in more nuanced and sophisticated ways. Concluding her report of the 2014 symposium, Nancy Smith (2014) powerfully highlighted this imperative. Arguing it is ‘critically important’ for IHRA members to broaden their field of vision, she explained the symposium’s organizers

noted how vital it is for them to learn from educators working across the globe to teach about genocides and atrocities that have been committed in their own countries. Whether these educators teach about the Holocaust alongside their own experiences or not, those that consider Holocaust education as a mechanism to prevent genocide and mass violence can learn much about the value of education for genocide prevention by extending and strengthening these networks. Too little is known (broadly speaking) currently about other genocides and the violence that led to them – IHRA members can learn from their colleagues in other countries and regions to create a deeper understanding of genocidal violence, and possible avenues to help prevent it. (70-71)

This sense that Holocaust education and remembrance could learn from those engaged in teaching, learning, and remembering ‘other genocides’ runs counter to the Holocaust (as well as pedagogical and mnemonic practices of it) as paradigmatic and exemplary. However, it is one which shows it is possible to ‘coexist without competing’ (Beorn 2015: 73), and holds out the prospect of a more holistic and integrated understanding of genocide as a phenomena.

Genocide as a ‘legal norm’ in post-imperial Britain

National contexts impact the condition of teaching, learning, and remembering the Holocaust and genocide. As Doyle Stevick and Zehavit Gross (2014) put it, ‘events take on meaning in relation to local histories and from within different cultural frameworks’ (61). On the effect of local heritage, Yair Auron provides the useful reminder that

The past or present policy of each country towards its minority groups, and at times the involvement of the country, or of people within it, in genocidal acts, or in acts with a genocidal character, or considerations of “realpolitik” that led or lead to indifference to past or present victims – any or all of these may create an ambivalent stand in that country to the teaching of the subject. (2005: 162)

On analysis, these remarks are especially apposite for our British case study. Post-war British history has, by and large, been dominated by the processes and consequences of decolonisation and declining international influence. Beginning during the First World War and increasingly visible during the inter-war period, the rapidity with which Britain experienced imperial break-up and decline was remarkable and, in turn, immensely disorientating. The response of the political establishment, Peter Preston (2014) argues, was the undertaking of a ‘post-war political-cultural project’ characterised by ‘denial’ and ‘confection’: in effect, a reconceptualization of Britain ‘as the legatee of empire, the victor in a virtuous war, number one ally of America and something of a model for other countries-in-general’ (2).

With time, the realities of post-colonialism in the context of Cold War and closer Western European cooperation pressed against such an imagining. Dramatic changes in the social fabric of British society from the 1960s onwards, accelerated by demographic upheavals and economic instability, resulted in increasing cultural conflict during the last quarter of the twentieth century. As successive governments sought to realign the country according on a market-driven, neo-liberal footing, Britain’s post-imperial identity complex was made further acute by European integration and union, as well as the emergence in the late 1990s of an increasingly multicultural, metropolitan and diverse society. Significantly, these elemental alterations only intensified concerns for and obsessions over “Britishness”, especially of the

imagined, imperial kind. Most recently this was clear for all to see during the EU Referendum and in the aftermath of the vote for “Brexit”; in the rise in ethnic tensions, reported incidents of hate crime, and in the championing by “Brexiters” of ‘Empire 2.0’ (Coates 2017; Olusoga 2017).

The enduring influence of all things imperial has not prevented the development of Holocaust consciousness in Britain or genocide awareness. But the loss of Empire and the subsequent imperial hangover has had and continues to have considerable effect upon Britain’s historical culture. More specifically, the predilection for viewing Empire through rose-tinted lenses necessarily shapes cultural memories of colonial violence and the willingness to engage with the legacies of these. The salience of this comes more pointedly into view if we see the British Empire with Michelle Tusan (2014) as ‘an institution more associated with the violation of human rights than with their advocacy’ (50).

If Tusan’s depiction sounds severe, it is because to avoid accusations of self-interest, ‘maintaining authority over a massive overseas empire was cast as a moral responsibility’ (51) and became a cultural truism. In actuality, as Richard Gott (2011) eloquently describes, the tinting of the global map with a ‘rich vermilion’ proved to be a ‘peculiarly appropriate colour’ since ‘Britain’s Empire was established, and maintained, for more than two centuries, through bloodshed, violence, brutality, conquest and war’ (1).

