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THE LIBERATION OF THE NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN BRITISH MEMORY

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ABSTRACT
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'The Liberation of the Nazi Concentration Camps in British Memory'
by Aimee Bunting

Through an exploration of both past and present day reactions to the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps this thesis will attempt to trace the roots of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust and of the formation of a Holocaust memory in Britain today. Connecting the past with the present, the thesis will argue that past British understandings of, and reactions to, the events of liberation and to the Holocaust as a whole, continue to determine the nature of Holocaust representation in Britain today. The reactions and memories of those for whom liberation was a reality and of those who recognised the distance between 'knowing and understanding' in Britain during the Holocaust years will be considered in a parallel assessment of some of the most concentrated forms of Holocaust representation in Britain today, in the form of official memorial days and in the creation of a national Holocaust museum exhibition. A case study of that Holocaust museum exhibition in London will provide a detailed means to assess the continuation of British attitudes to the Holocaust and will raise vital points both with regard to the complexities of Holocaust representation in a museum setting and in relation to those aspects of such a representation unique to Britain today. Finally the thesis will ask how far the place of the Holocaust has been changed in Britain by the presence of such a museum and will conclude that Britain's understanding of the Holocaust and the country's connections to remain as complex as ever.

Taking the present as its starting point the thesis will begin with a consideration of the newly organised Holocaust Memorial Days in Britain (Introduction). The debates surrounding the Day's inception will be placed in the context of a brief background of liberation, the events of which are identified as one of the strongest connections between Britain and the Holocaust. Holocaust survivors' perception of their liberators and the extent to which their experience and memory would often differ from that later presented to the world is explored. The question of memory is also discussed here in terms of the historical assessment of their testimony. (Chapter One). The levels of understanding in Britain during the years of the Holocaust are considered and a study of the work of those who recognised a British gap between 'knowing and understanding' is included. (Chapter Two). Chapter Three compares that information to the initial reactions of the British people to the news and images of liberation. A case study of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition (Chapter Four) is the central focus of the study drawing together the past and present elements and exploring the extent to which such an exhibition provides a unique insight into Britain's complex relationship with the Holocaust.

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Contents

Introduction

Using both past and present reactions to, and memories of, the events and experiences of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps, the thesis will attempt to trace the formation of a British understanding of liberation and specifically of Britain's own connection to, and memory of, the events of the Holocaust as a whole. The thesis will argue that the roots of present day British conceptions of the Holocaust and of the British connection to those events may often be traced to perspectives formed during the years of the Holocaust itself. In tracing the endurance of those perspectives throughout contemporary British representations and 'memories' of the Holocaust in the form of organised memorial days and large scale museum exhibitions, the thesis will argue that such present day British views of the Holocaust and the country's connection to it, retain the complexities and ambiguities that have always shaped Britain's relationship with the Holocaust. At the forefront of Britain's Holocaust representation today, and yet providing an equally revealing window upon both past and present day British Holocaust understanding are the recently created Holocaust Memorial Days, and their development and initial impact provide the starting point for the thesis.

On the eve of Britain's first Holocaust Memorial Day to be held on 27 January 2001 and annually thereafter, the journalist Phillip Johnston addressed his Daily Telegraph readers with a series of questions and images that appear to represent in concentrated form some of the complex issues at the core of any assessment of firstly contemporary British, and in comparison, American self image and identity with regard to both the events, representation and memory of the experience of the liberation of Nazi concentration camps by Allied troops

and indeed of the Holocaust as a whole.[1] The existence of a Holocaust Memorial Day, the developments and decisions for which are themselves significant, will, if only fleetingly place such questions at the forefront of British thinking through press and television coverage. Thus the day itself is perhaps one of the best starting points and examples for such a study.

Johnston begins his article with an apparently simple question; Why is Britain holding a Holocaust Memorial Day on 27 Jan? Indeed one answer, here supplied by the words of Prime Minister Tony Blair, may also seem simple and clear cut enough. The Prime Minister describes the intention of the event as to honour the victims of genocide and to celebrate our diversity and build a new patriotism that is open to all. A simple phrase, and one with which it may be difficult to argue; after all what can be questionable about a nation marking the memory of a terrible event? And yet it is a statement that in turn poses questions of a more profound and complex nature with regard to Britain today and its understanding of, and relation to, the events of the Holocaust.

Firstly, in describing the intention of a Holocaust Memorial Day, Tony Blair does not however refer to the need to honour the six million Jewish victims of the Nazi Holocaust, but instead speaks of the victims of genocide. In so doing his words raise one of the most complex issues at the centre of a study of the representation of the Holocaust in both Britain and America today, namely that of the very definition of the Holocaust itself and more significantly of the identity, numbers and nature of the victims that should be considered part of that event's definition.

Indeed throughout the development of the Holocaust

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1. Philip Johnston, 'Anger over the forgotten massacre', Daily Telegraph, 11 January 2001, p4.

museums, memorials, programmes, or films in British and American society considered in this study, the question of whether the word, and indeed the event, Holocaust, should apply solely to the Jewish victims of the Nazis or should be extended to include the other victims of the Nazis' destructive policies is repeated frequently and is the subject of much debate. It is a question which, whilst not limited to Britain and America's encounter with the Holocaust, does however, as the context of Mr. Blair's words suggest, reveal much with regard to the specific conception and representation of the Holocaust in those two countries today and it is one to which we will return. Indeed Blair's phrase is, no doubt intentionally, inclusive throughout in referring to the diversity of British society and perhaps most significantly in the last and most interesting suggestion of a new patriotism for all.

Whilst conjuring images of British unity, inclusivity and national pride, and in so doing echoing the motivation behind other state orchestrated occasions such as the Armistice Day Remembrance Services which in themselves will provide a useful comparison throughout, Mr. Blair's suggestion that a Holocaust memorial day, a day set aside ostensibly, although the distinction is not always clear despite the day's official title, to remember and reflect upon the mass murder of Europe's Jews at the hands of the Nazis, should be connected to a source of something as essentially positive as a new patriotism for Britain might equally be read as, at best a highly ambiguous and at worst a crude connection considering the scale and severity of the fate of the Holocaust's victims. In turn it may simply prompt the individual to ask how it might be that Britain could find a new source of patriotism with the accompanying suggestion of a resurgence of national pride from an event which occurred not only more than half a century ago, but also in the middle of Europe, involving European countries and European victims. It is a question that

once again will be present throughout a study of British and American responses to, and representations of both Liberation and the Holocaust, as museum designers and memorial builders in both countries often felt the need to, or felt under pressure to, justify the presence of their projects, buildings, memorials, in two countries where the Holocaust had not in fact occurred. It is in those justifications and in the connections they would make between themselves, their country and the Holocaust, primary amongst those being their conception of themselves as Liberating Nations, that much of the complexity of their subsequent representation of the Holocaust and of Liberation is revealed.

In returning to a consideration of his article, that Johnston's initial question should be asked at all in a British society today in which the Holocaust is present as never before. This is in the form of Heritage funded museum exhibitions, on the National Curriculum, and even pervades our leisure time in the form of film, television and art. Johnston's article then goes on to suggest a connection between the announcement of the Memorial Day and the current Government's multi-cultural agenda, that the Government simply conformed in its choice of date with the already existing EU Genocide Remembrance Day. Finally the article forms part of a larger piece documenting the continued objections of the Armenian community at their exclusion from the memorial event, a result they say of Britain's unwillingness to risk the continued presence of air bases on Turkey, a country which in turn continues to deny that the fate of over 1.5 million Armenians in 1915 was the result of a Turkish implemented policy of genocide, all of which suggests that such a question has profound implications and illustrates the political and social issues in both Britain and America into which the Holocaust and its memory and representation can be drawn.

The British Government's patriotism for all does

not, it seems, extend to the Armenian community and indeed as Johnston reminds us, last year President Clinton asked Congress not to acknowledge the Armenian Massacre after, the American State Department was told that Anglo American flights over northern Iraq from the Turkish air base at Incirlik might be restricted and arms deals with Washington curtailed. The Armenian's' exclusion from the official memorial events to be held on the day illustrates a further dimension to the continual tension over what might be considered an accurate representation and definition of the Holocaust. Should the Holocaust be included in the general definition of genocide and if so what are the consequences for our understanding and representation of the Holocaust if the Nazis' Jewish victims are remembered alongside other victims of genocides both before and after the events of the Second World War? Why should this definition of genocide not include the Armenian people? Finally if both the Holocaust and the fate of the Armenian people were either not genocides or exist beyond the definition of genocide, then how are they to be remembered or represented, if indeed, as in the case of the Armenian people, they are to be remembered and represented at all? Such complicated questions form the context of a study of the way in which, through their representation and memory of Liberation, Britain and America conceive of themselves and their connection to the Holocaust as a whole.

The Memorial Day itself is to be marked with a national ceremony held in London which, according to the Home Office, is to be attended by a senior member of the Royal Family and leading political, religious and community figures and will be covered live by the BBC and their senior correspondent John Simpson.[2] It was a prompt

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2. In Philip Johnston, 'Anger over the forgotten massacre', Daily Telegraph, 11 January 2001, p.4. See also official website for the Holocaust Memorial Day as part of that of the Imperial War Museum at

for a series of Holocaust related documentaries and films to be shown on BBC2. Indeed the BBC have also faced similar accusations of exclusion by the Armenian community over their intended coverage of this event. Alison Lauder of their information unit responded with a statement significant in any consideration of the memory and memorialisation of an event on a national level and the forces that control the boundaries of that memory, 'The time frame of events to be remembered is not our decision but has been taken by the Government'.[3] The concept of a time frame of remembrance and the extent of control held over that by an individual body is itself interesting and the continued presence of which is something to be aware of in a closer study of the representation of the British, the Americans and the events and memory of Liberation.

In turn the planned presence of a member of the Royal family at the national ceremony, a connection already made with the attendance of the Queen at the opening of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition in June 2000, and the debate both over the nature and control of the televised representation of the Holocaust, illustrate further a recurrent point in a study of the British and American relationship to, and representation of, the Holocaust and that is simply the significance of the identity, status and motivations of those individuals involved in, or associated with, any such public representation. It is also one which suggests the necessity of a distinction between the interpretation, understanding and stance taken with regard to the representation of the Holocaust by those organisations connected to Governments, those in power, local government or with a degree of national control or influence in Britain and America and those of the general

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www.iwm.org.uk - Includes Home Office and Race Equality Unit statements on subject.

3. Johnston, 'Anger Over the Forgotten Massacre', p.4.

public as a whole, the Press representing a further separate sphere of influence and opinion.

Finally, and perhaps most significantly for this study, the date of this Day at the centre of so much debate, corresponds with that of the liberation by the Red Army in January 1945 of the most infamous of Nazi extermination centres at Auschwitz Birkenau. That the date should refer to the liberation of an extermination camp and as Johnston's later remarks suggest, it is Liberation itself, the event, the individuals involved, and its consequences and representation that appears to stand at the centre of any assessment of the nature of Britain and America's conception both of the Holocaust as a whole and their relationship to its events and its victims, both then and now. Having left his readers with the sense that their connection to such a memorial day is at best tenuous, and at worst, the result of a Government decision to join in with the conventions of the EU, Johnston does however continue, with perhaps the most revealing and significant statement of the article, by suggesting with reference to the chosen date of the Memorial, that; 'a more suitable date would have been 15 April, when the British Army reached Belsen'.[4] In so doing Johnston illustrates a defining point evident throughout a study of the way in which Britain, and indeed America, remembers, represents, memorialises and teaches the Holocaust, namely that it is through Liberation and the role, responses and memory of their respective nations in relation to Liberation, that both countries, their Governments and their people, make one of their most enduring connections between themselves and the events of the Holocaust.

For Johnston then, and indeed perhaps for many of his readers, the answer to his original question and in

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4. Johnston, 'Anger Over the Forgotten Massacre', p.4.

turn the means through which to make the concept of a Holocaust Memorial Day relevant and applicable in the Britain of today, must be to connect it indelibly with that day over 55 years ago, 15 April 1945, the day upon which British soldiers entered Bergen Belsen concentration camp in Germany, the day when the British soldiers became liberators, and seeing what they believed to be the worst examples of Nazi atrocities, returned photographs, film footage, written and oral testimonies to a stunned British public, the impact of which defined, and in many ways continues to define, general British understandings and memory of Liberation and indeed of the Holocaust itself. In America too, the arrival of the United States Army Fourth Armoured Division at Ohrdruf, a sub camp of the larger Buchenwald concentration camp on 4 April 1945, of the Sixth Armoured Division at Buchenwald itself on 11 April, and indeed of the Fourth Infantry Division at Dachau on 28 April, combined with the shocked and angry words of Generals Eisenhower, Bradley and Patton on their 12 April visit to Ohrdruf, had ensured the same images were present in American newspapers and cinemas.

Thus the reaction to, the memory and representation of Liberation in both Britain and America, traceable through the press, memorials, museums, education programmes and the words of Holocaust survivors and liberators themselves, and the changes and continuities in that representation and memory from 1945 until the present day, adds not only a further dimension to the attempt to piece together a more complete picture of the experience and events of Liberation itself, but also illustrates how Liberation may serve as one of the most revealing sources for a greater understanding of the complex relationship between Britain, America and the Holocaust itself.

The study of Liberation as an event in its own right, presenting its own unique questions and complexities within the study of the Holocaust as a whole, has only developed comparatively recently, as the experience was removed from the shadow of the events of the last days of the Second World War and as the words of Holocaust survivors became more prolific. Hitherto accepted conclusions with regard to the event, not least the conception that such an experience must have been one of universal joy for the survivors and that it did indeed represent for them what Jon Bridgman called 'The End of the Holocaust', have also subsequently been called into question as it became clear that Liberation was not simply 'the happy ending to the harsh story' but was in fact a far more complex and ambiguous event with multiple layers of experience and memory both for the Jewish survivors and for their British, American or Russian liberators.[5]

Liberation very rarely meant the conclusion of their Holocaust experience for the liberated, representing instead a transitional stage, a state of limbo between their lives as prisoners and the beginnings of the process of survival beyond the camp gates which would bring its own challenges, often simply prompting a continuation of their suffering or sadness in another guise be it loneliness, grief or a sense of disorientation, of not belonging or of not having anyone to belong to after the loss of family, friends or community. The complexities and ambiguities of the Liberation reality remain into its representation and in

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5. Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust - The Liberation of the Camps, (London; B.T.Batsford, 1990) More recent and challenging theories see; Joanne Reilly, Belsen - The Liberation of a Concentration Camp, (London; Routledge, 1998), Joanne Reilly et.al, Belsen In History and Memory", (London; Frank Cass, 1997), and Barbie Zelizer, Remembering to Forget - Holocaust Memory through the Camera's Eye, (Chicago; University of Chicago Press, 1998).

turn so too does it continue to represent a transitional stage, both a beginning and an end in terms of Britain and America's relationship with the events of the Holocaust, allowing us to both look forward from 1945, from the Liberation Days themselves, to the way in which the current representation and memory of Liberation in the two liberating nations has developed to its position today, and in turn to look back from Liberation across the preceding years of the Holocaust so as to provide a vital and revealing comparison with the attitudes, reactions to, and understandings of the events of the Holocaust and the plight of its Jewish victims in Britain and America as the tragedy itself unfolded.

Jon Bridgman divides the process of Liberation into three stages, a 'pre liberation period', the 'liberation period' proper dating from January to April 1945 and a 'post liberation period' concluding in August 1945.[6] Whilst liberations by Allied troops did occur outside of this period and it is unlikely that the liberated themselves would regard such a concentrated and contained description of the process as accurately representing the experience itself, it is indeed during the first half of 1945 that most of the liberations involving Allied troops were to occur. Bridgman suggests that the pre-liberation period was marked by a change in the relationship between the prisoners and the SS as SS authority and control began to wane, although by no means were the roles of victim and persecutor altered and murder continued. Indeed during the last months of the war as the German chain of command and control began to break down in the face of the deteriorating military situation, confusion between Berlin and the camp commandants and controllers over the future of the remaining incarcerated prisoners, fuelled by debate between those Nazis who saw the maintenance of the prisoners as a possible source of

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6. Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust - The Liberation of the Camps p.10.

bargaining power with the Allies, and those who saw no reason to discontinue the war against the Jews just because the military campaign was failing, (a belief perhaps most strongly illustrated by the words of Hitler's own final testimony before his suicide from within the bunker in Berlin) ensured that the, until then, rigid routine and regulation of murder in the extermination and concentration camps, began to take on an air of chaos.

It was however, very rarely a situation that meant any source of relief for the remaining thousands of prisoners, although their testimonies often record their being aware of sensing a change in their Nazi captors and their routine, a change which added to their hopes of witnessing their own liberation. Finally, and again without filling in the complexities and details of the liberation experience as a whole, Bridgman highlights a number of types of Liberations.[7] Firstly he defines the liberation of Bergen Belsen as a 'classic' liberation, conjuring images of Allied tanks and flags and starving prisoners in stripes with which we are perhaps most familiar. In those instances where prisoners took a degree of control themselves in the days before the Allied liberators arrived, Bridgman refers to a 'spontaneous liberation'. In turn he notes only one case of a 'transfer liberation' in which the SS handed over control of the camp at Thriesenstadt to the Red Cross who subsequently did so to the Russians. In illustrating the point that the period and experience of Liberation is often merged not only with the events of the last moments of the war, but also with the subsequent difficulties and politics of the Displaced Persons' crises which followed, Bridgman concludes that, 'The terminal date for the Liberation period is when the responsibility for the former inmates ceased being a humanitarian and became a political question.' However as a study of Britain and

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7. Ibid,p10.

America's actions and memories of the Liberation experience and their role in it might suggest, those boundaries between humanitarianism and politics may not have been so clear. Indeed the reactions and actions during the process of liberation on the part of both countries may well have been influenced as much by the latter as the former, a point which may in turn have lasted into a consideration of their Liberation, and therefore Holocaust, memory and representation today.

One of the first of the Nazi concentration camps to be liberated was Majdanek, liberated by the Red Army on 23 July 1944. Over 400,000 people had been murdered in the camp since 1941 and only 700 would escape death to meet their Russian liberators. Throughout 1944 the Red Army also captured Sobibor, Belzec and Treblinka, often finding that the original infrastructures of the camps had been destroyed and few, if any survivors remained. The Russians were to liberate a larger number of camps than the Western Allies, but were to liberate fewer surviving prisoners, a result of the fact that it was to be the larger camps and extermination centres of the East that lay in their path. The numbers of liberated in these camps were fewer both as a result of the larger and more total scale of the murder process and because the Germans had begun to dismantle and evacuate these camps as the Russians advanced. It is therefore perhaps one of the saddest ironies of Liberation that the advance of the Russian Army that brought the last days of the war within reach, also prompted the Nazis to begin the murderous death marches to the West and to the concentration camps such as Belsen and Dachau, triggering the fatal overcrowding and appalling conditions that would meet the British and American troops on their arrival some months later and thus lowering the numbers of those who would live to see Liberation more than 10,000 would die as a result of the impact of camp conditions on their already weakened strength and health. The consequences of the movement of the remaining prisoners also serve as a

reminder that throughout this period the identities of the extermination and concentration camps were changing. Bergen Belsen, to be liberated by the British, was one of those camps that would undergo a change in identity as Liberation grew closer. Struggling with the political problem of having foreign Jews in Germany and despite having banned the presence of a concentration camp on German soil, Himmler had nevertheless agreed to the imprisonment of Jews whom the Nazis believed might be used for potential exchange with captive German civilians. Himmler chose Bergen Belsen as the site and the first transports arrived in July 1943. By 1944 the camp's population had tripled and it had taken on many of the characteristics of a fully operational concentration camp, divided into sub camps for different prisoners. It was decided that one section of the camp should be a recovery camp in which to place sick prisoners. According to Bridgman, that decision and the arrival of a number of prisoners from the underground camp at Dora where the V2 rocket was constructed who were suffering from tuberculosis, would be the starting point for the uncontrollable spread of disease and overcrowding that would place Belsen in a state of chaos even before the prisoners evacuated from the East arrived.

By March 1945 numbers in Belsen had risen to 41,520 in a camp designed to hold only approximately 7500. With a polluted and almost exhausted water supply, conditions of absolute neglect and desperation, Belsen faced the arrival of almost 25,000 sick and dying prisoners from the East. Unequipped to cope with the numbers, the conditions in this camp and in many others in Germany came, in relative terms, to surpass those even of Auschwitz in the last months of the war, illustrating further how the period of Liberation heralded a unique set of circumstances and changes in the process of the Holocaust as a whole. Indeed Bridgman concludes that, 'what happened in Bergen Belsen in the last weeks before liberation was another form of genocide; genocide by

cynical neglect and administrative indifference'.[8] Finally, the changing nature of the camps the British and Americans were to liberate and the extent to which they themselves were aware of that change and of how far the scenes they were witnessing represented often unique circumstances in the development and history of the Holocaust as a whole, provides another key in piecing together the nature of British and America reactions to, and memories of, Liberation and their role in that process.

