CHAPTER 10

None Is Still Too Many: Holocaust Commemoration and Historical Anesthetization

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Holocaust commemoration has become a central focus of civic religion in the twenty-first century. Since the Stockholm Declaration was signed in the year 2000, the governments of the 31 International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance (IHRA) member states,¹ and particularly the three Anglophone nations within the Alliance (Canada, the USA, and the UK),²

¹A complete list of member countries may be found at <https://holocaustremembrance.com/member-countries> (accessed 01/2017).

²While there are of course marked differences between these three nations, geographical proximity, shared history, and commonality of language means that certain cultural trends and political discourses tend to circulate between them. The present Canadian government (under Justin Trudeau) is currently making use of a more hospitable attitude toward immigration in general, and refugees in particular, to mark itself out as distinct both from its southern neighbor and the Harper government which it has succeeded. However, in the 1930s it was the nation most strongly committed to curbing immigration—statements which in the USA were the purview of right-wing radio personalities such as Father Charles

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have increasingly highlighted Holocaust memory as part of their policy platforms. Former Prime Minister David Cameron's 2016 commitment to construct a memorial to the victims of the Holocaust, intended to serve as "a permanent statement of our values as a nation," is exemplary of this trend. The statement, however, was made a few short weeks before Cameron announced the date of the Referendum on the UK's membership in the EU, opening a campaign that would be defined, on both the Leave and Remain sides, by hostility toward migrants in general, and particularly toward the large number of refugees attempting to reach Europe from the Middle East and North Africa.

In Israel, the commemorative focus of Yom HaZikaron l'Shoah ve-laG'vurah is on victimhood and self-defense, with the public commemorative holiday set on the anniversary of the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising.³ Yom HaZikaron is the sober first act of a two-day festival, which culminates with the Hebrew calendar anniversary of the Proclamation of the State of Israel in 1948. Shortly after the sundown that marks the barrier between the two days, an assembly on top of Mount Herzl—also called Har HaZikaron, the mountain of memory—oversees the ceremonial raising of the flag up from half-mast, to mark the transition from remembrance to celebration. This is civic religion at its finest pitch of theatricality: mourn the dead, but anticipate the fruits of the struggle in which they laid down their lives; celebrate the nation-state, but do so with a clear memory of the price paid in human life for its existence.⁴

In contrast, IHRA member states observe Holocaust Memorial Day on the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz. The commemorative activities in these countries tend to focus on the roles played by bystanders and rescuers; refugee resettlement is particularly highlighted in countries

Coughlin were, in Canada, circulated on internal memoranda of government policy. For this reason, a considerable amount of the historical material reviewed in this chapter is taken from Canada, while my present-day comparisons are from the UK and USA.

³Unlike Holocaust Memorial Day, which takes place according to the Gregorian calendar, Yom haShoah is observed according to the Jewish calendar; it falls on 27 Nisan, which is generally in April or early May.

⁴See Alana Vincent, *Making Memory: Jewish and Christian Explorations in Monument, Narrative and Liturgy* (Eugene, OR: Pickwick Publications, 2013) for a much lengthier discussion of the constitutive function of war commemoration for national identity. Please note that that discussion is based in the commemorative apparatus of the British Commonwealth, dating from the First World War; the notion of war as sacrifice described above is by no means unique, or even original, to Israeli civic religion.

which contributed to the resettlement of refugees during and immediately after the Second World War. The putative intention of Holocaust commemoration and education outside of the Jewish community in these countries is to foster a sense of social responsibility, and in so doing prevent future genocides—including genocides enabled elsewhere through non-intervention.

As the current refugee crisis makes painfully clear, civic commemoration of past atrocities is not an inoculation against present—or future—moral responsibility. In fact, quite the opposite: as the UK case suggests, institutionalized Holocaust commemoration in IHRA member states very often serves to mask problematic policies by offering reassurance that the Holocaust was perpetrated in another place, at another time, by other people. Rote commemoration runs the risk of moral anesthetization, and the further removed the original event becomes in place and time, the more difficult its lessons are to transfer to the present day. At worst, Holocaust memory feeds into a narrative of national exceptionalism, in which the capacity to commit, or to be complicit in, genocide becomes the unique attribute of enemy states, and a nation's own record of intervention, however poor, is obscured from reflective scrutiny.

No historical narrative is a straightforward recounting of events, which are experienced by those who live them as more or less random happenstance. To narrate is to select, to focus, to craft—and this is particularly true of civic commemoration. The narrative being crafted is not simply a story about the past, but also about a nation's character, and thus, implicitly, about its future. The ways in which the historical narrative of the Holocaust has been crafted and received thus reveal a great deal about the self-perception of the USA, UK, and Canada—and the actions of those nations in response to the current refugee crisis reveal even more about the extent to which that self-perception is threatened by too close an examination of the surviving historical data, and the political strategies employed to counteract that threat. This is the topic which I will pursue in this chapter.

A PLACE OF REFUGE?