Scholarship in recent years has supported this view. Hazel Cameron (2013), for instance, opens her work on Britain’s role in the Rwandan genocide by describing Britain and the United States as ‘the two most repeat-perpetrators of genocide’ during the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries (2). Meanwhile, though cautioning against ‘facile equations of British imperialism, or even settler colonialism, everywhere and always with genocide’, Martin Shaw (2011) maintains ‘genocide was a repeated problem for the British’, as it was for other imperial powers (2427-2428). Such truths are rarely (if ever) evident within the realm of public history.

Reflecting on this through the prism of his research on the Tasmanian genocide, Tom Lawson (2014) suggests the lack of awareness or admission ‘that Britain has such a genocidal past, or that Britain is in effect a post-genocidal state’ has meant genocide has become ‘a crime committed only by others’ (xx) which ‘can be made use of in the celebration of being British’ (xxi).

Lawson’s claims gain substance when we observe the actions of the state vis-à-vis ‘genocide’ during the post-war epoch. To a certain degree, the die was cast as soon as the concept entered into the arena of international relations. Karen E. Smith records how even during the drafting of the Genocide Convention ‘the UK’s hostility was evident’ (33), with successive governments delaying ascension to the Convention until as late as 1968 (48). Such dilatory behaviour cannot be separated from the way British governments viewed, understood, and approached the break-up of empire, but rather must be seen in conjunction with policies as they developed (both from the centre and in the locales) during the period of decolonisation. Noteworthy here then is the prospect ‘the deliberate British policy of communal division’ helped cause ‘the horrors of Partition’ that followed Indian independence in 1947 (Tharoor 2017:148); the free recourse to torture and mass incarceration during the Mau Mau uprising in Kenya during the 1950s (Elkins 2005); the support of and arms sales to the Federal Military Government of Nigeria in its war against Biafra during 1967-1970; and the British government’s ‘allegiance’ to ‘the principle of non-interference’ during the East Pakistan war of 1971 (Debnath 2011: 440).

Britain’s connection to these and other atrocities do not, in and of themselves, account for the official procrastination and apathy repeatedly shown towards the Genocide Convention before the late 1960s. Nevertheless, as related realms of foreign policy, it would be naïve to dismiss their intersection and interrelation because these policies were constructed in accordance with a ‘legal norm’ of genocide – one that ‘codifies expectations for state behaviour’ through the

Genocide Convention (Smith 2010: 3). How Britain has approached foreign policy, and how it has approached instances of genocide and atrocity, are two sides of a post-imperium coin shaped by the experience of decolonisation and loss of empire.

This holds not just for the period of post-colonial violence and turmoil up to the early 1970s, but beyond as well. Smith observes for instance that in response to atrocities in Europe and Africa during the 1990s and early 2000s, the British government 'remained for the most part reticent to use the term genocide, except with respect to Kosovo'. That aberration aside, the policy template of Her Majesty's Government has proved impervious to change in the face of political pressure. In 2015, for example, faced with calls for official recognition of the Armenian genocide, the then Minister for Europe, David Lidington, explained it remained

The Government's policy, indeed the policy of successive Governments...that genocide is not simply an expression of a political judgement. It is now a crime, and the British Government recognise as genocide only those events found to be so by international courts. (Hansard 2015)

This mantra was rehearsed during a backbench debate in 2016 on recognition of Daesh policies towards Yazidis and others as genocidal. The Under Secretary for Foreign and Commonwealth Affairs, Tobias Ellwood, emphasised in his statement the UK's membership of the UN Security Council was an 'important' consideration in determining legally if Daesh were committing genocide, as was the UK's 'aspiration and means to play a significant role in world affairs'. For, Ellwood explained, this 'mean[s] we are expected to not just take an interest but to show leadership on the world stage. We are seen as fair, knowledgeable and trustworthy' (Hansard 2016).

Genocide as ‘social norm’ and the emergence of ‘the Holocaust’

It is evident that in the UK’s foreign affairs understandings about what genocide is conform to an established, institutionalised code. Though it would be hyperbole to suggest this directly informs state attitudes to genocide education, it would be peculiar for one realm of governmental policy to deal in fudge and ‘sophistry’ (Dudok de Wit 2015) towards genocide while another engaged in the promotion of teaching and learning about it. In some ways, however, this is precisely what has occurred: since the Holocaust conforms to the ‘legal norm’ of genocide, educational initiatives related to it have come to be understood at a state level as genocide education in all but name.