On the resumption of their military campaign east of the River Oder in January 1945, the Russians would liberate Stuthoff and Auschwitz Birkenau. One third of Jewish prisoners in camps in January 1945 would die before Liberation, leaving approximately 100,000 in camps as the process of Liberation began. The last transport had arrived at Auschwitz on 5 January 1945. Aware of the advancing Red Army, the camp commandant had ordered the evacuation of the camp and the last roll call was held on 18 January 1945. Many thousands of prisoners were moved west on the long and desperate journeys to concentration camps at Buchenwald, Sachsenhausen, Mauthausen, Dachau and Bergen Belsen. These death marches killed many of the already starving and exhausted prisoners. In Auschwitz approximately six thousand prisoners had remained, too sick to move. Half that number would die before 27 January when the Russians arrived. A further 1000 would die in the days immediately after liberation so that the total number of Auschwitz survivors numbered no more than 2000, 95% of whom were Jewish. Jon Bridgman has described such a liberation as a 'hollow' one, a liberation where, whilst the dead would always outnumber the liberated in all cases, in these camps the liberators would find only a handful of prisoners and only the physical evidence of the mass murder of many thousands of others. The Russian reports of their discovery received significant coverage

8. Ibid, p.41.

in the Russian press yet only scant attention amongst the Allies in the West, still sceptical about atrocity stories and yet to find any proof of such horrors themselves. In turn Auschwitz's numbers had been depleted not only by a continually soaring death rate through the preceding autumn but also as the result of a series of evacuations as the Nazis attempted to move the evidence of their crime beyond the path of the approaching Red Army. Thus the reality of what had occurred at Auschwitz Birkenau and the camp's true identity, scale and significance in terms of the Nazis' exterminatory policies and therefore of the Holocaust as a whole was not immediately recognised, a defining factor in understanding the reactions of the British and American soldiers and indeed British and American public, to the sights they were to witness at camps such as Bergen Belsen and Dachau, soldiers and people for whom the names Auschwitz and Treblinka had at this time, little significance. Indeed the Russian experience and memory of the liberation of Auschwitz, and their wider role as liberators may provide a useful comparison with that of the British and Americans in seeking connections between the nationality of the liberating armies and their country's memory of Liberation and their approach to memorialising and representing that event.

The final phase of the Russian winter offensive began at the beginning of April 1945 as the British and Americans themselves came close to their own encounter with the camps. The Red Army discovered Gross Rosen, Sachsenhausen and Ravensbruck, all of which had been subject to evacuations by the Germans, many of the prisoners being moved, often for the second time, to camps such as Belsen. Often freed in the literal and physical sense from extermination centres, these prisoners faced continually dashed hopes of true Liberation as they were moved from camp to camp in which conditions began to worsen extensively. Coping not only

with such journeys, but also with the both the psychological impact of having survived places such as Auschwitz only to remain within the Nazis' reach, and also with the bitter recognition that had they been allowed to remain in those very camps, their Liberation at the hands of the Russians may have already occurred, left prisoners weakened in both mind and body. It would be in this condition that they would have to wait for the remaining weeks, even months, before their British and American liberators arrived.

'The things I saw beggar description' Supreme Allied Commander Dwight Eisenhower wrote to the United States Army Chief of Staff George Marshall on 16 April 1945.[9] Eisenhower, along with General Patton, had just made a tour of Ohrdruf concentration camp on 12 April, the same day that President Roosevelt had died. According to Leonard Weinstein who was a Lieutenant Colonel and Chief of the Liaison Section of General Eisenhower's staff at the E.T.O.U.S.A, or European Theatre of Operations of the United States Army, General Eisenhower had initially been unwilling to make time to visit the camp, marked, near a small town, with a red cross on their military maps and with the words Death Camp.[10] American troops had discovered the camp on routine patrol on 4 April.

Therefore when Eisenhower was finally persuaded to see the camp for himself, several days had passed since the moment of liberation itself. Weinstein describes the scene, as he remembers it, which met the General and Generals Patton and Bradley; 'We saw evidence of the horror; hundreds of bodies thrown into shallow pits, hundreds of others stacked like cordwood or thrown about

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9. Stephen Ambrose, 'Eisenhower and the Final Solution', part of, Liberations 1945, in Dimensions - A Journal of Holocaust Studies - A Commemorative Issue, (Volume 9, Number 1, 1995), p.9.
10. Leonard Weinstein, 'The Liberation of the Death Camps' in Midstream, (April 1986, Number 32), p.20-24.

at random in buildings or sheds or along the roads. Emaciated, putrefied, covered by flies and maggots, they created an unbearable stench'.[11] Indeed General Patton is recorded as having been physically sick as he walked the parameters of the camp. Eisenhower's words on his return from the camp are now one of the first things to meet the visitors to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington D.C. It was a visit that would prompt Eisenhower to order every Allied unit stationed near Ohrdruf to visit the camp. The General also wrote to Churchill and to De Gaulle suggesting that they too should witness the camp for themselves. He also called upon the world's press to record the images for the people back home, so that as Robert Abzug comments, 'it was the generals tour of this now mostly forgotten camp that set in motion a vast endeavour to make the public aware of the brutal crimes perpetrated by the Nazis'.[12] Eisenhower's concern to ensure this occurred is perhaps evident in that letter to Chief of Staff Marshall; 'ask about a dozen leaders of Congress and a dozen prominent editors to make a short visit to this theatre in a couple of C-54's. I will arrange to have them conducted to one of these places where the evidence of bestiality and cruelty is so overpowering as to leave no doubt in their minds about the normal practices of the Germans in these camps'. Eisenhower was clearly concerned to avoid the same accusations of scare mongering and exaggerating that his own Army and Government had levelled against the Russians and the reporting of their own liberation discoveries just months earlier.

On 11 April the 104th Infantry Timberwolf Division

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11. Leonard Weinstein, 'The Liberation of the Death Camps', p.21.
12. Robert Abzug, 'The Liberation of the Concentration and Death Camps; Understanding and Using History' in Dimensions - A Journal of Holocaust Studies - A Commemorative Issue, (Volume 9, Number 1, 1995), p.4.

and the 3rd Armoured Division of the United States Army had arrived at Dora concentration camp near Nordhausen where they would find only 1000 survivors and 3000 corpses. On the same day escaped Russian prisoners led units of the American Fourth and Sixth Armoured Division to Buchenwald where prisoners had taken control of the camp. Elie Wiesel, liberated at the camp, described the days before the Americans arrival: 'On April 5th, the wheel of history turned. Resistance took hold of the camp. Toward noon everything was quiet again. The SS had fled and the resistance had taken charge of running the camp'.[13] On 28 April the Americans liberated Dachau where a group of the liberating soldiers was reportedly so disgusted by what they witnessed that they executed over one hundred of their SS prisoners. Finally Simon Wiesenthal describes the impact of the U.S 11th Armoured Division's liberation of Mauthausen on 5 May 1945: 'Gone was the sweetish smell of burned flesh that had always hovered over the yard'.[14] The same soldiers had discovered Gusen the day before, whilst the 8th Infantry Division had discovered the camp at Wobbelin, a sub camp of the larger Neugamme complex on 3 May and the 9th Armoured would find Flossenberg on 7 May. Those divisions of the American Army currently form part of a group recognised and certified as Liberator units by the American military and Government. Only certified military units may display their flag in Washington's Holocaust Memorial Museum and indeed a desire to know just which units were involved in the process of liberation is perhaps illustrated by the fact that one of the museum's 'Frequently Asked Questions', displayed on their website and in their educational literature, is, 'Which American Army Units liberated the Concentration Camps?' This process of certification so as to obtain a degree of certainty over the identity of the camps and soldiers involved in any claim for the status of liberator is itself interesting

13. Ibid, p.135.
14. Ibid, p.133.

and may reveal much with regard to American attitudes to, and memories of Liberation as a whole. Why might it be so important that proof of a particular unit's activities in connection to liberation is available and which bodies make that decision for certification? How does the process of certification change the status of these units when compared with other divisions of the Army in American wartime memory? Does a process of certification suggest a belief that many claims to have been involved in the liberation of concentration camps made on behalf of the military or even by individuals may be questionable? Finally does such a process simply provide further confirmation for the American people of America's role as a liberating nation and thus of its' essentially positive position in relation to both the actions of other Allied nations and in turn to the Holocaust as a whole?

Finally the Liberation that is perhaps the most crucial in terms of British understandings of the event and of the Holocaust is that of Bergen Belsen. On 4 April 1945 Himmler had appointed SS. Standortenfuhrer Kurt Becher as Reichskommisar for all the concentration camps. Becher visited a rapidly deteriorating Belsen, where he was to suggest to the camp's commandant, Kramer, that the only option would be to hand control of the camp to the advancing British. Illustrating his changing conception of his role in the Nazi world, his belief in the possibility of striking a deal with the Allies if seen to be lenient and perhaps an increasingly wavering loyalty to Hitler, Himmler agreed with Becher's suggestion. The British responded by asking that the Germans confirmed an 8 kilometre neutral zone around the camp. On 13 April Kramer ordered the SS to leave the camp where he remained with a number of staff and a significant group of Hungarian guards. On 15 April the British arrived. There were approximately 60,000 prisoners within the camp as a whole. In Camp One the British found 45,000 barely alive

people and, according to the Army's records, over 10,000 corpses. In Camp Two nearly 15,000 prisoners met their British liberators, often in a relatively better condition having only arrived in Belsen a week or so before the Liberation. The majority of prisoners in the main camp were women, of whom the largest number were Jewish women, many having come from Auschwitz. In the first few days after the British arrived their presence was barely felt in Belsen and the random murder of prisoners at the hands of Kramer's Hungarian guards continued despite the camp being under the official supervision of the British. Deaths from diseases and the effects of starvation would continue throughout the subsequent British attempts to improve conditions in the camp, initially at a rate of over 500 people a day, becoming a tragic symbol both of the experience of Liberation but also of the very limitations of the impact of the event on the lives of the prisoners. Many prisoners had already died as a result of the British soldiers' well-intentioned attempts to feed them with their Army rations, with which the prisoners' weakened digestive systems and emaciated bodies could not cope. Both soldiers and survivors record how many liberated prisoners died in this way. On the 17 April the British began in earnest to attempt to gain a degree of control over the situation in the camp. The process of cleaning and disinfecting the buildings of the camp began, as did medical treatment and the supply of food and water. Attempts were made to set up a hospital to treat an estimated number of 35,000 seriously ill survivors. These first attempts to treat survivors were carried out by the medical units of the Army under the supervision of Brigadier H.L.Glyn- Hughes, a man, whom for many of Belsen's survivors would become the most abiding memory of their Liberation. It became clear that the prisoners were unable to eat solid food but desperately needed nourishment. The British prepared a Bengal Famine Mixture, consisting of flour, salt, sugar and water, which, as its name suggests, had been used to fight

famine in Bengal. For many weeks survivors diets consisted of this mixture and milk in an attempt to build up their strength and rebuild their digestive systems, whilst medical staff drew up suitable diets for each survivor. In turn for many survivors, Liberation would be a disorientating and alarming experience as many succumbed as prisoners to illness or unconsciousness through disease, hunger, grief or sadness, only to wake in the British makeshift hospitals as survivors. As Jo Reilly illustrates, for many survivors then, the first moments of Liberation would be shaped by a terrifying thought that they were not in a hospital at all, but were instead to be subject to the Nazi medical experimentation they had feared throughout their imprisonment.[15] At the end of April, Red Cross and British medical students arrived to aide the shortage of personnel and suitable equipment that had prevented the saving of many prisoners in the early days after Liberation. The mass burials, images of which pervaded British newspapers and news reels during the initial reactions to Liberation and still remain at the centre of the way in which the British remember and represent the experience of Liberation as illustrated by the presence of a large copy of the photograph of a British Tommie using a bulldozer to fill a mass grave at Belsen in the section documenting Liberation at the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition, were begun by the British on 17 April and were not completed until 28 April. The evacuation of Camp One in order to move the survivors into the nearby military camp was begun on 24 April with the women being moved first at a rate of about 1100 a day. One thousand survivors would die as a result of being moved. The remaining barracks were then burnt down and the transfer was completed on 19 May. By that time there were 27,000 survivors in Belsen, half of whom were hospitalised. Of the 60,000 alive in the camp on that day when the British

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15. Jo Reilly, Belsen - The Liberation of a Concentration Camp, (London; Routledge, 1998)

arrived only those 27,000 remained, 13,000 having died and about 17,000 having been repatriated. The total number of deaths between Liberation Day itself and June 1945 is estimated to have been 14,000.

Bergen Belsen was the largest concentration camp liberated in Germany and would become the largest Displaced Person's Camp in the British zone of occupation in Germany. It has been estimated, although as Hagit Lavsky, comments, 'nowhere is there a statistical demographic estimate of the ethnic religious composition of the Belsen camp at the time of Liberation', that over half of the liberated in Bergen Belsen, more than 30,000 people, were Jews.[16] Indeed as a Displaced Person's camp, Bergen Belsen would become the centre of Jewish survivor cultural life in the months after Liberation and the end of the war. However, that the Jewish identity of both those prisoners murdered in Belsen and those liberated by the British went largely unrecorded during the process of Liberation and thus would not form part of the immediate reactions to the event amongst both the British and the American people so that the extent and systematic nature of specifically Jewish suffering would go unnoticed, illustrates the first of many complex and ambiguous products of the relationship between the Allies' attitude to the Holocaust and to Jewish suffering as a whole, traceable both before and throughout the war years, and their formation of themselves into the role of Liberators during and after 1945.

Robert Abzug comments, 'A peculiar attitude took hold both in the West and among the Soviets during the liberations of the extermination and concentration camps:

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16. Hagit Lavsky, 'The Day After; Bergen Belsen From Concentration Camp to the Centre of the Jewish Survivors in Germany', in German History, (Volume 11, Number 2, June 1993), pp36 - 59.

a relative blindness to Jewish victims as Jews'.[17] It would beblindness evident in British reactions to Liberation as for example in the Daily Mail's 19 April 1945 publication after the liberation of Bergen Belsen, Lest We Forget.[18] Including, what the paper described as 'The Most Terrible Story of the War', and 'factual accounts' by Daily Mail Correspondents with the Allied Armies of Liberation, the supplement supplied only to adults, illustrates some of the first reactions to liberation and to the Holocaust in Britain and with those, some of the main misconceptions of the event which have often lasted into the present day, in turn suggesting the roots of such misconceptions traceable through long term British attitudes, official and public, to the plight of Europe's Jews. With Fleet Street style the paper announced, The Horrors of the Nazi Concentration Camps revealed for all time in the most terrible photographs ever published A Trail of Devilry is Revealed to the World. Writing the introduction, George Murray told us that people have already been forced to leave the cinemas where such images have been shown on film, referring to photographs of Belsen and Buchenwald. Interestingly Murray states both that The purpose of the book is neither to harrow the feelings nor to ferment hatred against the German people. No good would come of either and that to refuse to look at these abominations may do credit to the heart but it does no credit to the mind. Nor does it reflect the determination to keep the national pledge that these things shall not be repeated. The emphasis throughout is both on the idea that these horrors were unknown to the authorities and to the Army and were only discovered recently, that they may prove useful in the re education of the Germans, and finally that Britain now had a duty to see that such things were

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17.Robert Abzug, 'The Liberation of the Concentration and Death Camps; Understanding and Using History', in Dimensions, p.5.

18. Daily Mail, Lest We Forget, (Additional Supplement, 19 April 1945).

not repeated. Whilst also suggesting that the number of victims at Auschwitz was approximately four million, mentioning incidences of cannibalism and including sections of delegation reports from Buchenwald, the testimony of a Mrs. Mavis Tate, the only woman on that delegation, and quotation from the U.S Congressional delegation report on inspecting the camps, the paper makes no mention of Jews at all. Abzug suggests that the failure to identify the victims and the liberated as Jews was the product of an Allied fear of fuelling accusations that the war had been fought for them, the culmination of a long term failure to recognise the specific case of Europe's Jews traceable through the debates over their rescue during the war.[19]

In turn the pictures of genuinely outraged British and American soldiers at the sights they were witnessing and the fact that often Liberation occurred accidentally as the Allies merely happened upon the camps as they moved through Germany, could be used to confirm the official position that these acts of Nazi barbarity were, until now, unbeknown to the British and American governments and used to detract from the fact that information with regard to the Holocaust had been available to both since its earliest stages. In turn the images of American and British troops and medical staff working in the terrible conditions of the camps allowed for the conception that both countries during and after Liberation did all that they could to aid and assist the liberated in their attempts to rebuild their lives.

Thus in surveying the events of the Liberation days themselves, the contemporary and initial reactions to them by both the British and Americans and the continued debates over their representation and memory as evident in the questions raised by Britain's first Holocaust

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19. Robert Abzug, 'The Liberation of the Concentration and Death Camps', in Dimensions, p.5.

Memorial Day, Liberation is confirmed not only as a significant part of the whole of the Holocaust, but also as a multi-layered event and experience which provides in concentrated form many of the questions, complexities and ambiguities at the centre of a study of the continually changing relationship between Britain, America and the Holocaust. Having considered the nature of present day constructions of a British memory of the Holocaust as represented by the content of, and reaction to Holocaust Memorial Day, the following section of the thesis will seek to outline the past events and reactions to the experience of liberation and to the Holocaust as a whole in Britain. Taken from both the perspective of those who were themselves liberated and, specifically in terms of British reactions, from the unique point of view of those in Britain who would seek to understand the reality more fully than most - The National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror - the thesis will turn to the British reactions and responses that endure and shape present day Holocaust representation in this country.

SECTION 1

Chapter One: Survivors and the Experience and Memory of Liberation

If the events and experiences of the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps may be said to represent one of the strongest points of connection between Britain, the Holocaust and its' victims and survivors, then a detailed study of the experiences and memories of those for whom the experience was a reality would seem necessary in attempting to forge connections between those days in 1945 and present day British representations and understandings of the Holocaust. It was during those moments that the liberated had to confront their new identity as survivors and in turn it was to represent the point at which Britain adopted its' identity as a liberator nation. The concept of Britain as `liberator nation' would be a difficult one in terms of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust and the ambiguities of that notion again remain present today. At the time, the image such a concept suggests would also, (as a study of the attempts of small groups throughout Britain to bring the plight of the Jews of Europe to the fore will prove), often lie in stark contrast to the realities of British reaction to the events of liberation and the horror which had preceded them. The complex differences in that shared experience, the thesis will argue, remain present in the relationship between the two groups today, something especially evident in the British representation of the events of liberation in a museum exhibition format to

which the thesis will return. The concept of liberation and the image and actions of the liberators would form both a part of the daily lives and hopes of those imprisoned in the camps and would often feature heavily in the written testimonies of those who would survive. For the historian the written words of the survivors and their struggles with memory and with the formation of an accurate account of such a devastating experience, provide a useful comparison with the manner in which a national memory of the experiences of liberation and of the Holocaust has been constructed in Britain today.

For prominent Holocaust survivors Elie Wiesel and Primo Levi, liberation would constitute a vital part of the testimony charting their Holocaust experience, often forming part of their story's conclusion, and thus apparently bearing out the commonly accepted vision of liberation as the final act of the war and of the Holocaust.[1] However, as their words and those of many other survivors suggest, liberation and the emotions and questions which it was to generate would not be confined to the concluding chapters of their work or to a discussion of the arrival of the Allied liberators and the physical release of their fellow prisoners. Instead what the words of these survivors reveal is the existence of a vital distinction which would determine both the reality of the survivors' experience of liberation and their representation of it within their testimony. It is the distinction in meaning

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[1] Elie Wiesel, Night, (Harmondsworth; Penguin, 1981).
Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, (London; Vintage, 1965), Originally published as Se Questo e Un Uomo, (Italy; Gilulio Einaudi, 1958).

and understanding which exists between the act of `Liberation', as that which refers to the day of the Allied arrival, and the notion of `liberation', a concept generating a multiplicity of images, responses and questions intimately connected to the individual survivors' understanding and perception of freedom in relation to their Holocaust experience and to their interpretation of the term `liberation' itself. What survivor testimony reveals is that the notion of liberation as distinct from the act of Liberation, permeated the daily experience of the Holocaust victim at multiple levels and indeed Joanne Reilly comments that; `latent hope of impending liberation was fostered for weeks'.[2] Indeed in the months and in the pages before the Allies were to arrive, as survivor Henry Wermuth's words suggest, liberation was to exist in many forms, not least as a site for, and as an object of, a perpetual source of hope, a `tiny spark in our darkness'[3]. It would be an inherently significant hope in that it would allow the prisoner to construct within their mind and from a position of imprisonment, an image of the future Liberation Day and its events and emotions. It was not, however, a hope which would provide a vision of the Day's aftermath or a basis for the prisoners' adaption to survival. Indeed it would frequently be a construct, an image which would contrast radically with the realities of that day and much of the survivors' reaction to the act of Liberation itself may be traced to their

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[2] Joanne Reilly, Belsen - The Liberation of a Concentration Camp, p.149.