It is worth noting that of the 17 existing Holocaust memorials that currently exist within the UK, only 2 are genuinely public commemorations of the event, the others being either situated for the benefit of particular communi-

ties, or else dedicated to the memory of particular individuals.⁵ These two are the Holocaust Memorial Garden in Hyde Park, a restrained Japanese style garden erected by the Board of Deputies of British Jews, and Hope Square outside of Liverpool Street Station, which is dedicated “to the Children of the Kindertransport, who found hope and safety in Britain through the gateway of Liverpool Street Station,” and was paid for by the Association of Jewish Refugees and the Central British Fund for World Jewish Relief.⁶ While Hyde Park is a popular tourist destination, it sees far fewer visitors annually than does Liverpool Street Station (7 million vs. 55 million).⁷ Much like Hyde Park, the station has a complex traffic flow, and there is as little

⁵ The number 17 is taken from the list maintained by Kate Vigurs “Six Million Memorials ~ Landscapes of Memory,” at <http://www.6millionmemorials.co.uk/> (accessed 02/2017). Vigurs’ criteria for inclusion are rather broader than my own would be, as she counts sites such as the Wiener Library and exhibits at the Jewish Museum (London), Imperial War Museum, and Imperial War Museum North, all of which play important roles in preserving public memory without being public memorials per se; the National Memorial Arboretum, which includes trees dedicated to Raoul Wallenberg and Anne Frank among many other, non-Holocaust related arboreal dedications; and several memorials situated in synagogues and churches, which are oriented toward the congregations they are located in rather than the general public. My own count of truly public memorials on Vigurs’ list is seven, which includes three memorials to specific individuals (Anne Frank, Raoul Wallenberg, and Freddie Gilroy), and a further two memorials to the Jewish populations of particular areas (Jersey, and Lidice, a village in the Czech Republic which is commemorated with two plaques located in Hackney, for reasons which Vigurs confesses herself unable to determine). The remaining two memorials—the Holocaust Memorial Garden in Hyde Park and the Kindertransport: The Arrival Memorial at Liverpool Street Station—will be discussed below.

⁶ Inscription at the site.

⁷ The visitor count for Hyde Park is reported by Michael Hitchcock, Tony Curson, and Paola Parravicini, “Visitors to the Royal Parks: Results of Steady State Count (August 2007–July 2008),” International Institute for Culture, Tourism and Development (London Metropolitan University, 2008) at https://www.royalparks.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0019/41815/report-august-2008-1.pdf (accessed 02/2017). These numbers might be slightly low, as they do not take into account attendance at the Winter Wonderland event which has run annually since 2007 and which itself attracts upwards of two million visitors each year, as reported in Katie Deighton, “Winter Wonderland Visitors Rise to More than 2.5 million,” *Event Magazine*, January 5, 2015, at <http://www.eventmagazine.co.uk/winter-wonderland-visitors-rise-25-million/destinations/article/1327827> (accessed 02/2017). However, one might safely assume that visitors to the Winter Wonderland are particularly unlikely to be attracted to a Holocaust memorial, even if its design were not quite so modest. While more recent figures for Liverpool Street Station are available, in order to provide a more meaningful comparison, the visitor count for that site is taken from Georgios Georgiou and Brian Ball, “Station Usage 2006/07,” *Delta Rail*, May 1, 2008, at http://orr.gov.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0008/4598/station-usage-report-2006-07.pdf (accessed 02/2017).

guarantee that a visitor there will pass through Hope Square as there is that a visitor to the park will discover the Holocaust Memorial Garden. In spite of this, a much higher number of visitors to the station, combined with a much more visually arresting site design, suggest that the Kindertransport memorial is currently the most viewed and recognizable Holocaust memorial in the UK. At the same time, a great deal of Holocaust Memorial Day education depends on first-person testimony, and natural aging processes mean that such testimony is now provided primarily by child survivors—a large number of whom were Kindertransport refugees.

What documentary sources tell us about the context of the Kindertransport is that from 1933 onwards, there was a steady trickle of Jewish refugees attempting to leave Germany, frustrated primarily by a lack of available destinations. The numbers of refugees increased sharply after Kristallnacht (November 9–10, 1938), after which the British government estimated 10–15,000 German and Austrian Jews were rendered homeless and required housing in temporary camps; at this point, the UK undertook to admit unaccompanied children.⁸ Prior to this crisis point, there is little evidence that any government seriously doubted that life in Germany was becoming untenable for Jews. Rather, what is recorded is a widespread perception that enabling Jews to leave Germany would only serve to encourage Germany to expel them in even greater numbers, solving its own “Jewish problem” by increasing everyone else’s.⁹ While the politicians of some nations (Canada included) identified their countries as particularly desirable to Jewish refugees due to a perception of favorable economic circumstances, no serious historian of the refugee crisis of the 1930s suggests that a perception of Jews as primarily “economic migrants” was particularly widespread (although concern that refugees might push native citizens out of jobs, particularly in the medical professions, was expressed in the popular press).¹⁰ Unaccompanied children posed neither such economic risk nor the political problem of being seen to laze about on the public’s penny.¹¹

⁸ See Ari Sherman, *Island Refuge: Britain and Refugees from the Third Reich 1933–1939* (London: Routledge, 1994), 182.