The will and wont of governments cannot alone explain the current relationship between teaching and learning about the Holocaust and teaching and learning about other genocides in Britain. For that, we must consider how genocide as a ‘social norm’ (Smith 2010: 6-7) has emerged and converged with Holocaust consciousness; particularly during the past forty years. In distinguishing between the ‘social’ and ‘legal’ norms of genocide, Smith points to differences in definition and in expectations. As a consequence, she summarises the social norm as having ‘a wider definition of genocide, and a different, more demanding, conception of what states should do in the case of genocide’ (6). Juxtaposing the two norms against the context of post-war Britain, Smith concludes

The proposition that governments avoid using the term genocide because they wish to avoid the pressures generated by the social norm seems to fit the British experience, but the UK’s stance may also reflect its historical animosity towards the Genocide Convention. (244)

Smith's argument is persuasive, for it captures the political calculations which have dictated Britain's official position vis-à-vis historic genocide. Yet this has not stunted or curtailed the emergence of 'social' norms around genocide; as can be seen on a number of levels. For example, during the 1960s in particular, British newspaper readers could frequently come across talk of 'genocide' being enacted in what would have seemed like far flung corners such as Tibet, Cyprus, and Rwanda (Pearce 2014:20-31). In the latter years of that decade, the outbreak of the Nigeria-Biafra war and accusations of genocidal policies by the Nigerian Federal Government piqued public interest. In light of the continued arms sales to Nigeria, political opponents of Harold Wilson duly 'accused Whitehall of complicity in genocide' (Heerten & Moses 2014:180), while events seeped into public consciousness thanks in part to the efforts of the novelist Fredrick Forsyth and journalist Auberon Waugh. How far public opinion was galvanised is debatable (Smith 2014: 252), but the affair did facilitate the continued emergence of social norms about and around genocide.

These were furthered by developments in East Pakistan, with the media picking up on atrocities, labelling them as genocidal, and in turn helping manoeuvre 'British public opinion against Pakistan' (Debnath 2011:435; The Daily Mirror 1971a, 1971b; Pilger 1971). Meanwhile, the MP John Stenhouse was able to claim something of a moral victory in the House of Commons when his proposal that the violence be condemned as genocide was signed by 210 out of 630 members. 'British' social norms around genocide received their biggest fillip thanks to the transmission of the television documentary *Genocide* in 1974. Critically acclaimed and seen by millions, that even today the programme remains a periodic feature of television programming around Holocaust-related events says much about its enduring cultural impact and standing. At the time, the documentary's meticulous attention to detail and its concern with faithfully documenting the process by which Europe's Jews were exterminated meant it performed an incredibly important function as a piece of mass education. That this

was believed to be necessary by the programme's makers was instructive, speaking volumes about how peripheral these events were in Britain's historical culture as well as the myths, mythologies, and general ignorance crystallised around them. Yet *Genocide* did more than simply 'educate' the public in terms of transmitting – literally – raw knowledge; it also disseminated an 'organising conceptual framework into which the events of the Holocaust could be posited' (Pearce 2017: 237).

These were significant advances. On the one hand, they allowed historical culture to move beyond fragmented knowledge of those events towards something more akin to coherent knowledge and understanding. By the same token, it shone a much-needed light upon the particularities of the Jewish experience; something largely absent, in terms of detail, from public consciousness. On the other hand, in the depiction of the extermination of the Jews as 'genocide', the Jewish experience during the war acquired a frame: one which, as all frames do, did not 'freeze the particular "reading" as *the* correct one' but rather 'establish[ed] the likely range of meanings' (Irwin-Zarecka 1994: 4). Notably, as we have seen, 'genocide' as a frame already had cultural circulation and came with different normative connotations depending on a given context.

It was here, then, that the 'legal' and 'social' norms each exerted influence. From one perspective, the framing of the Jewish experience as genocide gave it *ex post facto* status as an international crime – a crime that, under the terms of the Convention retrospectively posed questions of Britain, but one that for the majority underscored the criminality of the Nazi regime. From the more inclusive 'social norm' perspective, the narration of the Jewish experience as a genocide positioned it alongside the numerous other genocidal incidents the British public had become more aware of in recent decades. In both registers, a degree of distance was placed between Britain and the genocide of the Jews: it was testament to the

Nazi/German 'Other', and/or it was universalised as one of a number of 'genocides' – none of which, of course, were seen to involve Britain.