[3] Henry Wermuth, Breath Deeply My Son, (London; Valentine Mitchell, 1993), p.156.

recognition of, and attempt to come to terms with, the distance which existed between the images of liberation they had constructed as prisoners and the reality of Liberation they faced as survivors. Thoughts of liberation would also be present in the prisoners' captive lives as a source of frustration and fear, as liberation became an illusory event existing on the parameters of their world, a potential reality consistently beyond reach. A natural preoccupation with liberation also became the site not only for the expression of doubts and fears over the liberators' progress, but more significantly with regard to the prisoners' very ability to cling to life, or more accurately, to avoid death, for long enough in order to see the hoped for day. The presence of a notion of liberation within camp life would therefore prompt thoughts of the past, of lost families, raising difficult questions of faith, and desperate attempts to find meaning in their experience for the prisoners, whilst simultaneously providing a source of hope for the future and conjuring images of reunion and joy, a dual and complex role played by both the image and the reality of liberation throughout the survivors' experience. Thus both before and after the day of Liberation itself, the concept of liberation would leave prisoners and survivors caught between starkly opposing sets of emotions, the mutual presence of which would be inherently disturbing and as their later testimony suggests, was to play a key part in the difficult transition from captivity to survivorship. Therefore as a study of the survivors' testimony suggests, liberation had always been at the core of existence in the concentration and extermination camp, present in many forms

and equally connected to the battle between life and death that had shaped the concentration camp long before Liberation Day became defined in itself by the Allies attempt to combat the disease and destruction they were to encounter.

For Henry Wermuth, a German Jew transported to Auschwitz Birkenau from Amon Goeth's notorious Plaszow work camp on the outskirts of Krakow and finally liberated at Mauthausen, the need to imagine just what the Day of Liberation would bring formed a vital part of his time in captivity, and references to liberation shape his testimony. For Wermuth the `tiny spark' in his captivity would be `hopes of liberation and survival', a comment which suggests how far the connection between liberation and survival is at the core of an assessment of the representation of liberation in survivor testimony. Whilst his words may indeed be shaped by the fact of his own survival, they may also illustrate the role played by the hope of liberation, if not in facilitating survival, an act dependent on multiple factors within the Nazi concentration camp system, then in acting as a personal sustaining element in individual prisoners' daily lives.[4] Writing with a vision of the future which his experience as a prisoner would not have allowed him and which is thus determined by his position of survival, Wermuth nevertheless illustrates a concern and a preoccupation with the time scale of the events which led to his Liberation which has remained with him as a survivor, in counting down the days to the act of Liberation itself; `This must have been Liberation Day minus twelve - 24th April 1945' and `27th April - Liberation

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[4] Henry Wermuth, Breath Deeply My Son, p.156.

Day minus eight'[5]. Interestingly few survivors record ever having doubted that the Day of Liberation would arrive. The source of their doubt lay instead in their own chances of living to see it. A conversation which Wermuth records between two prisoners in the Nordhausen camp in which he was once incarcerated regarding the Day of Liberation is illustrative of the presence of liberation in camp life and of the doubts and questions its' image would generate; `if they don't hurry up we will not live to see them - it would be terrible to die now, just before seeing our tormentors trodden into the ground'.[6] The prisoners' words suggest that they are both convinced of the Allies' eventual arrival and of the fate which awaits their captors, despite the profound absence of a similar conviction over their own future. Once more following its dual role, the hope for liberation had thus allowed the prisoners to construct the Day of Liberation both as the moment of triumphant vindication over their captors and yet simultaneously as the point which they might personally never reach. Indeed Robert Abzug has suggested that liberation always had a darker side, that there are always two images generated by the word `liberation', one of `crowds celebrating jubilantly, pretty women greeting proud and happy soldiers' and the other depicting `a dreadful repetition of faces without hope or comprehension, mounds of bodies piled neatly or littered on the ground'.[b] The distinction would become starkly evident within the camp even in the days before the Allies arrived, as the prisoners were confronted with the

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[5] Henry Wermuth, Breath Deeply My Son, pp. 184- 189.

[6] Ibid, p.171.

b Robert Abzug, The Liberation of the Concentration and Death Camps' in Dimensions, p.5.

reality that the presence of thoughts and dreams of liberation in camp life, just as the Day of Liberation itself, would always be inherently connected to both life AND death.

Survivor Abel Hertzberg's diary was compiled from the notes he made during his incarceration in Bergen Belsen from January 1944 until the camp's liberation in April 1945, a period of imprisonment which ensured Hertzberg was to witness the camp's descent into the chaos and misery which met the British soldiers in April 1945.[7] Hertzberg was a Dutch Jewish lawyer and writer, who as one of the so called `privileged Jews' had been imprisoned in Belsen's `Sternlager' or Star Camp. The camp's original purpose had been as a place where prisoners were kept whom the Nazis believed might be used for potential exchange with captive German civilians. There was in reality nothing privileged about Belsen's `Sternlager' and over 70% of the Jews imprisoned there would be murdered. Following the Nazis' evacuation of the Eastern extermination centres, Belsen's identity would radically change as it became overwhelmed by the vast numbers of sick and dying `evacuees', vast numbers of whom would be Jewish women originally from Poland and Hungary. Whilst approximately 60, 000 prisoners lived to become one of the liberated in Bergen Belsen, over 13,000 of those would never become survivors, as the death rate continued to soar after the British arrival, illustrating further the bitter reality that Liberation failed to remove from the camps the presence of death. The diary format of Hertzberg's testimony allows us to see the extent to which the

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[7] Abel Hertzberg, Between Two Streams - A Diary From Bergen Belsen, (London; I.B.Taris, 1997).

concept of liberation was present in the prisoners' lives from day to day and suggests his concern, matched by that of Wermuth, that the Day of Liberation would come too late. He writes on 21st August 1944, eight months before the camp's Liberation, `we know that unless the Allies arrive very soon, we will be lost. Lost in sight of the harbour'.[8] For Hertzberg from within the camp, the notion of liberation becomes the rule by which the scale of the continued suffering may be measured as he illustrates a bitter frustration with the continued distance which existed between himself and the Allies. He comments, `This morning there were two more for whom the British would arrive too late' and on the 7th September 1944, `our future looks bleak. The mood is funereal. Eight days of the kind of work that now has to be done and again the British will arrive too late for a few more'.[9] The desire for liberation formed part of the daily routine of the camp, shaped as it was by a tumult of emotion from deepest despair to momentarily raised hopes, as Hertzberg suggests in an apparently more hopeful tone on the 17th August 1944, `Providing that we are alive we will be able to live as free people and participate again in all those things that give meaning to life'.[10] The simplistic nature of Hertzberg's hopes for the future in contrast to his earlier despair almost allows the reader to pass over the enormity of the proviso on which they are dependent - namely the arbitrariness of Hertzberg's actual survival.

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[8] Abel Hertzberg, Between Two Streams, p.21.

[9] Ibid, p71.

[10] Ibid, p100.

Gisela Perl, a Hungarian Jewish doctor deported to Auschwitz, would witness the core of Nazi brutality in an attempt to save and protect the young and pregnant women of Auschwitz for whom pregnancy spelled death or medical experimentation. From Auschwitz she would be transported to Belsen where she was finally liberated. Her testimony further illustrates the centrality of the anticipation of liberation in camp existence: `We trembled with fear and expectation. We vacillitated between hope and despair'[11]. For Perl, hoping and waiting for the liberators formed a vital part of her camp life and she suggests that such a hope proved to be a unifying force amongst her fellow women prisoners: `Day after day went by and I was waiting for the liberating armies who would open the doors of our camp and give us back our desperately hoped for freedom - at night when our jailers locked the doors on us, we sat in the darkness and planned for the day of liberation'.[12] As the extent of Perl's hopes for the day of Liberation might suggest, much of the survivors' later disillusionment and disappointment with the realities of the Day of Liberation may be traced to the depth of the time and emotion invested in a construction of the events of that day during their imprisonment, a construction to which the realities would and could never match up. To suggest that the extent of Perl's hopes for the day of Liberation may even seem to make her disappointment and disillusionment with its reality inevitable is not to minimise the significance of the

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[11] Gisela Perl, I Was A Doctor in Auschwitz, (New Hampshire reprint edition, 1992), p.152.

[12] Ibid, p.161.

prisoners' personal need for such hopes, but further reveals the distinction between the prisoners' vision of liberation and the events of Liberation, the scale of which only the aftermath of the latter would reveal to the prisoners as they became survivors. For Hertzberg, there is an almost all consuming desire to will the liberators closer; `I look at the sky. Are they not coming yet?'.[13] and Echoing the fears of the prisoners at Nordhausen he asks; `Will we make it? After six years of war! After all we have experienced, to stumble at the threshold!'.[14] On 5th September 1944, Hertzberg had commented; `We are starting to live in a state of tension here. We are desperate for the liberation'.[15] It is just such a `state of tension' which in many ways describes the role played by the presence of the idea and hope of liberation in the concentration camp prisoners' lives in the days before the Allies themselves arrived, a state determined by a complete conviction on the one hand that Liberation would become a reality, and on the other by a desperate sense that for many the only experience of liberation would be the image constructed in their minds and dreams. It is a state of tension matched in their testimony and indeed whether the survivor represents it as the moment when they would regain their freedom or as an unobtainable goal, the idea of liberation seems present throughout their writing even whilst they record the other aspects of their Holocaust experience. In the months and days before the Allies arrived then

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[13] Abel Hertzberg, Between Two Streams, p.106.

[14] Ibid, p.213.

[15] Ibid, p.65.

liberation had become a `threshold', a watershed in the minds of the prisoners, an event rehearsed detail for detail in their heads, and of which they had built an image from which they could, and would not, deviate whilst they remained prisoners, for it had become a central, if not life sustaining force in that experience. Liberation was already the distinctly personal experience it would be throughout and it had already taken on the dual and complex identity grounded in the notions' ability to bring together otherwise opposing emotions and experiences which would determine the prisoners' transition from captivity through liberation to survivorship. And yet as such it existed as part of the camp life, of captivity. This `liberation' was unaccompanied by the physical freedom which precluded the fulfilment of so many of the prisoners' desires. The Day of Liberation would, if often only in name, bring that physical freedom. It would however also bring an end to the camp life which had generated and sustained the prisoners' vision of liberation until that moment marking both a beginning and an ending. The transition from that image to reality would not, as Gisela Perl suggests, be an easy one. In illustrating both the extent to which the construction of an image of Liberation Day would be a vital way of envisioning the extension of deep relationships founded in the camps beyond their boundaries, Perl reveals the extent to which the hope of liberation would allow the prisoners to escape from the world around them into that vision of the future; `During the interminable months waiting for the day of liberation I had seem myself again and again leading my fellow suffers to freedom. I had seen myself walking ahead of them,

laughing, crying, singing songs of freedom, a human being going to meet other human beings'. [16] Such an image would exist in stark contrast to the reality of Liberation Perl was to experience, a Liberation which would not only fail to be accompanied by the happiness her words envisage, but one which would also signify the end of the circumstances, shaped by fear and death, which created the unique bonds at the heart of those relationships. Thus as the Day of Liberation arrived and the image finally gave way to the reality, Gisela Perl would not therefore be alone in her shocked conclusion - and it is one which has a profound impact on the representation of liberation in survivor testimony - simply `This was not how I imagined it!'.[17]

Part Two

`Death rate 17,000 in March, thousands of corpses lying unburied. Inmates starving to death every day. Water and food finished. No light or sanitation. Hundreds dying'.[18]

For liberators like Brigadier J. Melvin of the Eight Corps Medical Unit of the British Army stationed at Bergen Belsen in April 1945, the Day of Liberation would be defined by shock and horror in an attempt to come to terms with the scene which lay before them. The British had toured the typhus ridden parameters of Bergen Belsen explaining to the prisoners in a

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[16] Gisela Perl, I Was A Doctor in Auschwitz, p.141.

[17] Ibid, p.141.

[18] Paul Kemp, `The British Army and the Liberation of Bergen Belsen,April 1945', in Joanne Reilly et al. (eds), Belsen In History and Memory, (London; Frank Cass, 1997), p.135.

variety of languages that they were liberated. They then confronted the desperate task of bringing food into the camp, establishing a hospital and burying the thousands of dead. At the moment of Liberation the British would find in Bergen Belsen and the Americans in camps such as Buchenwald and Mauthausen, - a camp considered by the Nazis' themselves as the most harsh of the non extermination camps where `between January 1st 1945 and liberation on May 8th 1945, 28,000 inmates died and another 3000 died in the days immediately following the arrival of the Americans'[19] - dreadful conditions which would even surpass those the Russians encountered in the extermination centres such as Auschwitz Birkenau. As a study of the manner in which liberation has been remembered and memorialised in Allied countries, and the effect of that collective memory on the survivors' written testimony will reveal, that distinction in the conditions of the extermination and concentration camps would ensure that the Allied soldiers were to conclude that what confronted them in Belsen and other Western concentration camps were the worst excesses of the Nazi regime, a misplaced conclusion which defined the image of liberation in Western consciousness for many years in the aftermath of the war. It is a distinction which would also reveal a further bitter irony of liberation in that it was to herald perhaps the only moment during the Holocaust when, in terms of physical conditions, prisoners in Auschwitz Birkenau would be in a relatively better situation than those in the concentration camps of Germany and the West.

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[19] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust - The Liberation of the Camps.

The status and condition of the camp in which the prisoners were liberated would be a vital factor in determining the nature of their experience. Most significantly for those prisoners moved from the extermination centres to the concentration camps of the West, Liberation would be a dual process in the sense that they were to cope with the psychological impact of having survived and been freed in the literal sense from a place designed for their systematic murder, a process made more complex in having been initiated by their Nazi captors and not by the Allied armies, only to be returned to imprisonment and the company of death to continue their wait for Liberation in a different, yet equally threatening environment. Thus the testimony of those survivors who were to experience both survival from a death camp and subsequently Liberation from a concentration camp provides one of the most unique perspectives on liberation.

For the survivors, the representation of their initial reactions to the moment of liberation, to the first stages of a long transition from image to reality, would begin to reveal the significance of the role played in that reaction by the unique aspects of their personal Holocaust experiences, whilst also triggering a fundamental distinction between their physical and psychological reactions to the event, a difference evident both at the time and throughout their testimony. For many survivors the moments preceding the Allies arrival and their initial reactions to the moment of the day of Liberation would be shaped by a continued fear of the Nazis, in their belief that the SS and the guards of the camps would murder those still alive in order to ensure that

evidence of their crimes would not fall into Allied hands. Ruth Foster was to share that fear. Describing her liberation in a moving video testimony for the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust exhibition, she describes the way in which she and her fellow prisoners were herded into a barn as the Front approached and left unaware of the Nazis' intentions; `What were they going to do with us? Burn us? Shoot us?'[20]. In fact the increasing noise would be revealed as the arrival of the Russian liberators. Ephraim Poremba, a Polish Jew liberated at Allach by the Americans, was to comment in testimony given to Yad Vashem in the 1960's; `The fear came back, we were afraid of what they would do with us. If the Americans or the English came too close, they might wipe us out with the weapons they had'.[21] and Eva Braun, a Slovakian Jew liberated at Salzwedel by the Americans after having been incarcerated at Auschwitz was to state of Liberation Day· `We heard it. We were frightened. Maybe the Germans had recaptured something and they were coming back. But then somebody screamed and said these were Americans!'[22]. Sim Kessel illustrates the way in which such a fear altered his perspective on the events of Liberation; `The fear that our guards might return and punish us somewhat poisoned our jubilation'.[23] It was to be a fear echoed by Fania Fenelon, liberated at Belsen after having been incarcerated in Auschwitz in an essentially unique position as

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[20] Imperial War Museum, Holocaust Exhibition, June 2000.

[21] Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation - Testimonies From 1945, p.50.

[22] Ibid, p.45.

[23] Sim Kessel, Hanged At Auschwitz, p.174.

a member of the Auschwitz orchestra, a photograph of whom in the Auschwitz museum now occupies the site by the camp's main gate where the group of prisoners able to play an instrument, hand picked by the SS, were forced to play music as the workers of the camp marched to and from work. She writes of Belsen; `All morning the rumour had been going around that they were going to do away with us. But unlike the rumour about the liberation of the camp, this one rang true'.[24] Again she is more convinced by the inevitability of her death at the hands of the SS than by the idea of Liberation, a sentiment shared by Primo Levi, one of the few awaiting the arrival of the Russians within Auschwitz; `Not one Jew truly believed that he would still be alive the next day'.[25]

For Henry Wermuth when the moment finally arrived after having survived a death march from Auschwitz to Mauthausen, he notes the event with a simple and short statement, accompanied by the sense of a prolonged period of waiting to which the prisoner had adapted himself having come to an abrupt end, leaving him without the tools to deal with the new order of things; `A prisoner shouts "Ein Amerikaner Soldat". I did not know how this news affected my comrades around me'.[26] That Wermuth should state that he was unaware of the impact of the announcement of Liberation on those around him is interesting in that it is both rare amongst survivors for whom the

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[24] Fania Fenelon, Playing For Time, (translated by Judith Landry, United States; Syracuse University Press, 1976, 1977), p.5.

[25] Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation - Testimonies from 1945, p.5.

[26] Henry Wermuth, Breathe Deeply My Son, p.196.

reactions of those around them to Liberation often forms a central part of their memory and of their work, and also in suggesting that the news prompted Wermuth to recoil within himself, to become acutely aware of his own situation and experience, whilst those around him faded and blurred. It is a sudden self awareness prompted by Liberation that would be shared by many survivors as they attempted to come to terms with the significance of their survival. Wermuth had been liberated at Mauthausen, the last camp, as Bridgman states `to be liberated by the Western powers, and as the liberation came on the same day as the surrender of Germany it was little noticed in the press'. [27] The influence of the world's reaction to the liberation of the particular camps upon the survivors representation of their experience is something to which we may return in a discussion of the role of memory, both individual and collective, in shaping testimony.

For Gisela Perl the shock of Liberation was to be double layered, and further reveals the uniquely painful experiences of those prisoners moved from extermination centres to the West. In the days after her arrival at Bergen Belsen from Auschwitz she was to hear of the Russians' arrival at the extermination camp, whilst her own freedom from Belsen remained months in the distance. The depth of her desperation is perhaps most clearly expressed in her desire to actually have been allowed to remain in Auschwitz; `For two days I went around in a red haze of pain, despair and fury. Auschwitz has been liberated! I could be a free and happy being today had

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[27] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust - The Liberation of the Camps, p119.

they permitted me to stay there!'. [28] When Liberation Day finally arrived at Belsen, Gisela Perl records it with a sense of disbelief and shock, illustrating perhaps her difficulty in translating an event into reality which had until then been an illusion; `Something was happening beyond the barbed wire fences, something of great importance of which we were not told. And yet rumours began to travel from mouth to mouth, wonderful encouraging rumours. The Allies are coming! The Liberators are coming!'. [29]

Survivor S.B Unsdorfer, one of a transport of 800 Slovakian Jews to Auschwitz of whom only a few would survive, was to be liberated at Buchenwald and records the initial moments of Liberation Day with a simple and short sentence, signalling a change from captivity to freedom in the life of the prisoner, the enormity of which the reader may easily miss and which may suggest a similar inability to comprehend the scale of the event in the survivor themselves; `And so the hour had come after all those terrible years'.[30] However, as a study of the survivors' difficulties with the representation of their liberation experience in written testimony may later suggest, the simplicity of Unsdorfer's words may equally be connected to his struggle with the inadequacy of the language available to him with which to represent the reality of his experience. In turn, whilst the struggle with language would indeed shape many survivors' attempts to record their

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[28] Gisela Perl, I Was A Doctor in Auschwitz, p.155.

[29] Ibid, p.172.