⁹ See Irving Abella and Harold Troper, *None is Too Many: Canada and the Jews of Europe 1933–1948* (Toronto: Lester & Orpen Dennys, 1982), 26–32.

¹⁰ See Sherman, *Island Refuge*, 48, 124–126, 131.

¹¹ “Unaccompanied children” in the 1930s and 1940s were, much as they are today, legal minors, largely adolescents, rather than toddlers and primary school children. Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, 237, recount the difficulties in finding families to accept older

This is all to say that the Kindertransport currently occupies a far more substantial space in British imagination of the Holocaust than is historically warranted, especially given that, as Norman Bentwich has argued, political will to support the transport was founded, in part, on an expectation "that a large part of the children would be able to emigrate to overseas countries, Palestine, the United States, etc., within a short time. England was to be the country of first refuge and transit"; that the outbreak of war rendered further movement impossible ought not cover the Home Office in a retroactive glow of charitable intentions—although the steps taken to naturalize children who, in 1946, found themselves unlikely to be reunited with any surviving family members do reveal some humanitarian sensibility on the part of the government.¹²

The point of this critique of the extent to which British Holocaust memory focuses on the Kindertransport is not, of course, to paint the UK as careless of Jewish lives or complicit in their loss—the UK was no more, and by some evidence perhaps even slightly less, resistant to accepting refugees during the 1930s than any of the other Allied nations.¹³ Rather, the point is that in centering public commemoration on some facts, others are necessarily pushed to the margins of the narrative—and, thus, elided from any considerations about the nation's character, or its future.

children: "In Toronto, for instance, first efforts to get foster homes or adoptive parents for the children were rewarded by a rush of enthusiasm. Many families offered to take orphaned children—all requested children less than seven years of age." The misapprehension over what constitutes a "child" refugee has continued, and added some fuel to anti-refugee fervor in the UK, as the *Daily Mail* spent a considerable amount of column space observing that "migrants arriving into Britain over the last two days appear to look older than the 14 to 17 years the Government claims they are." John Stevens and Emma Glanfield, "Adults are pretending to be children": Now even aid workers admit 'Calais kids' are LYING about their age as vulnerable nine-year-old African boy is refused UK entry in 'shambolic' selection process," *Mail Online*, October 18, 2016, at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3847114/Adults-pretending-children-aid-workers-admit-Calais-kids-LYING-age-vulnerable-nine-year-old-refused-UK-entry-shambolic-selection-process.html> (accessed 02/2017).

¹² Norman Bentwich, *They Found Refuge: An Account of British Jewry's Work for Victims of Nazi Oppression* (London: Cresset Press, 1956), 71.

¹³ It should be noted, however, that the reluctance to accept refugees was merely an extension of a long-held suspicion of Jewish—and particularly Ashkenazi—immigration, as detailed in Tony Kushner, *The Persistence of Prejudice: Anti-Semitism in British Society During the Second World War* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1989). See also Anthony Julius, *Trials of the Diaspora: A History of Anti-Semitism in England* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2012); Tony Kushner, *The Battle of Britishness: Migrant Journeys 1680 to the Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2014).

Some readers will expect me, at this juncture, to perform the traditional obeisance to the uniqueness and incomparability of the Holocaust as an event. These readers are advised to prepare themselves for disappointment. They may seek consolation in the many volumes already written on that subject¹⁴; in the present political crisis, we are compelled to confront other questions, both more interesting and more urgent, and it is those discussions which I am actually invested in advancing here. The Holocaust was a deliberate strategy undertaken by Germany with an aim of eliminating an undesirable population; that policy of elimination proved fatal primarily as a result of the international community's determination to stand in solidarity with one another in a refusal to accept refugees. This became clear at the 1938 Refugee Conference held in Evian (France). The remarks made by the Canadian Prime Minister William Lyon Mackenzie King in a letter prior to the conference were typical of the mood of the gathering:

Other governments with unwanted minorities must equally not be encouraged to think that harsh treatment at home is the key that will open the doors to immigration abroad. It is axiomatic that no state should be allowed to throw upon other countries the responsibility of solving its internal difficulties.¹⁵

The primary concern in almost every international negotiation over the fate of refugees before, during, and after the war was economic. For example, Canadian immigration policy favored agricultural workers, a category which very few of the primarily urban German and Austrian Jews could qualify under. Irving Abella and Harold Troper argue that the government's refusal to adjust this policy, even in the face of changing Canadian labor needs in the late 1930s and early 1940s, was a direct result of a desire to minimize Jewish immigration on the part of the Director of Immigration,

¹⁴ A good summary of the literature in this vein can be found in Gavriel D. Rosenfeld, "The Politics of Uniqueness: Reflections on the Recent Polemical Turn in Holocaust and Genocide Scholarship," *Holocaust and Genocide Studies* 13/1 (1999), 28–61, but see especially Yehuda Bauer, *The Holocaust in Historical Perspective* (Seattle: University of Washington Press, 1978); Lucy S. Dawidowicz, *The Holocaust and the Historians* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1983); and Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (New York: Knopf, 1996).