These cultural tendencies were further embedded during the second half of the 1970s with coverage of events in Cambodia. References to Hitler, Nazis, Auschwitz, and Jews were never far away from some newspaper columns (see Daily Mirror 1979; Murray 1979; Pilger 1979), illustrating how awareness of the fate of the Jews was used to make sense of what was taking place in Indochina. In a very revealing comment made in the early 1980s, John Rae (1984), writing in *The Observer*, asserted 'if you thought the genocide carried out by the Khmer Rouge was different from the Nazis, you were wrong.' For Rae, the two were 'comparable in scale and in the pathological sadism with which it was executed'; the issue, then, in Rae's words was 'all holocausts are not equal, it appears'. Beyond pointing to the impact of Cold War politics, Rae offered a more mendacious explanation for this perceived inequality: 'unlike the Jews, the victims of the Cambodian holocaust have no international influence'.

Rae's remarks highlight how, a decade on from *Genocide*, 'the Holocaust' – as a way of referring to the fate of the Jews – was acquiring purchase in British culture. In contrast to elsewhere (Kansteiner 2006), the British transmission of the NBC *Holocaust* television miniseries in the late 1970s did not affect massive upheavals in societal interest and awareness. What it did do, however, was popularise the phrase. As the 1970s turned to the 1980s, 'Holocaust' did not immediately supplant older ways of speaking of the extermination of the Jews but it did mix with them. As 'the Holocaust' began to become a retrospective 'legal norm' and contemporary 'social norm' of genocide, this opened the door for conceptual confusion as to what (if anything) distinguished 'the Holocaust' from 'genocide', who and what the phrase referred to, and how either terms related to late twentieth century, post-imperial Britain. These quandaries took on concrete form with the inauguration of the Holocaust Memorial Garden in Hyde Park in 1983.

Teaching, learning & memory politics

The above developments all signified a movement in the position of the Holocaust within Britain's historical culture. With this – indeed, inseparable from and even integral to this, was an accompanying politicisation over and around the history and memory of the genocide of the Jews. This played out in different ways, in different arenas. In the case of the Hyde Park Memorial, the politics of memory could be seen in how it came about and its final form – all of which spoke to the political concerns and priorities of Anglo-Jewry and the British government (Cooke 2000). Elsewhere, as seen in Rae's remarks, politicisation manifested itself in growing competition for memory – though not (or at least, not yet), in the form of competing identity politics seen in America.

One of the most important forums in which Holocaust memory politics materialised was education. In North America, we know from Thomas Fallace (2006) that the 'turn' of teachers to the Holocaust from the mid-1970s occurred organically, was informed by rising Holocaust consciousness in American society, and was driven by a desire 'to use history to transform the lives of their students'; that is, to make the curriculum relevant to the world around them, and engender self-reflection. (97, 84). There are both differences and similarities in the British case. Here, it was not until the 1980s that teachers' interest in the Holocaust began to grow, and even by the late 1980s this remained generally scattergun, sporadic, and generally exceptional (see Fox 1989). For teachers who did wish to teach the subject, classroom resources and materials were in extremely limited supply. Where they did exist, they tended to be authored or distributed by organisations on the left of the political spectrum, and, accordingly, were tied to anti-racist agendas. The prime case in point is the Inner London Education Authority (ILEA), and their resource pack for teachers *Auschwitz: Yesterday's Racism*. Created in the mid-1980s, these materials were designed 'to encourage reflection on the universal aspects of the

Holocaust' (Russell 2006: 66). Despite being popular with teachers, however, they were fervently criticised by the then Conservative government on account of their 'politicisation' (Russell 64), leading eventually to the materials being withdrawn from circulation.

The takeaway from the ILEA affair was that teaching and learning about the Holocaust could be – and now was being – politicised. This was further exemplified during the years 1989-1991 when, as part of the creation of a National Curriculum for all state-maintained schools to follow, campaigners pressed the government to include the Holocaust (Pearce 2017:). Noteworthy for us is how lobbying parties did so in part by explicitly universalising the Jewish experience – avoiding the term 'Holocaust' to talk in terms of 'a state policy of mass murder and genocide', whilst positioning the 'attempted destruction of the whole of European Jewry' alongside the murder of 'gypsies, political dissidents, homosexuals and many other minority groups' (*Submission* 1989: 3). As a strategy, this packaging of the fate of the Jews up with the experiences of other groups at once highlighted and reduced the Jewish specificity of the Holocaust; making it more attractive to policy makers concerned the subject was 'too Jewish' and/or irrelevant for Britons. Together with poignant appeals to British war memory and patriotism, it was ultimately a successful tactic (Kushner 1994: 263) but it came with consequences.