[30] S.B.Unsdorfer, The Yellow Star, (New York; Thomas Yoseloff, 1961), p.192.

liberation experience, might not the apparent difficulty with the clear cut simplicity of Unsdorfer's words result as much from our own expectations as readers or historians than as from any failure on his part to comprehend or record accurately the realities of his experience? With our knowledge of the scale and suffering of the Holocaust, the notion that the immediate act of Liberation changed little and could be recorded with such simple statements, may perhaps, be difficult to comprehend. Unsodrfer's words and those of many other survivors in whose testimony the initial moment of Liberation may be recorded with nothing more than a simple statement, may however represent the most accurate and revealing image of that moment. Indeed might not their sparse words simply suggest that, both physically and in a practical sense, nothing more dramatic actually happened or changed in the first moments of Liberation Day? The simplicity of their words may also represent accurately the depth of the emotional and psychological impact of that moment, in that it seems to be accompanied by a profound sense of shock, as the distance between their dream of liberation and its realities became clear, generating a sense of disorientation which probably would have left them without the means to express in any greater depth their experience of the first moments of Liberation Day. Thus finally perhaps our own sense of shock at the simplicity of the representation of the initial impact of Liberation may not be so misplaced. We may indeed share it with the survivors' own shock at the often simple, far from dramatic nature of the Liberation reality.

Unsdorfer's account of the arrival of his American

liberators suggests his sense of something unreal, dreamlike about the event and his struggle to trust both himself and his eyes; `my ears picked up an unrecognisable rumble. Directing my eyes towards the main gate, I saw through thick clouds of dust and sand, a column of tanks rolling past the entrance. Their colour was light brown, and a white star was painted on their sides. The Americans!'.[31] A disbelief in the actuality of the events happening around them is a common reaction amongst survivors. A sense of otherworldiness accompanies survivors' initial reactions to liberation, reminding the reader that whilst liberation might have brought physical freedom, it also brought an alien world within the camp boundaries. Indeed for the prisoners the familiar resided not in the appearance and actions of their liberators brought in from that outside world, but in the routines and experiences of the camp. Liberation thus brought, if not the complete unknown, then the long forgotten. Anita Lasker- Wallfisch was transported to Bergen Belsen after having been incarcerated in Auschwitz as a member of the Auschwitz camp orchestra. Of Belsen's Liberation she was to write; `When I first heard the announcement through a loud hailer and saw the first British tank I flatly refused to believe my eyes'.[32] Fellow orchestra member, Fania Fenelon, would greet the camp's Liberation Day with the same sense of disconnection and disbelief; `From the remotest distance a man was speaking; what was he saying? No one was answering him. That was odd. What was going on? Strange words reached my ears

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[31] S.B.Unsdorfer, The Yellow Star, p.192.

[32] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit The Truth 1939 - 1945, (London; alm, 1996), p.94.

- it was a language I knew. It was English![33], whilst Sim Kessel refers to the United States soldier who stood before him in Mauthausen's sub camp Gusen 11 as simply `an apparition'.[34] Elie Wiesel describes the `magical appearance of the first American units' at Buchenwald.[35] Finally Fania Fenelon, illustrating the extent of the preoccupation with liberation during imprisonment and in turn the shock of its eventual arrival, tells us; `We had lived for this moment; We'd imagined it hundreds of times, polished and repolished it, added a thousand details of sated vengeance, and now seeing a procession crossing the camp, we failed to understand that what we had waited for for so long had arrived'.[36] The difficulty of making the connection between the hope and reality of liberation would be added to by the survivors' struggle with the opposing sets of emotions which the arrival of the Allies would generate.

Whilst the search for elements of joy over liberation within testimony may indeed be traced to the readers' desire to seek out a `happy ending' to an otherwise horrific account, and whilst they were to be emotions which in no way dominated the experience of Liberation, initial expressions of joy and happiness are however key to survivors' representation of the event within their testimony. For example Yehusua Buchler tells us that there was `incredible rejoicing' at his

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[33] Fania Fenelon, Playing For Time, p.6.

[34] Sim Kessel, Hanged At Auschwitz, P.176.

[35] Elie Wiesel, All Rivers Run to the Sea, (New York; Alfred Knopf, 1996), p.96.

[36] Fania Fenelon, Playing For Time, p.256.

liberation from Eisenberg in Germany after his escape from a death march.[37] Eva Braun comments, `It was freedom. We were elated",[38] whilst Ephraim Poremba liberated by the United States army at Allach camp states `There was joy. A tremendous eruption of shouting! You could tell the difference between the shouts of joy and the shouts of fear, and Gizi Godalli, amongst the few liberated at Auschwitz in January 1945 tells us, `We were free. We celebrated the end of the war for three days and three nights', and finally Asher Barasi, liberated at Thriesenstadt comments, `This was joy such as I had never seen before'.[39] Gisela Perl's joy at the liberation of Bergen Belsen may seem uncommon amongst many of Belsen's survivors who were to write testimonies, in describing a universal exclamation of rejoicing within the camp, suggesting the influence of the remnants of her own longed for image of liberation constructed during her imprisonment. This was a much longed for moment and there is a distinct sense of a sudden release of tension, of emotion, the impact of which is in many ways added to in testimony in being shared by the reader: `Suddenly I heard trumpets and immediately afterwards a tremendous shout of joy coming from thousands of throats shook the entire camp. The British have come! The Liberators have come! We are free...free!'. [40] However, her description of the united joy of

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[37] Yeshua Buchler in Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation - Testimonies From 1945, p.44.

[38] Eva Braun in Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation - Testimonies from 1945, p.45.

[39] In Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation - Testimonies from 1945, pp.48 - 59.

[40] Gisela Perl, I Was A Doctor In Auschwitz, p.172.

the camp is matched in the testimony of Fania Fenelon, a fellow Belsen prisoner: `A great "Hurrah!" burst firth and swept along like a breaker, carrying all before it. They had become men and women again'.[41] Sim Kessel, a French Jew arrested and tortured as part of an underground group, deported to Auschwitz and finally liberated in Mauthausen, comments, `Like the rest of my comrades I was intoxicated with joy'.[42] whilst Fania Fenelon writes of her fellow prisoners in Belsen; `Madness was unleashed around me. They were dancing, lifting their thin legs as high as they could. Some threw themselves down and kissed the ground, rolling in the filth, laughing and crying'.[43]

Relief, even joy, were however transitory, unsustainable emotions, giving way firstly to the demands of the physical which, in the immediate aftermath of liberation, would often override all else for the survivors. Henry Wermuth illustrates the way in which the news of the Day of Liberation would frequently prompt a spontaneous physical reaction in the prisoners; `Ein Amerikaner Soldat.. my insides erupted with uncontrollable convulsions. I felt my tearducts' involuntary release, shedding streams which I would not have believed they had'.[44] For others the moment of Liberation would be defined by their physical pain and exhaustion to the cost of all other emotions. Anita Lasker-Wallfisch comments, `We were completely

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[41] Fania Fenelon, Playing For Time, p.9.

[42] Sim Kessel, Hanged At Auschwitz, p.174.

[43] Fania Fenelon, Playing For Time, p.7.

[44] Henry Wermuth, Breathe Deeply My Son, p.196.

burnt out'[45] and Hedi Fried, an Auschwitz survivor, liberated at Belsen, `At that moment I felt only indescribable weariness. I walked back to the bed and wanted only to sleep'.[46]

Survivor and psychologist Victor Frankel was to comment in his famous account of his experience, `Man's Search For Meaning'; `The body has fewer inhibitions than the mind. It made good use of the new freedom from the first moment on. It began to eat ravenously' [47] and for many survivors, food and the impact its presence was to have on their fellow prisoners, became the dominant factor in their experience and memory of Liberation Day, illustrating one way in which liberation imbued the smallest or most simple elements of life with massive significance. Indeed the events and consequences of Liberation would create a world of imbalance and disproportion from which the survivors were only gradually to emerge. Elie Wiesel comments on the impact of the arrival of food in Buchenwald where he was liberated after surviving a death march from Auschwitz; `Our first act as free men was to throw ourselves onto the provisions. We thought only of that. Not of revenge, not of our families. Nothing but bread'.[48] Indeed for Esther Brunstein liberated at Bergen Belsen having survived Auschwitz, it was the presence of food that made her

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[45] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.96.

[46] Hedi Fried, Fragments of a life - The Road to Auschwitz, (London; Robert Hale, 1990), p.162.

[47] Victor Frankel, Man's Search For Meaning, (London; Hodder and Stoughton, 1946, 1962), p.89.

[48] Jon Bridgman, The End of the Holocaust - The Liberation of the Camps, P.135.

liberation a reality; `I was too numb and confused to make sense of what they were saying. However, on seeing four chunks of black bread and four cans of Nestle condensed milk on my bunk it dawned on me that the longed for moment had come and we were free at last'.[49] Whilst the healthier prisoners left the camps in order to `organise' food from the surrounding areas - which often resulted in violent confrontation with other prisoners, as Yitzak Friedrich tells us; `We broke in, took margarine, butter; we tied our pants at the bottom, we filled up and got out of their as fast as we could. Finally inmates who were stronger than us caught us on the way. They beat us and took all that we had stolen, we were left with nothing again' - food also became a site for sadness and destruction as the well meaning Allied soldiers distributed their rations to the starving prisoners whose emaciated and malnourished bodies were unable to cope, resulting in the deaths of thousands in the days after Liberation. Haim Rosenfeld, liberated at Dachau writes, `they cooked soup in pots and then the terrible tragedy happened. People fell like flies. It was an unbelievable spectacle. People who had gone through that whole hell died just like that, unnecessarily'.[50] The effects of food and the continuation of disease despite the Allies' efforts to combat the suffering, ensured that the Day of Liberation and indeed the weeks which followed did not therefore bring an end to the deaths within the camps. Food had played a key role in the construction of the image of

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[49] Joanne Reilly et al. (eds), Belsen In History and Memory, p.214.

[50] Yehudit Kleiman, (ed), The Anguish of Liberation - Testimonies from 1945, p.48.

liberation during the survivors' incarceration, and its' absence had, of course, been at the core of their suffering. Now, revealing further the ever present darker side of liberation, its' presence would create a new type of suffering, confounded by its ability to further shatter the liberation illusions of the survivors. The Day of Liberation had therefore brought a diversity of emotion from shock to joy. In the days and weeks which followed and once the challenge of maintaining their physical survival had been confronted, the prisoners would face a new identity as survivors and a new challenge - freedom.

Part Three

In assessing the representation of liberation within survivor testimony, the historian must account for the fact that the image of liberation presented is necessarily filtered through the survivors' struggle with such questions as the reliability of their personal memory, a compulsion to write expressed by many survivors, guilt at their own survival and the challenges of the literary format of their testimony, all of which would form what Primo Levi would call the `survivor syndrome', and which would, according to Elie Wiesel, ensure that all survivors would speak in a unique code, the true meaning of which would always allude the understanding of

those who had not experienced the Holocaust[51]. The notion of any such unique perspective of survivorship ensures that the use of survivor testimony in an attempt to understand more fully the complexities of the liberation experience is at the centre of an ongoing debate among survivors, historians and literary critics alike, regarding such fundamental questions as the possibility of accurately representing the Holocaust in literary form and the moral implications of any attempt to do so when accounting for the connections between that style and the myth making and story telling of fiction. Debate also stems from the complicated position of survivor testimony as a both a historical and literary narrative, raising a multiplicity of issues regarding the comparative value of the two disciplines in an approach to any aspect of the Holocaust, and the position of the historian in asking questions of those texts which many survivors regard as sacred. The historian is therefore faced with assessing survivor testimony as source material not only through asking such questions as the time, place and context in which it was written, through a consideration of the physical and physcological distance between the survivor and their experience, but also through an attempt to account for the multiple identities of the survivor as they became, in Primo Levi's words, `the witness writers'[52].

For many survivors, liberation would herald the circumstances necessary to fulfil a desire to write of their

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[51] Elie Wiesel, `The Holocaust as Literary Inspiration', in Dimensions of the Holocaust - Lectures Presented at the Northwestern University, (Illinois; Northwestern University Press, 1977), p.7.

[52] Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, p.398.

experiences which had been generated within the camp, whilst for others it would serve as the starting point in an attempt to, in Levi's words, `tell our story to the rest', which would define their years following the Holocaust.[53] For some, the experiences of liberation and writing would blur and in so doing reveal the equally undefined boundaries between the psychological impact of liberation and the process of adaption to survival, allowing Primo Levi to refer to the writing of If This Is A Man as an `interior liberation'.[54] The witness writer must struggle with the apparent futility of language in an attempt to describe their experiences, giving way to a fear that the limitations of the language available to them might distort the reality they are attempting to portray. Dominick LaCapra has described testimony as an `prevalent and important genre of nonfiction that raises the problem of interplay between fact and fantasy',[55] and indeed the witness writer must adopt the basic tools of literature in describing their experience, with all the connotations of fiction which accompany them, so that Lawrence Langer concludes· `even memoirs ostensibly concerned with nothing more ambitious than recording horrible facts cannot escape from traditional literary associations'.[56] The most obvious of these associations being, `the invention of a narrative voice to impose on apparently chaotic events a perceived sequence,

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[53] Ibid, p.15

[54] Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, p.15.

[55] Dominick Lacapra, History and Memory After Auschwitz, (London; Cornell University Press, 1998), p.11.

[56] Lawrence Langer, Holocaust Testimonies - The Ruins of Memory, (London; Yale University Press, 1991), p.2.

whether or not that sequence was perceived in an identical way during the period that is being rescued from oblivion by memory'[57]. Indeed the chronology of the survivors' account of liberation may provide us with an insight into the position of that experience in their lives. Whilst for many, liberation forms the conclusion of their work, it is frequently presented in the midst of a longer account of life both before and after the Holocaust, as Paul Oppenheimer's work suggests in its very title, From Belsen To Buckingham Palace. His recollections of liberation are followed by details of his later move to England, his marriage and children and his life in the present time. Whilst such a representation of liberation, in comparison to those where it forms a final chapter, may appear to reduce its significance in the survivors' life, the central position serves to define the event as a watershed, a barrier, an unavoidable interruption in Oppenheimer's life. A concern with an attempt to bring an order to their memories would often be combined with the survivors' desire to appear objective, calm and controlled in their tone, betraying a fear that the horror of the events they were recording would be such that the validity of their testimony would be doubted.

Equally significant in terms of the representation of liberation would be the survivors' frequent concern with their own reasons for writing, their motivation, the roots of which may often be traced both to their experiences of liberation and to their struggles with the demands of being a writer and a survivor, whilst illustrating the extent to which testimony, like liberation itself, would generate an acute self awareness

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[57] Ibid, p.2.

in the survivor. In an introduction to his diary, Abel Hertzberg, in a tone which betrays a sense of a need to justify his reasons for writing common amongst many survivors, suggests the way in which the challenges of his survival overrode the initial intentions to write which liberation had instilled in him: `I had intended to write after the liberation, should I live to see it. But after the liberation the future was of greater interest than the past'.[58] A desire to look forward rather than at the past would be expressed by many survivors in explaining the comparative distance between their experience and their writing of it. It is also a point which illustrates the effect of collective memory upon testimony in the sense that in the years immediately following the Holocaust, the development of a knowledge of the full scale of the tragedy and of an interest in the words of its survivors would be a slow process so that many survivors who wrote early accounts of their experience were unable to find a willing audience, as Primo Levi suggests in explaining the initial publishing failure of If This Is A Man: `in all of Europe those were difficult times of mourning and reconstruction and the public did not want to return in memory to the painful years of the war that had just ended'.[59] Indeed Dominick LaCapra comments of the extent to which the effects of a tragedy often go beyond its survivors: `The traumatic event has its greatest and most clearly unjustifiable effect on the victim, but in different ways it also affects everyone

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[58] Abel Hertzberg, Between Two Streams, p.1.

[59] Primo Levi, If This Is A Man, p.381.

who comes into contact with it'.[60] For Bertha Ferdeber Salz, liberation itself prompted in her the desire to write; `I wrote down everything I could recall, vowing that at some future date I would publish what I had written'.[61] From her position of survival however, and again illustrating a concern to justify and explain her reasons for writing to the reader which would often be connected in the survivor to a fear that the details of their experience would not be believed, she sees her primary motivation as a need to bear witness to the dead; `I look through my recollections and ask myself; From where did I get the strength to record those events.... But it is almost as if the pages were written by themselves ... or perhaps the sighs of those who were burned and slaughtered dictated to me what I should write'.[62] Finally Anita Lasker Wallfisch was to comment, despite a considerable section of her testimony being devoted to liberation; `I would like to be able to describe how it felt to be liberated. That would be a daunting task even for a professional writer'.[63] It is not that Wallfisch questions her own qualification to write of liberation in comparing herself to the `professional writer' . Instead she suggests both that there must always be an element of the experience which cannot be recorded and that the tools and language of the writer are inherently inadequate in any attempt to represent in totality the reality of liberation.

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[60] Dominick Lacapra, History and Memory After Auschwitz, p.8.

[61] Bertha Federber Salz, And the Sun kept Shining, p.13.

[62] Ibid, p.18.

[63] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth, p.96.

That the survivors' representation of liberation must ultimately always remain distanced from the reality is confounded by the survivors' struggle with personal memory. The question of memory is also of relevance for the historian and indeed Dominick LaCapra has explored the relationship between history and the challenges of memory in terms of Holocaust studies, concluding with particular resonance for a study of written testimony: `Memory - along with its lapses and tricks - poses questions to history in that it points to problems that are still alive or invested with emotion or value'.[64] Complex as ever, Liberation would place the survivor in a position of physical freedom and of survival, their subsequent experience of which would determine, even alter, their memory of liberation as they came to write. For Henry Wermuth, the perspective of survivorship ensures there is a constant tension in his testimony between an apparent clarity and conviction and a hesitant, self doubtful tone in his recollections of liberation: `Perhaps my weakened perceptive faculties could not take it all in, perhaps I was too dazed by the event'.[65] He comments: `That 5th May, the day of my rebirth, of which I ought to be able to remember, report and put on paper the minutest detail, a hazy gap, lasting several hours occurred'.[66] That Wermuth suggests the memory of the details of his liberation experience still remain beyond him, indeed even that he is self conscious of an expectation upon

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[64] Dominick Lacapra, History and Memory After Auschwitz, p.8.

[65] Henry Wermuth, Breath Deeply My Son, p.197.

[66] Ibid, p.197.

him to recall the event, suggests that survivorship and the challenges of writing testimony have in no way removed the "hazy gap" which surrounds his liberation, but have rather confounded it. Finally in a statement which illustrates the doubts which the distance between the reality of his liberation experience and its representation in his testimony would instill in Wermuth, he concludes of liberation, `Probably, against expectations, nothing worth remembering happened'.[67] That such a phrase should interrupt Wermuth's account of liberation suggests the pervasive depth of his doubts over his memory. Fania Fenelon would also record a sense of being in a `haze' and of allowing herself to `drift' having been assured that the moment of which she had dreamt had arrived, whilst Anita Lasker Wallfisch comments, `Many of the events of the day are rather hazy, but I remember certain details', including within her testimony letters from family members as though to fill those gaps in her memory.[68] Bertha Ferderber Salz suggests alternatively that it was the day of liberation which returned to her the capacity to remember; `Little by little I felt my memory coming back'.[69] Sim Kessel is confident that his recollections of his liberation are accurate; `I can remember almost every moment of May 7th 1945'. From within Belsen, Abel Hertzberg anticipated the effects of memory on the survivors' representation of their experience; `Once this period is over, we will have forgotten the pains, that is to say we will remember only that they once

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[67] Henry Wermuth, Breathe Deeply My Son, p.197.

[68] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth.

[69] Bertha Ferderber Salz, And the Sun kept Shining, p.117.

existed, like a sharp pain that has passed. Even now, with the prospect of peace, the days we have lived through already begin to resemble a storm that has abated'.[70] In turn the survivors' account of Liberation would be written, by necessity, not in the camps surrounded by the liberators, not in wartime, but in peace. Thus the survivor would write with the knowledge of the fate of their loved ones, with a greater historical sense of the scale of the Holocaust, and of its long term consequences. The effects of such a perspective not granted the survivor at the time of their liberation are however evident in the tone and language of their testimony. Henry Wermuth's account of liberation combines his impressions of the day with knowledge gained through his years of survival; `We heard no news and we were unaware that the Americans and the Russians had already joined forces at the River Elbe. That meant that a large, perhaps the greater, part of Germany had already been liberated'. Wermuth concedes that the totality of the Holocaust was unknown to him at his liberation; `at the time of liberation, I was unaware of the extent of the catastrophe which had befallen the Jewish race'.[71] Anita Wallfisch suggests the way in which the wider picture afforded her by her survival shattered the images of the future which her experience of liberation had generated; `I had many illusions when I was liberated. I thought our suffering was an atonement for all time, and that the generations to come would be freed from prejudice forever'.[72]

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[70] Abel Hertzberg, Between Two Streams.