¹⁵ Quoted in Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, 27.

Frederick Blair.¹⁶ In the USA, even before Father Charles Coughlin's radio and periodical presence turned its primary focus to opposing Jewish immigration, David MacCormack, speaking in his capacity as Commissioner General of Immigration, argued that any increase would be likely to lead to racial unrest, "particularly during a period of depression and unemployment."¹⁷ The number of refugees Britain accepted, which Bernard Wasserstein argues was relatively generous when measured in proportion to the existing population,

was greatly facilitated by an undertaking given in 1933 by representative leaders of the Anglo-Jewish community who promised the Government that 'all expense, whether in respect of temporary or permanent accommodation or maintenance will be borne by the Jewish community without ultimate charge to the State.'¹⁸

Compare this with the characterization of the people risking their lives in attempts to cross the Mediterranean Sea into Europe, or swim across the English Channel from Calais, as "economic migrants," which occupied a considerable amount of public discourse in the months both before and after David Cameron's 2016 commitment to construct a national Holocaust memorial in the UK. Indeed, on the same day Cameron was making his speech, several papers carried reports of Frans Timmerman (the Vice President of the EU) claiming that six in ten asylum seekers in the EU are "people that you can assume have no reason to apply for refugee status."¹⁹ While Timmerman's figures were later reported to be in

¹⁶ See *ibid.*, 38–66. Abella and Troper do not, however, make explicit the connection between an immigration policy favoring agricultural workers and therefore premised upon Western expansion (which is to say colonialism) and anti-Semitism as two intertwined and mutually supporting manifestations of structural racism.

¹⁷ Quoted in David Brody, "American Jewry, the Refugees and Immigration Restriction (1932–1942)," in *America, American Jews and the Holocaust: American Jewish History*, ed. Jeffrey S. Gurock (London: Routledge, 1998), 181–210, here 198.

¹⁸ Bernard Wasserstein, *Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939–1945* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1988), 9.

¹⁹ Quoted in Matthew Holehouse, "Six in Ten Migrants not Entitled to Asylum, says EU Chief," *The Telegraph*, January 26, 2016, at <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/world-news/europe/eu/12123684/Six-in-ten-migrants-not-entitled-to-asylum-says-EU-chief.html> (accessed 02/2017). See also Peter Cluskey, "Most Fleeing to Europe are 'Not Refugees', EU Official Says," *Irish Times*, January 26, 2016, at <http://www.irishtimes.com/news/world/europe/most-fleeing-to-europe-are-not-refugees-eu-official-says-1.2511133> (accessed 02/2017).

error,²⁰ right-wing periodicals such as *The Daily Mail* continued to push the myth of economic migrants sneaking into Europe disguised as refugees for months afterwards.²¹ The effect was not to entirely discredit the claims of particular individual refugees, but to create a confusion in public discourse around the degree to which the migrants in general are entitled to exert a moral claim to admission into the EU, and to paint those speaking in favor of refugee rights as at best careless, and at worst engaged in an outright betrayal, of the interests of their fellow citizens.

The tacit acknowledgment that some moral claim to refuge exists is implicit in rhetoric which focuses on the distinction between refugees and economic migrants, as typified by the anti-EU Member of the European Parliament (MEP) Nigel Farage's recent remarks in defense of Donald Trump's attempted ban on citizens of seven Muslim-majority nations, including Syria, entering the USA:

Actually, most people that are coming from those countries, whether it's coming into Europe or coming to America are basically economic migrants. And it's mixed in with some of those that you potentially get terrorists. I do think the word refugee gets misused.²²

It would be a mistake to assume that such acknowledgments of a moral claim to refuge are the result of lessons learned from the refugee crisis of the 1930s. Compare George Edward Sullivan, from 1938:

²⁰ See Nikolaj Nielsen, "Timmermans Blunders on Migrant Figures," *EU Observer*, January 28, 2016, at <https://euobserver.com/migration/132048> (accessed 02/2017).

²¹ For *The Daily Mail*, Sue Reid ran the headline "The tragic but brutal truth: They are not REAL refugees! Despite drowning tragedy thousands of economic migrants are still trying to reach Europe," *The Daily Mail*, May 28, 2016, at <http://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-3613603/The-tragic-brutal-truth-not-REAL-refugees-Despite-drowning-tragedy-thousands-economic-migrants-trying-reach-Europe.html> (accessed 02/2017). *The Express* carried the theme of economic migrants into October, reporting on Czech president Milos Zeman's demand that economic migrants be immediately deported. See Nick Gutteridge, "SEND THEM BACK! Fuming Czech leader orders Brussels to DEPORT economic migrants," *The Sunday Express*, October 2, 2016, at <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/716819/refugee-crisis-Czech-president-Zeman-Brussels-deport-economic-migrants> (accessed 02/2017).