When the government finally acceded to political pressure and named 'the Holocaust' as statutory content in its first National Curriculum, it was unclear precisely who was being referred to. Today, we would presume most teachers would have been clear that by 'the Holocaust' was meant the extermination of the Jews, but this presumption overestimates levels of historical knowledge in British society at this time. Moreover, it presumes there was a commonly shared, consensual conceptualisation and cultural understanding of 'the Holocaust' in Britain by the early 1990s – which, strictly speaking, was not the case. This was partly because of lingering uncertainty as to how 'the Holocaust' was meant to relate to the

phenomenon of genocide. On this, the National Curriculum offered no help. Importantly, in its Final Report to the government, the Working Group charged with drafting the curriculum for school history had referenced the Holocaust in a very specific way: that being, ‘Genocide: the Holocaust’ (Department of Education & Science 1990). But, in the curriculum that came into force in all state-maintained schools in September 1991, the reference to genocide had been erased (Department of Education & Science 1991).

When teaching about the Holocaust, as they were now mandated to do, were teachers to focus on the fate of the Jews, or the experience of all victim groups, including the Jews? Was the Holocaust to be understood by students to be a genocide, the exemplar genocide, or something else altogether? And to what ends was learning about the Holocaust positioned – for the acquisition of ‘factual’, historical knowledge, and/or in the pursuit of combatting racism, intolerance, and prejudice? Such were the questions that presented themselves to teachers in England in the years after 1991 and, despite four revisions of the National Curriculum, these issues remain largely unresolved to this day. In this way, the first curriculum established the principles, terms and conditions under which teaching and learning about the Holocaust in schools proceeded over the next 25 years.

The detachment of ‘the Holocaust’ from ‘genocide’ in the National Curriculum, and the removal of the latter altogether, had significant implications. Schoolteachers were not prohibited from examining genocide or teaching other historic genocides, but even if they wished to do so their capacity was virtually negligible during the content-heavy curricula of the 1990s. Meanwhile, as Holocaust pedagogy became progressively influenced by trajectories of Holocaust consciousness in wider culture, lesson-centric conceptions of the Holocaust came to predominate (Pearce 2014: 40-45, 67-72). As the theoretical space for teaching ‘other’ genocides in the curriculum reduced, this was compounded by the accelerated institutionalisation of the Holocaust as paradigm around the turn of the millennium.

These developments were captured in and furthered by the creation of Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) in 1999-2000. An immense amount of ink has now been spilt on this initiative, but Donald Bloxham's charge (2003) that the day was blighted from inception by 'conceptual confusions' and 'intellectual inconsistencies' remains very hard to dispute (41). Similarly, the controversy that followed the omission of Armenia from the inaugural day – on account of their potentially being 'too much history', and the day wishing to focus on post-Holocaust genocides (Critchell 2016) – confirmed how Britain's historical position towards a given historic genocide powerfully enmeshed with contemporary realpolitik. There is no doubting that since 2001 HMD has increased awareness of the Holocaust, as well as consciousness of the genocides that have been chosen to be included in its annual commemorations. Yet the inherent tension that comes from a Holocaust Memorial Day which also memorialises a selection of 'other genocides', remains unresolved.

This, ironically enough, is not for the want of a lack of activity in the academic field of genocide studies. Indeed, over the last two decades, some of the major advances in genocide scholarship have been made by researchers in British universities;¹ many of whom are in the vanguard of a 'new cohort of genocide scholars' (Stone 2006: 243) promoting greater 'cross-fertilisation between Holocaust studies and genocide studies' (Bloxham 2013: 60). Although 'genocide education' at a tertiary level in Britain is not as embedded as in, say, North America, the existence of a strong and vibrant research culture throws into sharp relief the virtual neglect of teaching about genocide lower down the educational system.

Part of the answer lies, of course, in the long-established structuring of secondary education by the National Curriculum – which, as we've seen, places accent on the Holocaust. However, the academisation of the English system in recent years has meant an increasing number of schools are no longer obliged to follow the curriculum, and have the freedom to teach whatever content they wish. In this context it is encouraging to find some teachers who, in addition to teaching

the Holocaust, are broaching the issue of 'other genocides', but this – by all accounts – poses the question of why the majority are not. To understand that requires us to recognise that schools, (and the teachers who teach within them) are culturally situated, and to consider the ways in which the Holocaust and genocide are understood and approached within that wider culture.