[71] Henry Wermuth, Breathe Deeply My Son, p.202.

[72] Anita Lasker Wallfisch, Inherit the Truth.

Finally S.B.Unsdorfer, in reflecting from his position as a survivor, would reveal how his later knowledge of the full scale of the Holocaust would define his image of liberation; `What were we freed for? Only to mourn and lament for the rest of our days the greatest tragedy that had ever befallen our people in our long and trying history'.[73]

Part Four

Whilst the use of survivor testimony has recently increased significantly in an attempt to build a more complete picture of the Holocaust, in terms of the history and memory of the experience of liberation, it was to be the words of the liberators which were to shape Allied and world reaction to the event and as such have played a key role in the way in which liberation is memorialised and discussed in museum exhibitions and in text books which deal with the Holocaust as a whole today. The words of the soldiers, doctors and Army chaplains who entered such camps as Bergen Belsen provide a useful contrast and context for an assessment of liberation when used in conjunction with survivor testimony and reveal the way in which their initial impressions were to have a lasting effect upon the image of liberation in the years after they returned home.

There is a great deal of testimony available in the form

[73] S.B. Unsdorfer, The Yellow Star.

of Army medical reports, broadcasts, newsreels and the private letters of the soldiers who formed part of the interestingly named `Liberation Armies' of the Allied countries. A large section of that evidence would be produced by the British during their operations at Bergen Belsen, an encounter which compelled many to write and equal numbers to conclude, as yet unaware of such names as Auschwitz Birkenau, Treblinka or Sobibor, that what they had witnessed could never be surpassed.[74] Indeed confronted with the destruction in the camp and the appearance of its captives, Derrick Sington of the British Army, could only find a point of comparison in the animal world in his attempt to record those first moments in the camp, describing its smell as that of `a monkey house' and the prisoners as a `strange simian throng'. He continues; `They were like prancing zebras, these creatures in broad striped garments'.[75] Sington is clearly struggling to comprehend his surroundings, sharing with the survivors themselves, the struggle to find adequate words; `I had tried to imagine.. I tried to understand what I saw... I did not know'.[76] The words of Leslie Hardman, Jewish chaplain to the British Army further suggest a sense of otherworldliness, of a struggle to find a comparison, which confronted the British at

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[74] For an example of the long term affects of an encounter with Bergen Belsen as an Allied liberating soldier see; Dirk Bogard, `No Answer to the Sorrow and Pain - A Personal View' following, `How Could Such a Hatred Exist?', Book Review for the Daily Telegraph, 10th August 1991, and `Out of the Shadows of Hell', Book Review for the Daily Telegraph, 26 November 1988, reproduced in Dirk Bogard, For The Time Being - Collected Journalism, (London; Viking Press, 1998), pp.213 - 222 and p.143.

[75] Derrick Sington, Belsen Uncovered, p.16.

[76] Ibid, p.17.

Belsen; `Almost as though they had emerged from the ground itself, or had floated out from the retreating shadows of dark corners, a number of wraithlike creatures came tottering towards us'.[77] Hardman's colleague and Senior Jewish Chaplain, Isaac Levy was to share the horror and shock of Belsen; `Haggard and starved bodies, bulging eyes, pitifully appealing for help'.[78] Whilst all three men would make significant contributions to the relief of Belsen, their horror and their words would play a profound role in the experience and memory of liberation. For the survivors the soldier's obvious disgust at the vision before them, despite being combined with pity and sympathy, served as a kind of mirror on the extent of their physical decline and many record their distress at the soldier's repulsion from them. In turn the soldiers' search for any comparison to the camps may in many ways have served to dehumanise or remove from the survivors and indeed from the dead, the last semblance of individual human identity, particularly when their words were accompanied by the now well known images of the British soldiers using bulldozers to fill mass graves, a dehumanisation which may have continued into the formation of a collective memory of liberation. The dualistic nature of the liberation experience is thus once more revealed as the survivors began their adaptation to survival through their interaction with their liberators, liberators who would come to represent both a means by which to begin to regain a degree of personal identity and also a painful remainder of an identity lost and of the difficulties

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[77] Leslie Hardman, The Survivors, p.14.

[78] Isaac Levy, Witness To Evil, p.10.

of re - learning how to respond and react to other people in freedom.

Whilst reports formulated by the Russians at Auschwitz received little attention world wide, those of the Americans, and especially of the British at Belsen, would be widely broadcast across the Allied world. In Britain an exhibition of photographs of the liberated camps was held in the Daily Express building in London, often accompanied by Richard Dimbleby's recorded report from Belsen commissioned by the BBC. Newsreel would include the statements of British soldiers stationed at Belsen, such as those of Gunner Illingworth, for example, whose words now form part of the liberation section of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust exhibition, to be covered in the later sections of this thesis, in which he was to comment; `the things in this camp are beyond describing... even the pictures in the papers do it no justice'. As Illingworth's words suggest when he comments, `When you see this for yourself, you know what we're fighting for',[79] the images of liberation sent back to Britain and America would often be used and interpreted as a further source of justification for fighting the war, allowing the liberators' governments to be cast, not only as the victors in a justified military campaign, but also as the saviours in a right and moral fight, a role which would define the way in which liberation would be remembered in the Allied world and one which would leave little room for the often less clear cut vision of liberation as presented by the survivors.

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[79] Gunner Illingworth, Video Testimony used as part of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition, Opened June 2000, London.

Illingworth's report, as we will see, is included in the Imperial War Museum's exhibition. Indeed a study of the way in which liberation is represented in such museums and memorials, the positioning of the detail of the event in relation to the history of the Holocaust as a whole, the language, imagery, choice of artifacts and of media presentation used by the organisation or museum, and finally the role played by the words of the survivors themselves, provides an interesting conclusion on the contemporary state of liberation studies. Such exhibitions provide a window upon how far different countries may have been influenced in their representation of liberation by their wider role during the Holocaust, and finally may suggest ways in which the vision of liberation we have today may have changed from that formed in 1945. For example in the Polish State Museum at Auschwitz Birkenau, the visitor is firstly presented with a film taken by the Russians on their liberation of the camp, accompanied by a discussion of the camp's origins[80]. Thus whilst images of the initial moments of liberation are foremost in the minds of the visitor as they enter the camp itself, the complexities of representing the two sides of liberation seem once more present. Despite its position as the starting point for a visit to the camp, the image of liberation as presented is that of the event which marked not only the last chapter in the story of Auschwitz, but also the conclusion to the Holocaust itself. Whilst intended to allow the visitor to conceptualise conditions in the camp as they had been, conditions which would indeed have contrasted radically with

[80] Polish State Museum, Auschwitz Birkenau.

the state of the camp today, the image of those conditions and of liberation is distorted. Conditions in Auschwitz in 1945 were not those of its earlier years of existence and the film may therefore risk allowing the visitor to conclude that such images are representative of Auschwitz throughout the Holocaust. In turn, whilst indeed illustrating the continued physical suffering of the survivors, the image of liberation presented is that of a distinctly positive and largely one dimensional event. A complete picture of the whole of the liberation experience may indeed be difficult in a museum dedicated to Auschwitz alone, yet the visitor is left with no sense of the way in which the survivors dealt with their freedom or of the existence of any of the complexities of liberation raised by written testimony. Indeed the words of the survivors themselves, however few there may have been, are distinctly absent from the Auschwitz museum's representation of liberation as a whole.

Following a traditional chronology which traces the roots of the Holocaust to the changing forms of anti-semitism and to the experiences of the German nation after the First World War, the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust exhibition, opened in June 2000 as Britain's first permanent Holocaust exhibition, places its representation of liberation or what its creators interestingly call `Discovery', at the penultimate stage of the exhibition, the implications of which will be teased out in the final section of this thesis. The liberators are very much present in the exhibition, perhaps understandably in a museum positioned in one of the Allied nations' capital cities, a position which, as a result of the exhibitions

particular layout and stance, is not always easy for the visitor to forget in any attempt to understand more fully the events of the Holocaust. The phrase `Discovery' also does not suggest the conclusion to the Holocaust experience which `Liberation' might, a fact endorsed by the museum's section on liberation being followed by details of the war crimes trials and by the video testimony of survivors reflecting upon their Holocaust experiences on the whole. However, in being positioned at the end of an exhibition focused intensely upon German and Eastern European antisemitism and on the countries in which the Final Solution took place, often creating a sense that the Holocaust occurred in isolation and at an unreachable distance from the English capital city in which the exhibition is now being held, the word `Discovery' may lead the visitor to conclude that the soldiers, and particularly the British soldiers, were the first representatives of the Allied world to know, to `discover', the Nazis' intentions and actions toward the Jewish people, that their plight had until then, if not gone unknown, then been impossible to relieve or to stop. Thus it is a word which may both further risk distancing the visitor from the reality that the Holocaust occurred in the heart of Europe no more than sixty years ago, whilst also perhaps failing to raise vital questions regarding Britain's own complex role in terms of the Allied world's knowledge of the Holocaust as it unfolded and the possibilities of action to rescue the Jews of Europe, issues only briefly referred to in the exhibition as a whole. It is to issues of knowledge, understanding, belief and disbelief in Britain with regard to the persecution of the Jews during the Second World War that

we shall turn in the next chapter of this section.

Chapter 2: Britain and the Jews of Europe: A Case Study of Knowledge and Understanding

The complex relationship between understanding, belief and disbelief in Britain during the years of the Holocaust provides a vital insight into the formation of British present day Holocaust representations and indeed in terms of the general British public's attitudes towards and understandings of the Holocaust as a whole. In an attempt to assess the extent of information regarding the plight of the Jews of Europe that was available in Britain at the time and in turn to demystify the notion that nothing at all was known, the thesis will turn to consider the actions of a specific group in the form of the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror.[1]

The existence and work of the Committee illustrates not only the extent of knowledge and facts regarding the suffering available in Britain at the time, but that it was also possible to find those individuals who were willing to act upon it. However as the following chapters will suggest, British reactions to, and reporting of, the scenes and events of liberation would prove that knowledge whilst present, was not widespread nor lasting in the minds of the British public. It therefore must be noted that in assessing the impact of the National Committee, we are considering the perspective of the pre liberation Britain. Indeed the attitudes and responses expressed during the years of the Holocaust whilst the Committee were active provide an often stark contrast to the liberator nation image of Britain constructed in the aftermath of 1945. Contradictions here and the construction of a British self image that would often gloss over the years of the

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[1] Walter Laqueur, The Terrible Secret; An Investigation Into The Suppression of Information About Hitler's `Final Solution', (London; Weidenfeld and Nicolson, 1980) - Laqueur was one of the first to bring to attention the distance between knowledge and understanding in terms of the Holocaust. See also; Tony Kushner, `British Perceptions During the Second World War', in David Cesarani, (ed), The Final Solution; Origins and Implementation, (London; Routledge, 1994), pp.246 - 268.

Committee's activities would, as further chapters seek to prove, remain into modern British Holocaust representation.

On 23 March 1943, the Archbishop of Canterbury, speaking in his capacity as Vice President of a newly formed pro - refugee group, addressed the House of Lords on the subject of `German atrocities and aid for refugees'; `My whole plea on behalf of those for whom I speak is that whether what we do be large or little, it should at least be all that we can do'.[2] To ensure that Britain was to do all that it could with regard to the Nazi persecution of the Jews would, through a sustained public campaign, be the self defining commitment of that newly formed group, The National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror. It was a group which would count amongst its members not only two Archbishops and a Chief Rabbi, but also such staunch supporters of the refugee cause as Victor Gollancz, James Parkes and Eleanor Rathbone, a lady who would become the Committee's voice in Parliament as the debate over refugees and rescue became the central focus in British society through the crucial months between the United Nations Allied Declaration of December 1942 and the parliamentary debate on the `Refugee Problem' of May 1943. The Committee's attempts to place the plight of the Jews of Europe on the British national agenda, indeed their recognition of this unique aspect of Nazi policy, and their determination that Britain should recognise what the Committee regarded as a British national duty and responsibility to make every effort to ease the suffering, ensures that a study of the Committee's publications and actions, not only reveals the unique position occupied by the group itself, but also serves as a window upon the complexities of British reactions to the refugee and rescue issue, and more significantly perhaps, to the Holocaust as a whole. For the Committee, action meant rescue, a term which would take on a multiplicity of connotations during the period. It would be the Committee's belief in the feasibility

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[2] Lord Archbishop of Canterbury, German Atrocities - Aid For Refugees, (23rd March 1943), Hansard Parliamentary Debates, House of Lords, (1942 - 43, Volume 126, 16 February to 1 April 1943), p.813.

of the rescue of Jews from Nazi Europe, their formation of those beliefs into a coherent rescue plan, and their gradual realisation that their commitment to rescue was unmatched amongst those who may have had the power to act upon it, which would define the Committee's relationship with the British government and with the British public. Indeed the Committee's belief in the feasibility of rescue may also raise questions with regard to contemporary historical debate over the extent to which the rescue of Jews by Allied nations on any scale may ever have been possible. An assessment of the Committee's numerous publications, their regular bulletin, `News from Hitler's Europe', and of their reactions to the major events of the rescue debate, provides a means to access the ways in which the Committee understood the concept of rescue and the aims and objectives they set for the practical application of their beliefs in the detailed plan for rescue which they were to formulate. In turn a comparison of the manner in which rescue was understood and reported in the British national press in light of the Committee's publications, ensures that we might assess the impact of the rescue question on wider British society, whilst highlighting the unique aspects of the Committee's perspective. The comparison may also provide a further means to address the complex distinction perceived by historians between knowing and understanding in terms of the degree to which knowledge of the Holocaust was assimilated by those witness to it, whilst allowing us to see how the British context may have affected this distinction. The experiences of the Committee reveal that not only would the concept of rescue be open to multiple interpretations during the period, the debate which surrounded it would also move beyond logistics to become a microcosm of British responses to the Holocaust. Rescue would become a site for the expression of enduring negative British attitudes towards Jews and refugees, for disbelief with regard to the Final Solution, for the expression of fears over the war effort, the nature of the post war world and Britain's position in it, a point of tension in the growing rivalry between the United States and Britain, and finally, rescue would reflect a rapidly changing sense of British national identity and self perception. It

would be an identity crisis from which the Committee could not be disentangled. Indeed if Jewish refugees and their rescue were at the centre of the Committee's thoughts, then no less so would be the maintenance and protection of what James Parkes would call `our honour and sincerity'[3]. Rescue, for the Committee, could and would not end with the victims of Nazi persecution, if it had not first begun with the rescue of the liberal British identity, sense of honour, humanitarianism and justice in which the Committee saw the essence of the British character and to which they were themselves faithful. In the atmosphere of the rescue debate it was this very identity which the Committee felt was threatened by British inactivity in the face of the Jewish disaster. That the British government too were to sense the threat posed to their adherence to liberal principles ensures that the complexities of the British response to rescue may be traced to the differing interpretations of how to counter such a threat and the role rescue would play in that process, distinctions which would define the interaction between the British government and the Committee, as both acted from within a shared conception of British identity, only to reach conflicting conclusions on rescue and thus to illustrate the extent to which the question of rescue would challenge that very conception of British identity. Therefore rescue would not end with practicalities but would extend to become an arena for international politics and for the expression of national fears and frustrations. In pressing for action in the form of rescue then, the Committee would face a dual obstacle - the Nazis' continuing and total policy of extermination which made rescue a race against time, and the complex mix of national issues which the concept of rescue would generate in British society, ensuring that the achievement of the Committee's goal would require fundamental changes in British perspective on multiple levels. The Committee would operate in the unique momentary window before rescue would be subsumed by those

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[3] James Parkes, `The Massacre of the Jews - Future Vengeance or Present Help?', (unpublished, January 1943; Parkes Papers MS 60 9/5/1, Special Collections, Parkes Library, University of Southampton).

external challenges, when it would occupy a central position in British popular and governmental thinking. It would not be the window of opportunity for rescue for which the Committee hoped however, and whilst the reasons for the Committee's eventual failure must be assessed, what is perhaps more revealing in providing access to the nature of British reactions to the Holocaust, is an attempt to understand why the Committee was prompted to try in the name of rescue, to assess the manner in which they tried, and the nature of their motivation to keep trying.

As Tony Kushner comments, `By the time of the Allied Declaration, most of Polish Jewry had been destroyed and the mass deportations of West European Jews had been in operation for six months'.[4] Throughout 1941 and 1942 reports and information from Europe regarding the plight of the Jews had become increasingly detailed as the picture of the Final Solution was slowly pieced together in British consciousness. In November 1941, `the British minister in Berne, D.V.Kelly, reported that a Polish informant had told him, that about 1.5 million Jews who were living in Eastern Poland have simply disappeared altogether; nobody knows where or how'.[5] In the early months of 1942 the Jewish Chronicle continued to publish reports of mass deportations and massacres. In August 1942, the Foreign Office received the now infamous report from Swiss Representative of the World Jewish Congress, Gerhard Riegner, in which Riegner stated that a plan for the systematic extermination of the Jews of Europe was under Nazi consideration. The plan had already been implemented by the time Riegner sent his report. Riegner's report and the many others received by the British at this time were often met with an unwillingness amongst British officials to accept their content at face value or to emphasise the specifically Jewish nature of the persecution they detailed, so that Wasserstein comments that information was treated with `a

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[4] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, (Oxford; Blackwell, 1994), p.173.

[5] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe 1939 - 1945, (Oxford; Clarendon Press, 1979), p.167.

certain scepticism' and `a cautious reserve'[6] A connection was frequently made between the reports of the persecution of the Jews and the atrocity propaganda of the First World War ensuring that the government reaction to the details of the persecution was shaped by a `widespread aversion from falling into the same error again'[7] The connection made between the persecution and propaganda would have long term implications for the Committee's campaign for rescue ensuring that doubts would remain in Britain with regard to the very necessity of their cause. Whilst equally significant doubts remained amongst British officials as to the veracity of the information regarding the persecution, `by autumn 1942, the weight of evidence from all sources confirming the Nazi massacre of Jews compelled the British government to shift from its previous position of studious avoidance of any explicit reference to the matter'[8] The evidence was combined with concerted pressure upon the Government from pro - Jewish groups, from the British section of the World Jewish Congress and from the Polish Government in exile. These groups pressed the Government for a declaration in response to the news of the persecution which `would emphasise that those involved in the killing of Jews would be held personally responsible; it would call for an end to mass murder and for the seeking out of refuge for those who could escape'[9] The campaigners' image of the Declaration for which they pressed made provision for rescue. Reluctant to commit themselves to any such statement on rescue, the British government only equally reluctantly conceded to the Declaration in recognition of their need to be seen to respond in some way to the persecution reports. Thus on the 17th December in the name of eleven Allied countries, the Foreign Secretary, Anthony Eden addressed the House of

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[6] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.167.

[7] Ibid, p,167.

[8] Ibid, p.169.

[9] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.169.

Commons and condemned the Nazis' `bestial policy of cold blooded extermination', detailing the reports of the deportations and describing Poland as `the principal Nazi slaughterhouse'. The United Nations Governments resolved `to ensure that those responsible for these crimes shall not escape retribution, and to press on with practical measures to this end'.[10] Those practical measures were, however, not spelled out within the Declaration and the campaigner's vital clause for rescue was absent. The Declaration prompted a spontaneous silence in the House and indeed its very existence would stand in stark contrast to the Government's previous silence on the plight of the Jews. The window in which the Committee would operate appeared to have opened, so that Tony Kushner comments, `For the first and only time in the war, the specific fate of the Jews in Nazi Europe was highlighted'.[11] Whilst both the British Government and the future Committee members had shared a wish to see Britain's liberal image upheld in the Declaration and to find a resolution to the rescue question within it, the aftermath would reveal how far the nature of those hoped for resolutions differed and made clear an unbreachable cognitive and communicative distance between the British government and the Committee in terms of their interpretation of the state of Britain's position on rescue.

The Declaration prompted a public outcry and the future Committee members' reaction to both would lay the foundations of their later rescue plan, revealing their belief in the inadequacy of the Declaration, their emphasis on the need for action and not words, whilst illustrating the crucial connection between the Committee's calls for rescue and the power of British public opinion on the subject. It would be the Committee's recognition of the vital role public opinion would play in exerting pressure upon the government for action

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[10] The United Nations Allied Declaration, December 17th 1942, in Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.173.