²² Quoted in Ajay Nair, "'They're ECONOMIC MIGRANTS': Nigel Farage slates misuse of term 'refugee'," *The Daily Express*, February 13, 2017, at <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/766598/nigel-farage-fox-news-claims-refugees-economic-migrants> (accessed 02/2017).

some believe that an exception should be made in favour of these refugees, because they are claimed to be victims of the worst savageries in recorded history. Every right-minded person abhors, of course, every sort of lawlessness and tyranny, and expects every civilized nation to refrain therefrom. Condemnation thereof is always justifiable. However, it is preposterous to assert that these refugees have been subjected to the worst savageries in recorded history. The fact that they are permitted to be refugees demonstrates the falsity of the assertion.²³

Writing in Coughlin's periodical *Social Justice*,²⁴ Sullivan goes on to assert that the greater part of sympathy should be reserved for victims "[i]n Red Russia and Red Spain," where "the brutality has been so great that wholesale 'liquidations' and enslavements did not leave many who could qualify as refugees."²⁵ Similarly, Farage insisted that a "refugee is someone like a Jewish person in Germany or Austria, a refugee is someone like an Indian who was living in Idi Amin's Uganda."²⁶ The rhetorical strategy at work is consistent: nobody is denying that there are genuine refugees, who have a genuine moral claim to assistance, but they are not the people who have presented themselves before us in this instance. Nobody could doubt that if genuine, deserving refugees were to present themselves, we would make available to them every possible assistance; we are, after all, good and moral people. These people before us, however, are not genuine; they are attempting to pass themselves off as something that they are not, to gain an unearned advantage, to trespass upon our generosity. They are, therefore, a threat. Farage's statement is notable for the baldness with which it employs this logic, the immediacy with which it jumps from economic migrants to terrorists, but not for its originality in making such a connection.

²³ George E. Sullivan, "America's Insidious Foes: Surveying Some Subversive Snares and Propaganda," *Social Justice*, December 5, 1938, 9–12, here 10.

²⁴ *Social Justice* was relatively short-lived in its circulation, but it filled much the same ideological niche as Breitbart News does today.

²⁵ George E. Sullivan, "America's Insidious Foes," 10.

²⁶ Quoted in Ajay Nair, "'They're ECONOMIC MIGRANTS': Nigel Farage slates misuse of term 'refugee,'" *The Daily Express*, February 13, 2017, at <http://www.express.co.uk/news/world/766598/nigel-farage-fox-news-claims-refugees-economic-migrants> (accessed 02/2017).

CONTESTED MEMORY

In the aftermath of the Holocaust, the image of Jews as victims came to dominate and obscure the memory of Jews as threats which informed the majority of public discourse on the refugee crisis of the 1930s. With the Russian Revolution a recent memory and the early Stalinist purges and the Spanish Civil War a current concern, communism was the major threat lurking in the political imagination of the West, and the association of Jews—particularly Jews from Eastern Europe—with Bolshevism was a taken for granted feature of the political landscape.²⁷ The association between Jews and communism was promoted even by Winston Churchill,²⁸ and it is that association which the Nazi party used, initially, to justify the legal measures taken against Jews, but it is that association which was also used by public figures and opinion makers in other countries to argue against admitting refugees. This passage, from William Dudley Pelley, is typical of such argumentation:

The Jew, Marx, went ahead with his Scientific Socialism, and found the Ashkenazic Jews uniformly sympathetic and endorsive of what he proposed to accomplish. You will note therefore, that when Communism first came into post-war Russia, not only were Lenin and Trotsky both Ashkenazic Jews, but of 504 kommissars at the head of the politbureau running Bolshevism, 496 of them were Ashkenazic Hebrews, and the other eight renegade white Russians or Armenians. That's the way Communism works in practice and why we have the reasonable right to say that Communism is Jewish—or Ashkenazic World Jewry in Action.²⁹

²⁷ The history of the idea of Jewish Bolshevism is too complex to detail here; it has been derided as an anti-Semitic myth, but at the same time—like all good stereotypes—a myth which coincides with just enough factual detail to imbue it with an aura of factuality; an interested reader is advised to start with André W. M. Gerrits, *The Myth of Jewish Communism: A Historical Interpretation* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2009). It is certainly true that the majority of influential Jewish intellectuals in the twentieth century have been left-wing; for discussion of this phenomenon, see *Judaism, Liberalism, and Political Theology*, ed. Randi Rashkover and Martin Kavka (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2013); and *Jewish Thought, Utopia, and Revolution*, ed. Elena Namli, Jayne Svenungsson, and Alana M. Vincent (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2014).

²⁸ See Winston Churchill, "Zionism versus Bolshevism: A Struggle for the Soul of the Jewish People," *Illustrated Sunday Herald*, February 8, 1920, 5.

²⁹ William D. Pelley, *The 45 Questions Most Frequently Asked About Jews: With the Answers* (Asheville, NC: Pelley Publishers, 1939), 45.