Conclusion

On 7 December 2015 a remarkable group of teenage boys visited the House of Commons. Having learnt about various genocides, their purpose was to raise awareness of a new student campaign group they had formed in collaboration with peers from 15 different schools. Named 'Genocide, through our eyes', the group came together to increase genocide consciousness and had begun by researching what over 800 of their peers knew and understood (Lawrence 2016). Their findings were arresting. Among the headlines, the students discovered 81% of their peers could not name a post-Holocaust genocide, just 51% of 11-16 year olds 'could define the term genocide', and the vast majority had no awareness of events in Rwanda, Bosnia, or Darfur (Lawrence 2016; BBC 2015). The students' findings reinforced research conducted by the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) two years previously. Ahead of HMD 2014, the Trust published the results of a national survey which had revealed 'half the UK population cannot name a genocide that has taken place since the Holocaust'. Significantly, there was a 'lack of awareness among Britain's young adults – just one in five (19%) individuals aged 16-24 are able to name a post-Holocaust genocide', with 'a third unable to provide the correct definition of genocide' (HMDT 2014).

Although lamentable, the absence of knowledge and understanding uncovered by 'Genocide, through our eyes' and the HMDT should come as no surprise. Rather, these findings are to be seen and understood as the product of how Holocaust education, remembrance and politics has

evolved in Britain over the previous quarter of a century. Of course, it would be totally unreasonable to presume that by just studying the Holocaust young people would necessarily acquire an understanding of post-Holocaust genocides; however, one can legitimately expect students would be able to correctly define 'genocide' – especially given the paradigmatic status accorded to the Holocaust. That they cannot underlines how current orthodoxies in Holocaust education are not serving to develop knowledge and understanding of the phenomenon of genocide.

This begs the question of precisely what Holocaust education in this country *is* doing – especially when politicians and some pedagogues in the field advocate that learning about the Holocaust can work towards genocide prevention. An answer to that question can be found in the UCL Centre for Holocaust Education's research into students' knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust. As discussed in greater detail by Stuart Foster in this volume, that research laid bare major gaps in students' substantive knowledge and understanding, a reliance on myths and mythologies, and the prevalence of misconceptions. It suggested what is being taught is not the Holocaust, *per se*, but a particular memory of it.

'Genocide', writes Dan Stone (2013), is 'bound up with' and 'inseparable' from memory (103, 105). This cuts not just for the enactment of genocide, but also for 'the long afterlife of extreme violence' (Bergen 2015: 171). In this second register, there is an underlying tension between the nature of genocidal memories (referential as they are to rupture and trauma) and the way genocide may be remembered (that being as something past and gone). In the case of the latter, the need for resolution combines with the human 'need to build the future on hope not despair', leading to statesmen and women to speak of 'meaning in the midst of meaningless misery' (Bergen 2015: 168).

In Britain in 2018, teaching about the Holocaust rarely – if ever – lends itself to an appreciation of genocidal violence or the violence of genocidal memory. In part, this might be attributed to

how the Holocaust is framed by the National Curriculum and the multiple constraints that impress themselves on teachers. Yet as the students of ‘Genocide, through our eyes’ poignantly demonstrate, where teaching about the Holocaust occurs alongside teaching about genocide more generally, the results can be profound. However, because in the main much Holocaust education and remembrance seeks universal ‘lessons’ or draw ‘contemporary relevance’ it extracts the genocide of the Jews from both its historical and its phenomenological contexts. In the process, perhaps the most common and unifying element of genocidal atrocities is lost: that being, in Stone’s words, the reality that

Violence is, quite simply, the norm in society, a natural urge of human beings that can be mobilised by certain ideologies under certain conditions, and that what we call “civilisation” is the exception, though one no less worth striving for. (2006: 199)

Clearly, this is a frightening realisation – one enough to shatter many an illusion. Unless or until this reality is taught, learnt, and remembered, then students’ understanding of what the Holocaust was, what genocide is, and what their significances are for us today will remain impoverished and incomplete.

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Notes:

¹ See for instance the work of Donald Bloxham, Cathie Carmichael, Rebecca Jinks, Tom Lawson, Mark Levene, Martin Shaw and Dan Stone.