[11] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.171.

which, as Tony Kushner comments, ensured that, faced with the absence of any detailed `practical measures' for rescue from the Declaration, the pro refugee groups were prompted to take steps for action themselves; `Rathbone was now willing to play the only card left to the pro-Jewish campaigners - a popular campaign to embarrass the government and force action'.[12] In January 1943 James Parkes wrote an article which, whilst remaining unpublished, would outline his immediate response to the Declaration and would illustrate views he was to develop as a Committee member. It is an article which reveals his sense that the Declaration could, and would not, go far enough to ease Jewish suffering in Europe, and that at best it could only be considered as a starting point, an expression of sentiment which, without a corresponding commitment to action, remained essentially useless. Central to Parkes' The Massacre of the Jews would be the argument at the heart of the Committee's work, namely that the retribution promised in the Declaration could not take the place of rescue as a means to save Jewish lives; `The government has promised vengeance after the war, but that will save no lives'.[13] The government's commitment to a policy of post war retribution or `rescue through victory', revealed the foremost distinction between themselves and the Committee. Indeed `the British Government hoped that the promise of post war retribution was self contained and could be separated from the problematic issue of rescue'.[14] The Committee however, consistently maintained the connection between the two issues by comparing their respective consequences in terms of the persecution. It would not be a favourable comparison either for the British government or for the future of rescue. The Committee was further distinguished from the Government by their belief in the very feasibility of rescue itself. The British government saw no real possibility of rescue on a large scale and thus

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[12] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.174.

[13] James Parkes, The Massacre of the Jews, p.1.

[14] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.175.

whilst expressing a considerable degree of sympathy for the Jews' plight, saw no reason to raise `expectations of action' which would remain unfulfilled.[15] Whilst the Committee would never suggest that the ultimate cessation of persecution lay anywhere else but with victory, they believed that it was the very scale of the persecution which made immediate and concerted efforts at rescue in the present absolutely vital, and that the details of the persecution need not be separated from the war effort; `Be assured that everything helps the war effort which helps to keep constantly before our own minds and those of the others the agony which Europe is suffering'.[16] Retribution could only ever remain inadequate, an argument at the core of a remarkable and powerful essay by Victor Gollancz, written days after the Declaration. In Let My People Go, Gollancz commented of the Declaration that `it will not save a single Jewish life'.[17] Gollancz's work generated a huge public response and `had sold out by the end of January 1943'.[18] For Gollancz, rescue and retribution were simply incompatible and he illustrated how the latter shifted the emphasis in Allied thinking from the suffering of the Jews to the criminality of the Nazis themselves; `we may sum up the whole matter by saying that there are two ways of reacting to what is happening to the Jews of Europe; the one is mercy-immediate aid to the persecuted; the other is hatred - retribution for the persecutors'.[19] Parkes and Gollancz drew on similar imagery in their work. In attempting to reconcile his conception of the British character with what he perceived as the inadequate response to the persecution contained in the Declaration, Parkes could only conclude; `the reason is not a

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[15] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.175.

[16] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue The Perishing, (London; National Committee For Rescue From Nazi Terror, 1943), p.2.

[17] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go, (London; Victor Gollancz, 1942). p. 2.

[18] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.177.

[19] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go, p.28.

pleasant one for British honour. It is that these people are not regarded as just men or women, not even as children, but as Jews'.[20] Parkes makes clear the key role negative British attitudes towards Jews were to play in the rescue question. Indeed a fear that a government sponsored rescue plan might be so successful as to bring large numbers of Jews to Britain with the perceived risk of generating domestic anti Semitism, was a vital factor which further limited the official British perspective on rescue. The question of domestic anti semitism would also ensure that the debate over rescue in official circles would often be deflected from the situation in Europe, to centre on the position of Jews already present in Britain and their interaction with the British, turning government attention inward and away from the persecution at the centre of the rescue issue. It would be a further fundamental distinction in perspective between the British government and the Committee whose stance, whilst concerned with the impact of a failure to act on British identity, would focus outward and on the consequences of the situation in Europe for its primary victims. Parkes suggests that were the British to regard the persecuted not as human beings, but as Jews, they would share that stance only with the Nazis themselves. Commenting on the Government's position, Parkes points to the overtly British characteristics which the Committee valued in the British public and which they considered at risk in official responses to rescue, following a distinction in the way in which they regarded the British public and the British authorities throughout their campaign, reflecting their faith in the humanity of the former and their sense of isolation from the latter; `it is difficult to see in the attitude of the Government, the determination, the humanity, or the generosity which alone would be adequate to so terrible a human catastrophe'.[21] Parkes concludes; `there is only one answer for men who still believe there is any nobility in the cause for which we are fighting,' he continues in capital

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[20] James Parkes, The Massacre of the Jews, p.2.

[21] Ibid, p.2.

letters, `we will receive them. And if there really be 3 million of them we will thank God that we have been able to save so many from Hitler's clutches. And if there be a Jewish problem to solve, we will solve it as civilised men and not as murderers'.[22] Parkes' imagery of deliverance is powerful and served to remind the reader of his belief that not only was action the duty of Britain as a civilised nation, it was that of a Christian nation also. Gollancz took a similar stance, again illustrating his faith in the British public; `Will you wash your hands of responsibility for all this, as Pilate did? Will you pass by on the other side? I cannot believe you will because that would be contrary to the very essence of the British character'.[23] The scale of the persecution is emphasised by the scale of the moral consequences which inactivity must generate amongst the British. Both men illustrate a clear understanding of the totality of the Final Solution, a vision matched throughout the Committee's work. Parkes writes; `Hitler was not only threatening but actually carrying out the policy of destroying the whole Jewish population within his powers'[24], and Gollancz comments, `All this is part, not of a war, but of a quite deliberate policy, openly proclaimed, of exterminating the Jewish population of Europe'.[25]

Parkes would also comment on the way in which the persecution was reported in the Press; `we read about it at the time and then forget', seeing `only little paragraphs amidst the war news, and their impression passes from our memory'.[26] The responses of The Times and the Jewish Chronicle for example, to the Declaration and throughout the rescue debate, provides a key to both Jewish and Gentile British reactions and serves as a point of comparison with the

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[22] James Parkes, The Massacre of the Jews, P.3.

[23] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go, p.8.

[24] James Parkes, The Massacre of the Jews, p.1.

[25] Victor Gollancz, Let My People Go, p.1.

[26] James Parkes, The Massacre of the Jews, p.1.

Committee's perspective. On December 11th, days before the Declaration, the Jewish Chronicle, carrying a black border announced; `Two million Jews Slaughtered - Most Terrible Massacre of all time - Appalling Horrors of Nazi Murders'.[27] On the announcement of the Declaration The Times ran the headline, `Barbarity to Jews- Retribution by Allies - Commons Endorse a Pledge'. The reporter concludes of the silence following the Declaration, `it was a truly impressive scene', commenting of the Commons `its silence was more eloquent than words of deep sympathy for the helpless victims of terrorism, and emphasised the Government's resolve that the fight against the barbarous regime overshadowing Europe shall be waged to the victorious end'.[28] The paper takes the opportunity to reaffirm Britain's commitment to a `rescue through victory' policy, illustrating the extent to which the rescue issue could be utilised as a means to further demonise the enemy and thus to justify the war effort, a war effort which the authorities regarded as distinctly incompatible with any plan for rescue. In a letter to The Times of 22 December, which he had been advised not to send by the Colonial Secretary Lord Cranborne[29], Neill Malcolm, former League of Nations High Commissioner for Refugees, expressed his sense of the Declaration's failings, joining Parkes and Gollancz in making clear the unfavourable comparison between its' sentiments and those of the Nazis evident in Hitler's speeches; `compared with these truly awful threats, the Declaration by the powers sounds pitifully tame. Unlike Hitler we cannot convert words into deeds and must be content with promises which will not save one single life'.[30] The need to convert "words into deeds" had always been at the centre of the Committee's beliefs. By April 1943 it would be a position which they would share with

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[27] The Jewish Chronicle, 11 December 1942, p.1.

[28] The Times, 18 December 1942, p.1.

[29] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.177.

[30] Neill Malcolm, Aid For The Jews, The Times, 22 December 1942

the British government. Again, however, as rescue entered the international arena, their differing interpretations of the need for action and the role of rescue within that would reveal the limitations of the apparent common ground between them.

The British government's initial reluctance to issue the Declaration in the fear that it would prompt calls for action, which, if ignored threatened Britain's image in terms of the rescue question, appeared to be becoming a reality in the early months of 1943. The need to do something, if just for appearances sake, was evident. Unprepared to act alone, and indeed following a consistent belief in official circles that not only was there little that could actually be done, but also that the British government had already done what it could in terms of immigration entry concessions, the British finally contacted the American government; `setting out British views on the refugee problem, and inviting the United States to consider the expediency of a private and informal United Nations conference to discuss possible solutions'[31]. At the same time a group of `sympathetic MP's and Jewish representatives' met at Burlington House in London to press the Government for further action[32]. It was from the official consolidation of this group in March 1943 that the National Committee was formed with a membership which according to one of its leading lights, Eleanor Rathbone, `may fairly claim to represent the greatest common measure of opinion among those outside government circles who are chiefly concerned with a solution'[33]. The proposed conference with the United States would offer the Committee a degree of hope as the public outcry which had followed the Declaration and upon which they remained reliant, began to diminish. However the conference, finally held in April 1943 in Bermuda, would reveal the extent to which the window for rescue was beginning to close by mid

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[31] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.184.

[32] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.178.

[33] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.6.

1943. The American's delayed response and their publication of the details of the conference ensured that it appeared as though they had taken the initiative in calling the conference, bolstering their own image in the rescue question, to the detriment of the British. Both government's agreed not to address mutual topics of sensitivity such as British policy in Palestine and the American quota system, both of which had obvious vital implications for the rescue question. The limits of the conference were thus set before the delegates arrived in a memorandum sent by the British to the Americans which stated; `The refugee problem cannot be treated as though it were a wholly Jewish problem' and no one must `raise false hopes among refugees by suggesting or announcing alternative possible destinations'.[34] The most concrete product of the conference was to be the reestablishment of the Intergovernmental Committee on Refugees, first established at the failed Evian conference of 1938, the ghost of which seemed much present at Bermuda. The British government believed that the reestablishment of the Committee would serve to quieten the waiting refugee groups - it would not be enough.

The Conference was an intense disappointment amongst the Committee and their growing frustration would be evident in the parliamentary debate on the refugee question, long awaited by the Committee and finally conceded to by the government in May 1943. Rathbone had commented of Bermuda; `the defeatist tones of the opening speeches - intended no doubt to check undue hopes - caused widespread dismay in both countries among those who felt deeply on the question and desire bold and speedy action'[35], concluding `we have not been encouraged to hope for any but small things'.[36] The debate would reveal the extent of the strained relations between the Committee and the government. Rathbone was to comment; `we ask whether Ministers who show impatience with their critics and who assure us that

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[34] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.184.

[35] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.15.

[36] Ibid, p.16.

everything possible is being done, would feel quite so certain about that if their own wives, children, or parents were among these people'.[37] Wasserstein suggests the extent to which it had become clear by the time of the parliamentary debate that the British government had regained its balance on the rescue issue; `concerned lest the critics of the government monopolise the debate, the Cabinet decided on 10th May that in view of the disproportionate number of speeches made by Members holding extreme views in favour of the free admission of refugees to this country, the whips were invited to arrange that some members would intervene in the debate who would put a more balanced view'.[38] From the outset the debate established that rescue would not be an option, as Home Office secretary, Peake illustrated; `we must recognise that these people are for the present mostly beyond the possibility of rescue - they are hemmed in - the rate of extermination is such that no measure of relief, on however large a scale could be commensurate with the problem'[39] - the Committee had never suggested that any rescue measure could match the scale of the persecution, but had instead seen the need to make an effort however minimal in its effect. Peake referred to some `fantastic suggestions' made to the government regarding rescue plans and made a direct attack upon Rathbone's Rescue the Perishing, published at this time and containing the Committee's point by point rescue plan, in which Rathbone is critical of Britain's immigration entry policy. Peake commented; `A visa is not a ticket, nor is it a condition precedent in every case to entry in this country'.[40] Peake suggested that the `facts' are `never known in full to the person who puts forward a case such as this'. Rathbone's work is dismissed as propaganda; `There has been a regular spate of

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[37] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.17.

[38] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.203.

[39] Peake, Under Secretary to the Home Office, Hansard, House of Commons Debate, Refugee Problem, 19th May 1943, (Orders of the Day, Volume 389, May 4th to May 27th 1943), pp.1118 - 1186.

[40] Ibid, p.1123.

propaganda issued by people who feel very deeply upon this matter, people whose minds are haunted and tormented by visions of what is going on in Germany or Poland. Some of this propaganda is unfair'.[41] There is the suggestion here that much of what the Committee believed was a product of their imaginations. Rathbone's response betrays her frustration and distress; `We feel like the schoolboy who was asked to write an essay on snakes in Ireland, and who could only say that there were no snakes in Ireland', and of the Home Secretary; `Why does he always make us feel in his Parliamentary answers, and even in our approaches to him privately, as if the whole question of refugees was becoming a bore and an irritation to him and that he was transferring to refugees the dislike which he quite openly feels for ourselves?'.[42]

The Committee's disappointment with Bermuda and the debate was matched in the Jewish Chronicle on 23 April; `Even the most irrepressible optimist can scarcely fail to experience a rapid chilling of their hopes for the future of refugees of all kinds as they read the reports of the Bermuda conference'.[43] As elements of the conference were revealed the paper became more despondent; `over against the monstrous magnitude of the emergency, the delegates proposals seem depressingly small', concluding `in the presence of so collosal a catastrophe mere denunciations and lamentations are worse than nothing'.[44] On the 28 May the editorial addressed the speeches of the debate; `They amount, if not to the passing of a death sentence on the millions of Jews still surviving in Europe, at least to a pitiful confession of impotence to stay or overt the executions', concluding with an exhaustion similar to that expressed by Rathbone; `The Jew has wandered enough. He is weary of begging help. He is tired of

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[41] Peake, Hansard, Refugee Debate, p.1123.

[42] Rathbone, Hansard, Refugee Debate, p.1132.

[43] The Jewish Chronicle, (London; 23rd April 1943).

[44] The Jewish Chronicle, (London; May 7th 1943).

Evians and Bermudas'.[45] The Times is more reserved in its comment on the debate and illustrates an argument consistent with that of the government, namely that any attempt at rescue may serve to worsen the situation for the Jewish victims rather than improve it; `The debate in the House of Commons today on possible measures to help the people in the occupied countries of Europe who are suffering from the enemy's policy of deportation or extermination was handicapped by the necessity of restraint in the interests of the sufferers'. There is no direct mention of Jews and the paper emphasises the `rescue through victory' policy; `He insisted that the one solution of a painful problem was an allied victory and that any measures designed to help the victims which impeded the war effort would only bring increased suffering'.[46] The Committee's response to Bermuda and the consolidation of their rescue plan which revealed the arguments central to their thinking, would be contained in Eleanor Rathbone's pamphlet Rescue The Perishing published in April 1943.

Rescue The Perishing serves as a reflection of the wider British reaction to the concept of rescue and the plight of European Jewry. Rathbone notes the objective of the Committee as `to act as a medium for cooperation between the various organisations, groups, and individuals concerned with the rescue of victims of Nazi persecution'.[47] Rathbone's opening `appeal to readers' is revealing in its categorical statement that the details contained within the pamphlet `are not atrocity stories exaggerated for propaganda'[48], a comment which as the content of the parliamentary debate would suggest, had not convinced the British government. Her recognition that doubts remained in British society regarding the actuality of the persecution might be evident in Rathbone's attempt to include reliable witnesses in her work such as `American workers' or `a police officer' as though to validate her

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[45] The Jewish Chronicle, 28 May 1943

[46] The Times, 20 May 1943

[47] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.6.

[48] Ibid, p.1.

evidence. Rathbone recognises the centrality of victory; `nothing will end these horrors except a victory which will end the power of those who have caused them'[49]. However, both she and the Committee would be distinguished by their belief that rescue need not impede the war effort, but might successfully be part of it, indeed as Tony Kushner comments; `To Rathbone, the battle to win the war and to save the Jews were inseparable'[50]. Indeed in a later publication, Continuing Terror, of 1944 the Committee suggested that rescue become part of the war effort; `instructions should be given to all Allied Commanders wherever operating, and requests made to chiefs of Guerilla forces, to do everything possible, without hindering military operations, to rescue Jews and political prisoners'[51]. The Committee's argument that the numbers involved in rescue would only ever be small, not only illustrates their understanding of the reality of the situation in Europe, but again hints at the British government's fear that a rescue plan might prompt a `flood' of Jews to British shores. Indeed Bernard Wasserstein comments, `far more than Washington, London decision makers felt threatened by the Nazis ability to "dump" thousands, perhaps millions of Jews'[52]. Rathbone addresses the British public, `You are asked not only to feel, but to act', expressing the Committee's central demand for practicality, not pity[53]. With the emphasis once more on people power, Rathbone urges the reader to `show the Government that public opinion will support them in taking every step possible to rescue as many

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[49] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.1.

[50] Tony Kushner, The Holocaust and the Liberal Imagination, p.174.

[51] National Committee for rescue from Nazi Terror, Continuing Terror, (London; National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, 1944), Preface.

[52] Bernard Wasserstein, Britain and the Jews of Europe, p.113.

[53] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.2.

of the sufferers as possible before it is too late'[54]. The pamphlet contained a summary of a document published separately by the Committee, entitled Evidences of Public Concern, Rathbone described the public's response to the Allied Declaration as illustrative of their `practical and inherited sense of responsibility for all remediable human suffering'. The last point of the Committee's Twelve Point Plan for Rescue illustrates their belief that Britain should be seen to set an example on rescue; `the adoption of the principle that, whatever other nations may do or leave undone, the British contribution to the work of rescue should be the speediest and most generous possible'[55]. It was a point Rathbone would repeat in Parliament, as on the 11 February 1943 in a debate regarding the admission of refugees, when she asked the Home Secretary; `Should we not set the example ourselves before we can expect other countries to do so?'[56] and again on the 25 February; `Is not the extreme rigidity of the present restrictions a bad example to other countries?'[57] Rathbone went on to cite forces of public opinion including the Press and the Churches, represented on the Committee by the Archbishops of York, Canterbury and Chichester and included details of those amongst the general public who had offered `practical help' such as `loan of houses, money for maintenance, secretarial or organising assistance'[58]. Whilst the offers cited seem numerous, they are also tinged with a sense of their temporality and their having been prompted by an impulse of emotion which could, and would not, constitute a

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[54] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.2.

[55] Ibid, p.8.

[56] Eleanor Rathbone, Parliamentary Question, Hansard, House of Commons Debates, Jews and Other Refugees (Admission to the United Kingdom), 11th February 1943, (Oral Answers, Volume 386, January 19th to February 18th 1943), p.1447.

[57] Eleanor Rathbone, Parliamentary Question, Hansard, House of Commons Debate, Jews (Enemy Occupied Europe), 25th February 1943, (Oral Answers, Volume 387, February 23rd to March 25th 1943), p.284.

[58] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.19.

fundamental change in British perspective on the rescue issue. The Committee's twelve point program also includes `Replies to objections' which in themselves illustrate some of the main arguments against rescue evident in British society. For example Rathbone attempts to answer such statements as, `we cannot spare the food', `if we let more Jews in it might promote anti Semitic feeling', and `we have not the accommodation', many of which had echoes of the objections put forward to the admission of Jewish refugees in Britain's past[59]. Her responses include statistics on Britain's immigration history and make evident once more the Committee's distinction between the government perspective and that of the British public, as Rathbone comments; `Ships, it seems, can usually be found for any purpose for which the Government sufficiently wants to find them' and most signifcantly ; `Anti semitism is an ugly infection from Hitlerism. It is an insult to the British people to suppose that even those "who don't like" would rather leave them to be massacred than find asylum for a few more thousands of them'. Rathbone illustrates the way in which the Committee combined vision with realism in terms of rescue, looking not to the past and to lost opportunity, but recognising the possibilities for action in the present; `For those in Poland, action by ourselves except through victory seems impossible. But we still have to think of the thousands in daily danger of deportation to Poland from the occupied lands, to fill up the empty ghettoes till their turn comes for the slaughter houses'[60]. Rathbone also revealed the extent of her personal involvement in the issue and how far she would be hurt by suggestions that in supporting rescue, she was betraying her country. Her response again illustrates her belief that rescue and, fundamentally, Englishness, should not be seen as incompatible entities; `I have been accused of belittling the record of my own country, and no Englishwoman likes to do that, even justly'[61].

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[59] Eleanor Rathbone, Rescue the Perishing, p.9.

[60] Ibid, p.5.

[61] Ibid, p.10.