This is the rhetorical equivalent of today's "creeping sharia"³⁰: particular groups (Jews in the 1930s, Muslims today) are associated with a value system both foreign and opposed to Western liberal democracy, and an insistence on the homogeneity of those groups makes it impossible to argue for the admission of refugees without also becoming open to accusations of arguing for an abandonment of national security.

Here, then, the parallel should be clear: while the current refugee crisis does not appear to stem from a deliberate policy of population displacement within any single country from which refugees are attempting to emigrate, the international response to the crisis is virtually unchanged from 1938. Given this, and given the degree to which deference to Holocaust memory and pledges of "Never Again!" has become a political shibboleth—especially in the countries with which I have thus far been concerned³¹—we are forced to ask serious questions about precisely where the horror, the unrepeatability, of the Holocaust truly lies. It clearly cannot be the bare fact of abject human suffering in which witnesses decline to intervene, else we would have to own that our politicians, along with we who empower them, are the basest hypocrites imaginable.

It is not the fact of death that causes the Holocaust to disturb, not even the death of civilians; war has not ceased in the past century, and while there is evidence that advances in military technology may reduce civilian casualties (and certainly reduces military casualties), advances in communications technology have simultaneously increased awareness of such

³⁰A term which featured heavily in the UK media, especially around the time of the EU referendum campaign; see *The Daily Express*, "These sharia courts have no place in our country." Editorial, March 11, 2016, at <http://www.express.co.uk/comment/expresscomment/651624/Sharia-courts-UK-ban-Archbishop-Canterbury-Justin-Welby-migration-breast-cancer> (accessed 02/2017).

³¹Indeed, as I have been writing this paragraph I note that US Vice President Mike Pence has posted to Twitter: "Moving and emotional tour of Dachau today. We can never forget atrocities against Jews and others in the Holocaust." See Mike Pence, "Moving and Emotional Tour of Dachau Today. We Can Never Forget Atrocities Against Jews and Others in the Holocaust," at <https://twitter.com/VP/status/833334018313744386> (accessed 02/2017). That this statement comes shortly after his government has attempted to bar citizens of a number of Muslim-majority countries from entry into the USA, including canceling refugee resettlement visas and green cards, as well as having sharply increased immigration raids and deportations, rather underlines my point about the selectiveness of compassion prompted by Holocaust memory.

casualties.³² Likewise, it is not the cruelty documented in the photographs from the camps—while they still have the power to shock, so, too, do the images coming out of Aleppo or Abu Ghraib, and yet those images have not prompted any substantial re-evaluation of refugee or detainment policy. Is it the scale of death? Perhaps; it is true that the sheer scale of the Holocaust remains unmatched, even after adjustments are made for the relative size of pre-displacement populations. But there is a point past which numbers are just collections of digits, and the larger the numbers the greater the distance between figures and actual human lives—this is the difficulty which sites such as the Room of Names at the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, in Berlin, attempt to address, by returning the focus to individual lives. It is counterintuitive to suggest that we are simultaneously incapable of taking seriously one death among millions because the numbers are too large to comprehend, and incapable of taking seriously one, ten, a hundred, a hundred thousand deaths because the numbers are too small to consider significant.³³ The problem is not that we do not perceive the 14 people per day who died attempting to cross the Mediterranean last year as statistically significant.³⁴ The problem is that we do not perceive them as morally significant.

An article carried by the *Washington Post* in 1944 offered a suggestion of why the Holocaust was, at the time, uniquely horrifying:

It is a mistake, perhaps, to call these killings "atrocities." An atrocity is a wanton brutality. There were unspeakable atrocities at Auschwitz and Birkenau. But the point about these killings is that they were systematic and purposeful. The gas chambers and furnaces were not improvisations; they were scientifically designed instruments for the extermination of an entire ethnic group.³⁵

³²The question of awareness, and imagination, of war, aided by advances in photo-journalism over the course of the twentieth century, is of course the theme of Susan Sontag, *Regarding the Pain of Others* (New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, 2003).

³³Too long to reproduce here, Edeet Ravel provides a particularly elegant demonstration of this problem of numbers in *Ten Thousand Lovers: A Novel* (San Francisco: Harper Perennial, 2003), 278–281.

³⁴Figure taken from United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) briefing, William Spindler, "Mediterranean Sea: 100 People Reported Dead Yesterday, Bringing Year Total to 5,000," at <http://www.unhcr.org/uk/news/briefing/2016/12/585ce804105/mediterranean-sea-100-people-reported-dead-yesterday-bringing-year-total.html> (accessed 02/2017).

³⁵Quoted in Abella and Troper, *None is Too Many*, 187.

The industrialization of death speaks to an intentionality that is difficult to avoid. At first it may appear easy to differentiate from the everyday atrocities, from forced population displacement to mass rape to hacking one's neighbor apart with a machete, which have marked the genocides prosecuted by the International Criminal Court following the adoption of the United Nations Convention on the Punishment and Prevention of the Crime of Genocide in 1948. There is a particularly influential strand of Holocaust denial that focuses on undermining the evidence of the industrial process implemented at Auschwitz, arguing that in its absence, the Holocaust is a perfectly ordinary mass killing about which nothing more need be said.³⁶

But is there truly such a thing as a perfectly ordinary mass killing? The apparatus of gas chambers and crematoria introduced a distance between killer and victim,³⁷ which led to the moral puzzle of actors insulated from knowledge of their actions that occupied thinkers such as Hannah Arendt and Stanley Milgram in the decades following.³⁸ That distance, that ordinariness, marks out a terrifying void in our own self-knowledge; contemplation of it prompts a confrontation with our own potential capacity to commit atrocities—a confrontation which is, on an individual level and in a pedagogic context, uncomfortable, and on a collective level and in a political context, intolerable.

I am inclined to suggest that the most important characteristic of the Holocaust as an event, the thing which marks it as unique in the public imagination, which renders its victims, in hindsight, worthy of every assistance that has been denied to the victims of the crises and atrocities which have come after it, is precisely the fact of its existence *in the past*. It is politically safe to sympathize with victims once both their suffering and its cause have ceased; freed from the risk of opening ourselves to actual obligation, we are able to memorialize without constraint. Such memorialization is, of course, a fantasy, in which the virtues of the victims and the vices of the perpetrators are exaggerated—along with our own role, somewhere between savior and well-intentioned onlooker who, in spite of our ultimate

³⁶ See the analysis in Deborah Lipstadt, *Denying the Holocaust: The Growing Assault on Truth and Memory* (New York: Plume, 1993).

³⁷ See Elaine Scarry's analysis of the role of metaphor in facilitating killing by introducing distance in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), 27–59.

³⁸ In addition to Arendt, see Stanley Milgram, *Obedience to Authority: An Experimental View* (New York: Harper & Row, 1974).

helplessness in the face of events, nevertheless did everything we could.³⁹ This fantasy is politically useful insofar as it obviates any need for uncomfortable self-examination or attempts to alter long established policies. Creating a narrative of solidarity with past victims assures us that we are the sort of nations who act in solidarity with victims that our actions are by definition actions of solidarity—provided those who seek solidarity from us are suitably *authentic* victims.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

In England, this narrative is built in to the National Curriculum Key Stage 3 (taken by every child aged 13–14, and therefore one of the main sources of the general public's memory of the Holocaust), and the History A-level.⁴⁰ Across all levels, the primary focus is theorizing “why” the Holocaust happened, with a concomitant lack of inquiry into the “how.” A focus on the motives of Adolf Hitler in specific, and the Nazi party in general, leaves students unaware of and unchallenged by considerations of the process by which political consent was manufactured among ordinary citizenry. The prominence of Daniel Goldhagen's work on *Hitler's Willing Executioners* on the A-Level syllabus prior to its most recent revision is indicative of this problem: Goldhagen argues for a uniquely high level of anti-Semitism among the entirety of the German population, which was simply waiting for the Nuremberg code to give license to its expression.⁴¹ This is a comforting tale for British students and teachers to tell each other; it makes Germany's genocidal tendencies the result of a very unique set of cultural and historical circumstances, which should be studied and under-

³⁹ I speak here of a generic “we,” comprising the undifferentiated mass of the transnational Anglo-Western body politic; there are different nuances of memorial fantasy operative in communities where a greater identification with the victims is to be expected. Laura Levitt, *American Jewish Loss After the Holocaust* (New York: New York University Press, 2007), is an excellent study of this under-examined phenomenon.

⁴⁰ While recent revisions to the A-level curriculum have seen Goldhagen's work becoming less dominant, the first group of students educated under the new curriculum have yet to enter University, and so Goldhagen's influence on public understanding of the Holocaust remains significant. Jewish religious responses to the Holocaust are also covered by the Judaism paper for Religious Studies A-levels, but relatively few students undertake that paper, and so History is the main vector of Holocaust education in schools.

⁴¹ See Daniel Goldhagen, *Hitler's Willing Executioners: Ordinary Germans and the Holocaust* (London: Little, Brown & Co., 1996).

stood as past and prelude to later political movements—and possibly as an object lesson in why anti-Semitism, in particular, ought to be avoided.

The inclusion of Hannah Arendt's work on the banality of evil as a counternarrative to Goldhagen does not raise a sufficient challenge to this comforting national metanarrative.⁴² Its focus remains on Adolf Eichmann who, in Arendt's view, appeared to have no abnormal degree of animus toward Jews but nevertheless served in a senior position in the Third Reich; the emphasis is more on individual psychology and moral frailty than on the political power structures which enabled that psychology to become murderous. Arendt's later work on moral philosophy explicitly resisted attempts to draw from Eichmann any broader conclusions about collective responsibility or the role of bystanders: she is very clear that historical circumstances and social conditions are not guilty, individuals are.⁴³ And while this resistance makes perfect sense in the context of Arendt's broader philosophical project, it is unhelpful in forcing a reader to confront the problems in Goldhagen's theory; it is easy for a casual reader of Arendt (and students are, by definition, casual readers) to draw the conclusion that Eichmann, and those like him, were *exceptionally* morally deficient, just as Goldhagen portrays German society as *exceptionally* anti-Semitic. Uniqueness piles upon uniqueness, exception upon exception.