It would be just such a depth of personal involvement and vision among the Committee members with regard to the situation facing the Jews of Europe which would be evident in their regular bulletin, News From Hitler's Europe. News, described by the Committee's press secretary, Eva Hubback as `a small and unpretentious bulletin'[62] would in fact be an incredibly detailed, Europe wide pamphlet containing reports, mainly on the treatment of Jews, not matched in the national press, including information on concentration camps such as Auschwitz Birkenau, Thriesenstadt and Treblinka, whilst drawing upon a variety of sources, from underground representatives to foreign newspapers. Themes evident in the Committee's publications are developed and reaction to significant events in relation to rescue are recorded and compared with the British stance on the subject. For example in October 1943 News carried reports of Denmark's successful attempt to rescue its Jewish community, asking; `What have we done with our infinitely greater resources and power, that we can compare with their action?'[63] What is perhaps most striking about News is that it makes clear the depth of understanding exhibited by the Committee and their ability to foresee the Nazis' possible targets, so that the bulletin becomes a document through which the development of the Holocaust itself might be traced. This would be particularly evident with regard to the situation of the Jews of the Balkans. As early as December 1943 the bulletin commented on increasing tension as the situation in Yugoslavia worsened. Also on 28 March 1944 the bulletin reported that `over a million people are threatened with torture, deportation and direct extermination as a result of Hitler's invasion of Hungary'[64]. On 4 April the bulletin carries the response of the Foreign Secretary to a

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[62] The National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, News From Hitler's Europe, (London; The National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror, 5 September 1944), Parkes per MS, Special Collections, University of Southampton.

[63] National Committee for Rescue, News From Hitler's Europe, (22nd October 1943).

[64] The National Committee for Rescue, News From Hitler's Europe, (28th March 1944).

question from pro-refugee MP Sidney Silverman regarding the future of Hungarian Jews which illustrates the government's regained consistency on its stance toward rescue;'On this in common with their allies, now that the hour of Germany's defeat grows ever nearer and more certain, HMG can only repeat their detestation of Germany's crimes and their determination that all those guilty of them shall be bought to justice'[65]. On 2 May News reports reads `Terror Over Hungary' telling of the implementation of Nuremberg style measures in the country and extreme Nazi barbarity. On 4 July 1944, the bulletin comments; `The mass extermination of Hungarian Jewry has started', citing `the gas chambers of Oswiecim' as the Jews' destination[66]. News illustrates the powerful combination of the Committee's arguments for rescue with the evidence of the treatment of the Jews of Europe which prompted and justified those arguments. It was also to show the way in which the Committee understood that treatment and the necessity for urgency in the face of it, setting a tone of controlled reporting, accompanied by a clear sense of the emotional commitment of the authors.

By the end of 1943 the situation looked increasingly bleak for the Committee as the Nazis' destruction process continued without any corresponding action to rescue its victims. The Committee faced a British government which showed little inclination to change their policy and which began to exhibit the control over the subject which it had only momentarily lost throughout 1943. The vital public opinion which had provided the Committee with its support and with their last vestige of hope in trying to influence the government had also largely diminished as the war dragged on and the details of the Declaration, the initial source of the impetus, were forgotten. The campaign for rescue had further been dented by the loss of Victor Gollancz who suffered a nervous breakdown, evidence of the strain of the rescue

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[65] The National Committee for Rescue, News From Hitler's Europe, (April 4th 1944).

[66] The National Committee for Rescue, News From Hitler's Europe, (July 4th 1944).

campaign. Despite the fact that by 1944 the Committee's strength had diminished, their commitment remained and their significance in the wider picture of the British interaction with the rescue question and thus with the Holocaust as a whole cannot be downplayed. At a vital stage in British reactions to the Holocaust, the National Committee had succeeded in placing the plight of its victims on the official and public agenda in an attempt to bring about both their rescue and to insure the honour of the nation in which the Committee members believed. That more Jewish victims of Nazism were not rescued as a result of the Committee's work and that doubts remain today over British actions with regard to rescue, is perhaps not the most important point on which to conclude a summary of their achievements. Instead, in 1943 Eleanor Rathbone asked the British, `For a few brief moments, <u>be</u> just one of those human beings, whose body, with its nerves that can suffer so, and whose mind and soul, with all their resources of terror and despair, are concealed by the cold abstraction of "one hundred and fifty' and `ten thousand' and `six million'. For more than `a few brief moments' THIS would be the National Committee for Rescue's most vital achievement. The images and descriptions coming from the liberated concentration camps in spring 1945 were to test how much or how little had been comprehended through the efforts of Eleanor Rathbone, Victor Gollancz and their fellow activists.

SECTION TWO

Chapter 3: `Truth- Telling':

Initial British and American Reactions To the News of Liberation

On 1 May 1945, fifteen days after British troops liberated Bergen Belsen concentration camp in Germany, Lord Denham addressed the House of Lords in a debate entitled `Buchenwald Camp' in which, amongst a number of requests prompted by the news of the liberation of the concentration camps, he called for the British Government to ensure that German citizens were made to witness the liberated concentration camps. If passed it would be a measure comparable to that enacted by the American Military Police and General Eisenhower in the aftermath of the American's earlier liberation of the camps at Ohrdruf and Buchenwald. Denham presented the justification for his request to the Lords as such;

`the whole civilised world is satisfied about the truth of the allegations regarding these camps and is shocked to the core as no series of nations has ever been shocked in the world's history. This has been mainly due to the articles in the Press which they have seen, to the gallant war correspondents, to the magnificent and truth telling pictures that have been taken'[1].

Denham's comments and the debate would represent in many ways the culmination of a period of reporting, reaction and comment both in Britain and America on the liberation of the Nazi concentration camps. His words are significant in illustrating the key role the Press would play in both countries in forming influential and often long lasting perspectives and understandings of the events of liberation and of the identity, suffering and future for the camp's victims and survivors. In turn those perspectives of the first moments of liberation in Britain and America provide one of

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[1] Lord Denham, `Buchenwald Camp', Hansard, (HL), Vol. 136, Col 65, 1 May 1945.

the clearest sources of comparison with the record of those same moments in the testimony of the liberated survivors themselves.

Denham's words would go beyond a simple expression of shock or horror in reaction to the reports of the camps or indeed of public praise for the work of the war correspondents[2]. Instead his address and the tone and content of Allied reactions illustrated how far the liberation of the camps and its initial representation also generated issues which were seemingly more complex and absorbing for both Allied countries. Not least amongst those would be questions over the importance of what Denham would call `truth telling' in any description of the events of liberation and of the Holocaust as a whole, of a need to find evidence to prove the `allegations' seen to be made against the Nazis in relation to the camps, and of the perceived need to address the question of the place of the German nation in the `civilised world' of the future. Those questions, as a study of such Parliamentary discussion, of the national Press, of the comment and reaction of British and American war corespondents and indeed of the general public as illustrated through the forum of newspaper letters pages suggests, would form the basis of Allied responses to the news of liberation, shaping attitudes toward the victims, the perpetrators and the survivors. In turn those attitudes would form part of a traceable continuum in Allied attitudes to the fate of European Jewry throughout the war, whilst laying down the foundation for both countries memories of liberation, of the Holocaust as a whole, and of their own role and responsibilities in relation to both.

On 19 April 1945 The Times would carry a story entitled `Release From a Prison Camp - The Scenes Before Liberation -

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[2] Denham's speech and the subsequent questions would be extensive and form an interesting discussion in themselves in terms of reactions to liberation - particularly useful in this context would be how they reveal the extent to which members of Parliament were often as reliant upon the words of the press as were the general public.

Some British Officers Removed'[3]. The story did not however refer to the liberation of a concentration camp as present day readers might expect in making the now commonly recognised connection between the phrase and notions of `liberation' and the final moments of the Nazis concentration and extermination camp systems. Instead the story tells of the release of British POWs from a German prison camp. Alongside that story, however, the paper included a summary of a statement made by a General Dempsey, a Senior Medical Officer with the British Army present at the liberation of Bergen Belsen. The word `Liberation' used in relation to the experience of the British POWS does not appear in the headline for the report on the liberation of Bergen Belsen, nor indeed is Belsen referred to as a either a `prison camp, or a concentration camp but instead as an `internment camp', a word conjuring distinctly different images for the British reader who might recall the internment of so called enemy aliens in Britain itself during the First and Second World Wars; `The Captives of Belsen; Internment Camp Horrors; British Officer's Statement'[4]. Indeed the paper did not use the word `liberation' in relation to any of the reports it published regarding the camps throughout the months of April and May 1945.

Whilst the fate of British soldiers or citizens would always represent a priority for the paper, the use of the word `Liberation' in this context and its absence from the reporting of the opening of the camps, suggests on one level both that the definition and understanding of the concept of `Liberation' for the paper's editors was not automatically or easily connected with the images of the camps and in turn, the extent to which the concept's meaning and use has changed in the years since the event itself. In the context of the reporting of the spring months of 1945 however and when those reports referring to the liberation of POWs are compared with

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[3] "Release From A Prison Camp - The Scenes Before Liberation - Some British Officers Removed", in The Times, 19 April 1945.

[4] "The Captives of Belsen; Internment Camp Horrors, British Officer's Statement", in The Times, 19 April 1945.

those on the camps, the use of the word `Liberation" becomes a signpost for a recognisable and understandable event, for a reassuringly "normal" and positive experience, seemingly denoting a degree of humanity, of freedom, of a future for the released prisoners themselves. Thus its absence from the images of the Allied soldiers' encounter with Belsen, with Buchenwald and the other camps suggests dual implications for the British reader's conception of the events of liberation, leaving them both with the essentially accurate sense that these events could not fall within their everyday understanding of the `normal', whilst however also serving to extend that sense of disconnection, of unreality, to the Nazis' victims themselves. It would be a distancing only to be confounded as the tone and content of the initial reactions of the British and Americans turned increasingly from the victims to the perpetrators and the consequences of the camps' existence, not for their victims or survivors, but for the German people.

Dominating British and American reactions to the news of liberation and to the images from the camps circulated in the press and through film would be questions regarding the nature of the German character, only rarely distinguished from that of the Nazis, of the extent to which German people knew of, or participated in the crimes enacted in the now liberated camps, and perhaps most significantly, of the most suitable treatment or even punishment for the German nation and the role that the Allied nations must play in exacting that retribution, in what Lord Denham would describe as the need to `bring home to the German people the enormity of their crimes and to open their eyes to the depths of depravity to which they have sunk'[5]. Whilst it is not perhaps the extent of Allied preoccupation with the Germans in these reports that is interesting in the sense that they had been, and still were in the April and May of 1945, engaged in a long and arduous war against them. It is however the imbalance of the ratio between that preoccupation and any corresponding concern with the victims themselves

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[5] Lord Denham, Buchenwald Camp, House of Lords Debate p.63.

despite images of their suffering be displayed frequently alongside these stories and reports, that is interesting. The level of correspondence from the general public to the letters pages of the daily newspapers suggests the extent to which this was a subject with which, if only momentarily, the public engaged on a variety of levels. Prompted by Churchill's decision to send a Parliamentary Delegation to visit the camps following the request of General Eisenhower, a decision for which there appeared to have been widespread support, letters to The Times reveal the British general public's concern, not with the victims of the liberated camps, but with the German perpetrators, with establishing the `truth' regarding the camps, the existence of which many admit to having doubted, and with achieving the `re-education' of the German people through exposing them to the horrors of the camps.

The failure to accept the truth with regard to the camps in the reports available before those which followed liberation would now be explained and excused in essentially positive terms which portrayed the British and American public as simply too decent to have been able to conceive of such horrors. For example in The Times editorial of 20 April entitled `The Victims',(of whom they only briefly speak), the paper comments; `There have always been some who, for the honour of human nature, have withheld complete belief from the reports, finding it easier to suppose that suffering has caused hallucination in the victims than to imagine a degradation of the soul that could descend so far below the animal level of cruelty'[6]. Whilst the paper goes on to suggest that the by then widely circulated photographs of the camps dispel those notions, a result perhaps of what Deborah Lipstadt would call `the show me syndrome' traceable throughout the American press and public at this time,[7] the

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[6] "The Victims", in The Times, 20 April 1945.

[7] Deborah Lipstadt, Beyond Belief - The American Press and the Coming of the Holocaust 1933 - 1945, (London; The Free Press, 1986), p.240.
Lipstadt also identifies some useful ways of approaching the attitude of the Press toward these stories and reports of

language used to describe the conditions in the camps and of their prisoners continues to suggest an `otherworldy' place of destruction and depravity; `here in these fetid hovels filled with broken and dying men, in these long vistas of graves, is the reality in which the worship of unbridled power issues in the end'[8].

On 21 April1945, a V.H.Galbraith from the Institute of Historical Research wrote to The Times; `The Allies will forever stand at the bar of history for their treatment of the conquered Germany. To justify their action in the eyes of posterity, no trouble can be too great to establish the facts beyond all shadow of a doubt, and to remove them from the realm of passion and feeling'[9]. Galbraith, like many readers and indeed MP s at the time, called for a party of `civilian scientists' to accompany the parliamentary delegation to Germany so as to ensure the `scientific' accuracy of the reports. The ghost of the encounter with the atrocity stories of the First World War appears to haunt much of the initial reactions to the camps, as indeed it had done when news of their existence first arrived in British and American government circles. Indeed the subject of the atrocity stories is directly referred to in a letter from a Margery Bryce, on 27 April 1945, the surviving relative of Lord Bryce, author of the Bryce Report into German Atrocities During World War One. Ms. Bryce writes; `It is surely obvious that no discrimination is possible between the German military, intellectual or Nazi

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liberation - for example the idea of the `Yes - but..' approach in which reporters accepted a degree of the information that they received, whilst continuing to dismiss the rest as exaggeration. In turn she also points out the close connection between the stance of the American press and that of the American government, something equally applicable to the initial reactions of the British as becomes clear in a comparison of the Parliamentary debates and of the newspapers.

[8] "The Victims" in The Times, 20 April 1945.

[9] V.H.Galbraith, `German Crimes - The Parliamentary Delegation - History and the Facts', in The Times, 21 April 1945, Letters Page.

mentality'[10].

The need to establish the accuracy of the details and images of the camps and their prisoners remained a preoccupation throughout the liberation months of 1945, although for many people the release of the photographs and film reels taken at camps such as Belsen and Buchenwald went a long way to quash final doubts, if only of the very existence of the camps, however they then understood their purpose or the identities of their victims. A Lionel Wood of Thornton Heath made a suggestion to the paper which would be repeated frequently in both the media and in Parliament; `May I suggest that the revolting pictures of the Nazi guilt be reprinted in pamphlet form and distributed throughout Germany'[11]. Again on the 23 April The Times printed the letter of a Major General John Duncan from Berkshire under the heading, `Germany and the Camps - Making the Truth Known - Films For the Reich', in which the Major writes, `It is within the power of the Allies to make these loathsome sights known to a large section of the German youth - by compelling all German prisoners here and in America to view the films which have no doubt been taken of these sadistic cruelties perpetuated by their Nazi leaders; this might help to dispel the Hitler myth that Goebbles is trying to establish'[12]. Percy Pickney of Hampshire followed the trend; `These films should be shown by order in every cinema left standing in every town in Germany and the citizens should be compelled to go and see them'[13]. Admitting his own scepticism with regard to the earlier reports of the camps, a J.Juxon. Stevens of Buckinghamshire wrote; `The revelation of the true ghastly facts can be made to discredit the Nazi system in the eyes of the Germans in a way that defeat by

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[10] Margery Bryce, in The Times, 27 April 1945, Letters Page.

[11] Lionel Wood, in The Times, 21 April 1945, Letters Page.

[12] Major General John Duncan, `Germany and the Camps; Making the Truth Known; Films For the Reich', in The Times, 23 April 1945, Letters Page.

[13] Percy Pickney, in The Times, 23 April 1945, Letters Page.

superior force can never hope to do'[14]. The letter's concluding phrase leaves a subtle suggestion that Mr. Stevens might believe that defeat in war may not be sufficient the ensure that the Germans accept the error of their ways. Indeed as becomes clear, doubts over the extent of German, as opposed significantly to Nazi remorse, were not at all rare in initial Allied reactions to liberation.

Noting with reference to the suggestion that Germans be made to see the camps or at the least the films of them, that `many other readers make this suggestion'[15], The Times would also include the occasional letter suggesting the existence of a perhaps less mainstream, more perceptive and equally revealing type of reaction to liberation amongst the British readership. For example on 23 April, a F.Seidler of Earls Court reminds us before `we judge a good from a bad German' that a large number of prisoners in Germany were themselves Germans, referring to the ongoing debate played out in the media over the extent to which ordinary Germans were party to the action of the Nazis[16]. On 28 April Doreen Agnew from London, suggesting the extent to which the identity, scale and nature of the liberated camps was often misunderstood and how, as a result, the margins between the war and the events of the Final Solution were often blurred, wrote, `I think it is most important that the general public in England should realise that the recently discovered camps at Buchenwald and Belsen were not POW camps but concentration camps for political prisoners and for members of "inferior races'. As such they have nothing to do with the war, but everything to do with the Nazi idea of peace and civilisation based on the extermination of all opposition and of the races not fit to match the Herrenvolk'[17].

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[14] J.Juxon Stevens in The Times, 23 April 1945, Letters Page.

[15] In The Times, 23 April 1945, Letters Page.

[16] F.Seidler in The Times, 23 April 1945, Letters Page.

[17] Doreen Agnew, in The Times, 28 April 1945, Letters Page.

It is perhaps the points made on the 21 April by the MP Stephen King Hall which stand out most clearly in their tone and for their foresight from the rest of published opinion at this time. Welcoming the decision to send a delegation to the camps, he goes on to write; `Many I hope will now realise that in 1937 and before, the facts about concentration camps at places like Dachau, where German Jews, Socialists, and Communists were being tortured to death, were being published in Britain. It is well that my colleagues should go to the camps, but the verdicts of history will be that democracy sent its representatives seven years too late'[18]. King Hall's letter is distinguished not only for today's reader as perhaps an example of a vision of the future becoming the reality, but also at the time both for mentioning Jews as the primary victims of the Nazis and for speaking of the Allies, not in terms of their responsibility toward the Germans in their capacity as victors, but instead in their role as bystanders who might have done more for the victims.

However the paper's attention remained focused upon the future of the German people and with the extent and meaning of their guilt. The editorial of 20 April illustrates the initial role the Allies began to carve for themselves, not as the liberators of suffering people, but as the German people's `moral teachers'. Remarking on the American s' insistence upon the people of Weimar touring Buchenwald, the paper continues, `Beyond all this there is a larger significance in the lesson that is now being taught to the citizens of Weimar and other German towns. It is the beginning of the re-education of Germany. Germans have not only to see with their own eyes but to understand in their hearts that the monument to these doctrines is Buchenwald and all its horrors'[19].

Indeed the extent of American disgust at the news of the state of the camps is reported on 23 April when the

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[18] Stephen King Hall in The Times, 21 April 1945, Letters Page.

[19] "The Victims" in The Times, 20 April 1945.

revelations of liberation and thus the suffering of the camps victims, allowed the Americans to hit out at both their enemies in comparing the Germans with the Japanese; `Foul treatment of prisoners and internees by the Japanese had been generally feared, but to learn that a European nation is guilty of such bestiality and cruelty has revolted America'[20]. Essentially through these reactions and of those of others in Britain and America, unjustifiable and pointless destruction and pain is seemingly given a purpose, a point, both through its use as justification for the Allies' war, and in turn through the widely circulated belief in its role as an educative tool in the rehabilitation of the Germans - all of which distorts the realities for the survivors themselves of the experience of liberation. That use of the images of liberation as justification for the war and of the extent to which that would form part of a continued pattern in Allied attitudes toward Jewish suffering and toward the Holocaust as a whole as the event evolved, seems clear in a statement included in The Daily Mail's special supplement, Lest We Forget, in which a series of the photographs taken at liberation would appear[21]. The paper speaks of the `determination to keep the national pledge that these things should not be repeated'[22]. The idea of keeping such a pledge suggests that such a commitment to the victims of the Nazis had been in existence throughout and that liberation had merely confirmed its validity. Thus again any uniqueness that might be attributed to liberation and its implications is lost as the event is merged into a wider picture of the wartime mission against Nazism. What is not to be repeated here is not Jewish suffering or the Holocaust, such as the conception of it was at the time, but instead the rise and military activity of the Nazis, is war and not genocide. The two remain undistinguished following perhaps a perspective traceable

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[20] `Americans Shocked - Congressional and Press Delegation', in The Times, 23 April 1945.

[21] Lest We Forget, Published by The Daily Mail , (Associated Newspapers, London, 1945).

[22] Ibid, p.4.

throughout the war years in both countries in their unwillingness to recognise as distinct the Nazis' persecution policies, to recognise the Jews as their particular target, or to break from the Allied stance that this was a war against Nazism and not one being fought in the name of just one group of its' victims.