German exceptionalism is also British (and Canadian, and American) exceptionalism: insofar as ordinary Germans are, in this narrative framework, uniquely susceptible to genocidal impulses, ordinary citizens of every other country, including this one, are free to consider ourselves the natural heroes in the drama of history. Nowhere is this more evident than in the commemoration of the Kindertransport—an enterprise which saved the lives of a considerable number of the survivors now living in the UK. But the Kindertransport acts as a bright light shining directly into the eyes of the general public, dazzling us and obscuring debates about the immigration policy to which the Kindertransport was a single, shining (and largely privately funded) exception. That Britain's immigration policy was otherwise largely consistent with that of other Western nations may very

well give us reason to be proud of that single exception, but it should not be a reason to forget that the Holocaust took place against a backdrop of—and was to a large extent enabled by—a pervasive anti-immigration sentiment. Exploration—or even mention—of historical immigration policy and the political questions raised thereby is entirely absent from both the A-level syllabus and Holocaust Memorial Day commemorative activity.

The perpetuation of this narrative of exceptionalism and the resulting moral complacency in the face of the current refugee crisis is not what I or my fellow Holocaust educators would name as the intended outcome of our efforts. The commitment within the field of Holocaust studies to ongoing education, the point of the imperative to “never forget,” is precisely not to remember that, once upon a time, in a faraway country, some people who are entirely unlike us did some very bad things and so we should set aside one day a year to be sad about it, because performative civic emotions are necessary to give meaning to the lives of the victims.

The point is that there should be no more victims.

We are now approaching the 70th anniversary of the Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of the Crime of Genocide, a massive piece of international legislation prompted in no small part by the Holocaust. And in addition to the Holocaust and the Armenian genocide—still unacknowledged in the UK, but for which the term was first coined—we can now mark genocides in Sudan, Brazil, Tibet, Rwanda, Zanzibar, Indonesia, Biafra, Guatemala, Bangladesh, Uganda, Burundi, Cambodia, Sri Lanka, Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur, Yemen, Burma, and now Syria. Given this, I think we can safely say that “no more victims” is wildly aspirational. Perhaps it is better to say that we should learn that while genocide, and the accompanying creation of refugees, should never be treated as normal, it is, like war, apt to occur. It will produce some victims; some number of these might be saved by early and adequate humanitarian intervention. Ideally, that intervention ought to occur long before the situation escalates to the point that the Holocaust becomes an apt point of comparison.

In this light, the purpose of Holocaust education ought to be to give students, who will grow up to become the members of the general public whose opinions will be courted on the next crisis (and the next one after that, etc.), the tools for understanding, and acting in, that moment when it comes. And the moment is (always) already upon us.

⁴² See Hannah Arendt, *Eichmann in Jerusalem: A Report on the Banality of Evil* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006).

⁴³ See Hannah Arendt, “Personal Responsibility Under Dictatorship,” in *Responsibility and Judgement* (New York: Schocken Books, 2003), 17–48.

For not assuming that to be history's heroes is their birthright, but a series of difficult, fraught, and often politically unpopular choices.

For navigating the difficult terrain between accepting that an event has occurred without rendering it acceptable.

For continuing to work toward the goal that one day, there should be no more victims.

CHAPTER 11

"We Can Do This!" Tackling the Political Theology of Populism

Ulrich Schmiedel

"*Wir schaffen das* (We can do this)!" might be the most famous and the most fateful sentence Germany's Chancellor Angela Merkel never said. Her statement was, characteristically, much more circumspect.¹ Nonetheless, "We can do this!" stands for the striking shift in Germany's policy of migration which Merkel symbolizes, a shift which stirred up controversies throughout Europe.² In these controversies, the organized

¹The statement which was made during the Chancellor's press conference on August 31, 2015, was "*Ich sage ganz einfach: Deutschland ist ein starkes Land. Das Motiv, mit dem wir an diese Dinge herangehen, muss sein: Wir haben so vieles geschafft—wir schaffen das!*" Merkel's statement is available as *Im Wortlaut: Sommerpressekonferenz von Bundeskanzlerin Merkel* at bundesregierung.de (accessed 01/2017).

²The shift consists in the suspension of the Dublin Regulations according to which applications for asylum into the EU have to be handled by the state through which the applicant enters the Union. These regulations rendered it impossible for migrants from outside the EU to apply for asylum in Germany. With the suspension of these regulations in the summer of 2015, Germany took responsibility for migrants for whom it was not responsible. For internal as well as external political reasons which led the government to the suspension of Dublin, see Herfried Münkler, "Die Mitte und die Flüchtlingskrise. Über Humanität, Geopolitik und innenpolitische Folgen der Aufnahmeentscheidung," *Aus Politik und Zeitgeschichte* 66 (2016), 3–8.

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