Whilst the papers appear convinced of the role that the Allies must play in the so called `re- education' of the German people, there appears in many of the press reports and those from war correspondents a tension between reserved but rarely well concealed doubts over the very possibility of reforming the Germans at all and a desire to believe that they were essentially normal but had been perverted by a dreadful political system. For example two descriptions read; `So far can moral perversion deliberately cultivated in an entire generation, and equipped with the apparatus of power in a sophisticated age, surpass in brutality the native lust to kill in the most primitive savages'[23], and in turn, `not only has all pity been crushed out of them; their inward perversion has gone so far as to deprive them of the very sense of the dignity of man. To look at the pictures of the bundled corpses of Buchenwald is to know that that is true'[24].

The extent of German guilt and self reproach would also be doubted by a Mrs. Mavis Tate, the only woman to accompany the Parliamentary Delegation to Germany and indeed the extent to which her gender played a part both in her selection or in turn in the way in which her words were received, may lead us to return to the Allies concern with authenticity, with trust worthy reports of these liberated camps - Did they perceive the testimony of a woman to simply be more believable? She writes; `The Germans are defeated in war, but from the little I saw I am very certain that they are in no way repentant in

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[23] "The Victims", in The Times, 20 April 1945.

[24] Ibid.

spirit'[25]. The tension between a desire not to blame the German people as a whole and thus to cultivate the image of the just and fair victor, whilst also wanting to point out that the Nazis ruled with the will of the people, if for no other reason than to provide the justification for a long and destructive war against them, is perhaps best illustrated in Lest We Forget. George Murray, writing the introduction tells us, `The purpose of the book is neither to harrow the feelings nor to foment hatred against the German people. No good would come of either'[26]. Later however, there is a sense that Murray is unable to restrain from his commentary his own opinion that the German people not only knew, but knew and did nothing about, the fate of the prisoners in the liberated camps; `It has been stated that the Germans were unaware of the worst villainies which were enacted in their midst. But they must have known. Such things cannot happen without news of them trickling through the country', and later; `The probable truth is that they preferred not to know too much lest they, too, should be caught in the torture machine of the Gestapo'[27].

As is so often the case in these initial reactions to the liberations, the ultimate judgment of the German character is passed to the future historian and to future generations, creating a strange sort of imbalance in the reporting. The commentator's essentially negative opinion of the Germans is often clear and yet they seem uncomfortable with making it outright - Murray continues; `Whether or not this is sufficient excuse for tolerating the hell camps and for vociferously acclaiming the men who had erected them is for posterity to decide'[28]. It is, especially as the months after liberation passed, an imbalance between condemnation and

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[25] Mrs. Mavis Tate, `I Can Credit Every Horror', in Lest We Forget, reproduced from the London Evening News, (3 May 1945), p.11.

[26] Lest We Forget, p.4.

[27] George Murray in Lest We Forget, p.5.

[28] Ibid, p.5.

conciliation traceable perhaps to that evident between an Allied vision of Germany as the defeated enemy and of a desire to ensure her rejuvenation, as Allied concerns turned toward the newly perceived threat of the Soviet Union and as the earliest elements of Cold War politics begun to be laid down. Murray's suggestions for the future of Germany follow those made by The Times letter writers but also amazingly use language utilised only days and weeks before by the Nazis themselves, phrases indicative of a failure to grasp the scale and systematic nature of the process of which Belsen and Buchenwald were part; `What is certain is that any people who could stand by with equanimity while such barbarism was being practised are in need of some special treatment as a race'[29]. That gap in understanding would be matched in General Dempsey's report from Belsen, when in an understatement with profound implications, he was to comment of the camp with seemingly genuine surprise; `There were very few plump people'[30].

The language used to describe Nazism itself and individual Germans is often equally revealing. Emphasis would often fall on the fact that many of the SS guards discovered in the liberated camps were women. Edwin Tetlow writing for the Daily Mail wrote of having witnessed Nazi women being forced to remove the corpses of their victims; the SS women, the eldest of whom was only 27, were unmoved by the grisliness of their task. One even smiled as she helped to bundle the corpses into the pit', comparing their reactions with those of the SS men; `They stood the ordeal worse than the women. They cringed and shrank and a dread fear was in their eyes'[31]. For the paper and for many commentators on the camps the Nazi women were the indictment of the evils of the system and again

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[29] Ibid, p.5.

[30] General Dempsey, `The Captives of Belsen; Internment Camp Horrors; British Officer's Statement' in The Times, 19 April 1945.

[31] Edwin Tetlow in Lest We Forget, 13.

the distinction between Nazi women and the women of Germany in general is blurred, as Mavis Tate suggests, `what also shocked me was the faces of so many ordinary German housewives of Weimar. Hard, hating, aggressive, truculent and evil. I have never seen anything approaching them until I returned home and saw the photographs of the women guards at Belsen camp. They were the same faces on different women'[32]. SS guards are described as `typical German brutes - sadistical, heavy featured Nazis - quite unashamed" and "ghouls'. In turn Murray's definition of Nazism as a whole once again suggests a fundamental gap in understanding with regard to the Nazis' motivation and to their victim s' identities, whilst in turn attempting to find a place for Nazism in history; `It sought to destroy Christian civilisation and to replace it by a dark and bloody paganism deriving directly from the savage tribes of ancient Germany'[33]. The fact that it was Jewish civilisation that the Nazis sought to destroy appears to have passed Murray by.

A similar attempt to find historical comparisons is made also in Murray's reference to the deaths of the French Revolution. The religious, Christian imagery used is subtly pervasive throughout Lest We Forget, perhaps not least in the very title itself, reminiscent as it is of the Armistice services established after the Great War or indeed, at the risk of stretching the analogy too far, in the cover photograph of a prisoner's dead body with arms outstretched as though crucified. However such an undercurrent was manifest, it's position alongside the evidence of the horrible discoveries of liberation seems at once untenable, becoming another example of the failings of the British and American initial reactions, generated by a perspective falling somewhere between a genuine shock and lack of knowledge with regard to the scale of the event of which liberation was merely the conclusion and a refusal to confront the facts of

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[32] Mavis Tate in Lest We Forget, p.12.

[33] Murray in Lest We Forget, p.5.

the event and of the identity of its victims to which they had had access long before it reached that very conclusion. Thus throughout, the Nazis are referred to as `Devils', and in the final photograph for which the caption reads, `Giving thanks for deliverance', unidentified prisoners at Bergen Belsen are shown kneeling before a cross in prayer[34]. Once more the identity of the prisoners and survivors is lost as indeed is the reality that the majority of those murdered and imprisoned at Belsen and indeed at the other liberated camps, were Jewish, in a type of Christian message of hope, so starkly out of place as a conclusion to such dreadful photographs.

Whilst initial Allied reaction does indeed seem to have focused upon the Nazis and the German people themselves, that is not to say that the victims and survivors of the liberated camps do not feature, although they cannot be disconnected from the influences of the former perspective and from that same concern with `truth telling' of which Lord Denham spoke. The language in which the papers and the correspondents were to describe those victims and survivors and the images they would construct of the conditions in the liberated camps themselves would also reveal much in terms of Allied understandings and perceptions of the events of liberation and of the Holocaust. As suggested by the Daily Mail's inclusion of General Dempsey's report under the heading `The Most Terrible Story of the War' and in which the paper comments, `Much of what the officer said cannot be printed'[35], there would be a tension in much of the initial reporting on the liberation between the faintly sensationalist language of the newspaper and a real and seemingly genuine sense that editors often felt the need to hold back details, as the right and proper thing to do both for their readers and for the victims themselves.

In The Times of 16 April, Buchenwald would be described

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[34] In Lest We Forget, Final Page.

[35] In Lest We Forget, p13.

as a `Camp of Death and Misery', and interestingly for a British newspaper, it is Buchenwald, its liberation and the subsequent activities of the American Army which seems to receive more attention than the liberation of Bergen Belsen by the British troops throughout April[36]. There is a preoccupation with the activities of the Americans discernible throughout and whilst the two countries were allies, there is also a sense of a British concern not to be outdone or surpassed by their American partners with regard to liberation, again particularly when it came to determining the future of the Germans. Prisoners in the camps are described as having died from `starvation, torture, hangings and shootings'. Descriptions of Nazi medical experiments are included and General Dempsey's report includes a section entitled `Cannibalism'; `There was no flesh on the bodies; the liver, kidneys, and hearts were knifed out'[37]. On 21 April in a report for The Times telling of the `Restoration of Buchenwald - Death Rate Slower', a witness records having seen "such things as lampshades, book covers and other things, which to satisfy the whim of the former commandant's wife, were made of human skin"[38]. On the same day a Reuters report records the use of bulldozers to bury corpses at Belsen and a continually high death rate[39].

Attempts to discern the numbers of dead vary across the press as in The Times on 24 April; `Detailed reports are not yet available at Supreme Headquarters from which any estimate can be made of the thousands of victims who have died of starvation, disease or worse, in such places as Buchenwald and

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[36] In The Times, 16 April 1945.

[37] In The Times, 19 April 1945.

[38] `Restoration At Buchenwald - Many Prisoners Removed - Death Rate Slower' in The Times, 21 April 1945.

[39] `Hundreds Dying In Belsen Camp' in The Times, 21 April 1945.

Belsen'[40]. However in Lest We Forget, numbers are referred to specifically and once again reveal the struggle of initial Allied reactions to come to grips with the realities of the Final Solution. With specific reference to the Nazis' Jewish victims the number of deaths is put at 5,000,000. However in making an essentially accurate distinction between the differing uses of the camps, the death toll for Auschwitz is put at a 4,000,000 minimum; `Some were sheer murder camps, used only for the reception of live men and women and for the production of dead bodies. Such a one was Auschwitz, where, it is reported, at least 4,000,000 people were done to death in circumstances of peculiar horror'[41]. Whilst numbers may be inaccurate and whilst the supplement suggests that gas chambers were `common to all camps', points which may be explained by the fact that many of the specific details of the Final Solution to which we have access today had not yet been pieced together in 1945, the Daily Mail does appear to grasp the scale of the camps; `They are called camps, but they were really towns whose industry was the performance of the blackest iniquities which one human being could practise against another'[42]. Despite the inaccuracies both with regard to details and more specifically with reference to the victim's identities, the reporting of such things, still dreadful today, (and there is no reason why they should lose their impact except that perhaps today we live in a world more accustomed to mass media horror), must indeed have had a huge impact on their readers.

The Nazis victims and the camp s' survivors themselves appear in these initial reactions on one level simply as `shrunken, pathetic figures', `shapeless forms', `pitiful wrecks' `shadow men for whom all hope, love, ambition, and

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[40] `Overrunning of German Camps - Heavy Task of Relief' in The Times, 24 April 1945.

[41] In Lest We Forget, p.4-5.

[42] Ibid, p.4.

emotion are past', `the living dead',[43] `Living skeletons' and as `human wreckage'[44], language which would combine a real sense of distress and pity or sympathy which need not be dismissed amongst the journalists and witnesses who were to see the camps, with a series of misconceptions and inaccuracies which would serve to further dehumanise the victims and survivors and to distance the realities of their experience both of liberation and of suffering as a whole from the British and Americans.

Often reports focused on the presence of so called `prominent prisoners' to the detriment of the complete picture of the camps' prisoner makeup, as for example in a US Army report published in The Times on 16 April which notes the one time presence in Buchenwald of Leon Blum, the Lord Mayor of Prague, a Director of the National Library in Paris and the death there of the daughter of the King of Italy, Princess Malfada, a point repeated in Lest We Forget[45]. The camp's inmates are described frequently as `political prisoners', as `opponents of the Nazi regime' and only rarely is any distinction made between the fate of Jews and non-Jews. Mavis Tate was to write; `At each of these camps we found four general classifications of prisoners; political prisoners, habitual criminals, conscientious and religious objectors and persons in prison for failure to work'[46]. Such a classification of the prisoners ensured that readers were never confronted with the fact that Jews were placed in these camps simply for being Jewish or with the idea that the Nazis simply did not need any `reason' recognisable in the normal sense of justice and punishment to place people in the camps. Thus even when Jews are identified as having been victims it is perceived to be as a result of their opposition to the Nazis, not of their Jewishness; `We found the entire programme constituted a

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[43] In Lest We Forget, various pages.

[44] In The Times, various pages.

[45] In The Times, 16 April 1945.

[46] Mavis Tate in Lest We Forget, p.11.

systematic form of torture and death administered to intellectual, political leaders and all others, including the Jews, who would not embrace and support the Nazi philosophy and programme'.[47]

Many of the reports from Belsen and Buchenwald would note the nakedness of the Nazis victims and the survivors, the proximity of surviving children to the corpses of dead women, and indeed the fate of women in general in the camps, raising some of the most frequently recurring points at which initial Allied reactions would engage with the victims and with the liberated. Much of the reaction to the camps in America and in Britain would focus not on the individual, or even upon the more brutal or systematic murder practices of the Nazis, but instead the papers and the war correspondents would constantly return to the relatively less brutal, but clearly equally distressing and absorbing aspects of the suffering inflicted and discovered in 1945. The focus is not so much on the large numbers of dead, on the especially horrific nature of their deaths, or on the possibility that those deaths may be connected. Instead the reporters and their reader's attention, perhaps in a peculiarly English manner in the case of The Times and Lest We Forget, lies with the affront to the dignity, privacy and decorum of the prisoners, either in their death or survival, inflicted upon them as a consequence of their surroundings as much as the result of any direct activity by the Nazis.

The surprised indignation, distress and anger evident in the reports of correspondents such as Richard Dimbleby from Belsen, at the scenes of naked men and women being forced to wash together with filthy water in a desperate attempt to keep themselves clean, of grown men being forced to check one another for lice, or fighting for scraps of food, is real; `There was no privacy of any kind. Women stood naked at the side of the track, washing in cupfuls of water taken from British Army trucks. Others squatted while they searched

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[47] In Lest We Forget.

themselves for lice, and examined each others hair'[48]. They are frequent images. In The Times of 19 April; `naked men and women tried to keep themselves clean with the dregs of coffee cups' and in the Daily Mail; `I saw men and women standing naked in the open, trying to get themselves clean with cupfuls of water from ponds and ditches'. The distress of women features particularly in these initial reactions. It would be a dominant theme in Dimbleby's 19 April 1945 report for the BBC from Belsen, entitled `The Cesspit Beneath'. Fellow war correspondent Wynford Vaughn-Thomas would describe the impact Belsen was to have on Dimbleby; `When next I met Richard he was a changed man..I had never seen Richard so moved. Until then I had always regarded Richard as a man who would never let his feelings show through his utterly professional surface efficiency. But here was a new Dimbleby, a fundamentally decent man who had seen something really evil and hated it with all his strength'[49].

Throughout, in perhaps one of the most personalised and genuinely sympathetic reactions to liberation, existing as it did beyond the need to sell newspapers, Dimbleby would make apparently simple and yet profound remarks as though to remind the reader that Belsen was not a product of an alien other world; `Babies were born in Belsen'. From the outset it is the women of the camp who command his attention; `I found a girl, she was a living skeleton, impossible to gauge her age for she had practically no hair left, and her face was only a yellow parchment sheet with two holes for eyes'[50]. He also records witnessing the distress of one female prisoner as she tried to give her child to a British soldier believing he might save it; `she put the baby in his arms and ran off crying that she would find milk for it because there was no milk in her

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[48] Richard Dimbleby `The Cesspit Beneath', in Leonard Miall (ed), Richard Dimbleby - Broadcaster, (Billing and Sons, London, 1966), p.44.

[49] Wynford Vaughn Thomas, "Outrage", in "Richard Dimbleby - Broadcaster", p.42.

[50] Richard Dimbleby, `The Cesspit Beneath'

breast. And when the soldier opened the bundle of rags to look at the child, he found that it had been dead for days'[51]. Dimbleby, despite the clear impact of the sights of Belsen upon him, would still write from within the distancing discourse applied across the Press to describe the prisoners - `Some of the poor starved creatures whose bodies looked so utterly unreal and inhuman that I could have imagined that they had never lived at all'[52]. However there is no sense that he sees any thing demeaning to the dead or to the survivors in using those phrases. It is rather that he cannot find any other words to describe them. He searches for metaphors, for descriptions adequate to the task in front of him, and when he does find an analogy there is a real sense that he uses it in the knowledge that it is wholly inadequate and it is in that feeling with which the reader goes away that the impact of his report lies. Describing bodies he wrote that they were `like polished skeletons, the skeletons that medical students like to play practical jokes with'[53].

Dimbleby would record a report on Belsen again one month later in a programme entitled The World Goes By in which the prisoners appear with more of a sense of their being human than evident in the first report[54]. Dimbleby did not however, in either account refer directly to the presence of Jews in the camp nor indeed to the possible reasons for their having been there; `In Belsen there were peasants, factory workers, and musicians, artists and the whole range of professional people'[55]. But not Jews? That account does include however a description which, of those published at the time, comes perhaps closest to the descriptions of liberation which may be found in the testimonies of the liberated survivors

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[51] Dimbleby, "The Cesspit Beneath".

[52] Ibid.

[53] Ibid.

[54] Dimbleby, The World Goes By", May 1945, reproduced in "Richard Dimbleby - Broadcaster", p.45.

[55] Dimbleby, "The World Goes By".

themselves; `People who had forgotten the simple customs and conventions of everyday life and were now lost in a terrible apathy brought about by unbearable misery, starvation, and the certainty of agonising death'[56]. Perhaps illustrating the impact Belsen was to have upon him, Dimbleby was to return to the site of the camp in 1959 and again in 1965. On that final journey Dimbleby would reveal the impact of his reports back in London, illustrating how far the ever present concern over `reliability' and `truth telling' in Allied reactions could extend to include the words of one of the most respected of broadcasters; `the report which I sent back from here caused a lot of worry at Broadcasting House. When they heard it, some people wondered if Dimbleby had gone off his head or something. I think it was only the fact that I'd been fairly reliable up to then that they believed the story. I broke down five times while I was recording it'[57]. Dimbleby was to conclude his report on Belsen with an interesting statement in terms of changing reactions to the events and images of liberation; `There is one thing you must do - something without which all measures of relief and succour would be but temporary remedies - and that is to vow with all your hearts that such terrible things shall never happen again'[58].

The words `Never Again' have today in many ways become the symbolic phrase of the Holocaust, of its memorialisation and indeed of the way in which it has come to be regarded in Britain and in America, featuring as it does in the title of books such as those by Martin Gilbert to accompany the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition and throughout the literature and commentary prompted by the inaugural Holocaust Memorial day in Britain on 27 January 2001. Today, as in the days after liberation, it a phrase with implications beyond its apparent simplicity, as its now frequent use creates the

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[56] Dimbleby, "The World Goes By".

[57] Dimbleby, "Return To Belsen 1965" reproduced in Richard Dimbleby - Broadcaster, p.47.

[58] Dimbleby, "The World Goes By".

concern that its meaning and the event to which it is supposed to refer will be lost, that it will become part of a `ritualised language' similar to that associated with Armistice Day which in turn allows the individual's engagement with the Holocaust and the maintenance of its memory to be limited either to one day a year or to the utterance of a neutral phrase. Once again in the months after liberation `Never Again' would refer to the Germans' activities and to the Allies' responsibility to ensure that they were never again in a position to repeat them. It was not the `Never Again' of today that is, if not completely, but largely victim - centric, focusing specifically on the suffering of the Jews, but rather is intimately connected to the Allies perception of themselves in relation to their enemy in his defeat.(That is not to say that British and American self perception can be detached from the present day understanding of this term. Indeed that very focus on the victims may equally serve UK and US today interests as the converse would do in 1945, in detracting from difficult questions of rescue and of the failure to instigate more direct action for the relief of those very victims). Thus whilst the initial reaction of `Never Again' may seem difficult in our present day knowledge of the extent to which the Allies were detached from the events of the Holocaust and of how much more they might have done, in fact, such a standpoint would be completely in keeping with their perpetrator- centric perspective, with the role created for themselves as being engaged in a right and just war against the evils of the Nazi system and with their policy of not distinguishing its victims for whom relief could only truly be achieved in victory. For them to say `Never Again' in 1945 and so to become the Germans' judge and jury was simply the natural conclusion to the standpoint they had taken in response to any news of the Nazi persecution of the Jews and their other targets throughout.

Witnessing the Nazis' abuse of the sanctity of the feminine, of the privacy of the body and of the bond between parent and child would have perhaps a more profound impact on these reporters and observers than the piles of corpses and it

is a point of real sympathy with the victims. And yet ultimately it would be on the prisoners' LOSS of those elements of life which once made them respectable human beings that the observers concentrate. In so doing the victims' degradation and humiliation is emphasised, the portrayal of which was such that it could not but isolate them from those for whom respectable still had a valid or relevant meaning, one not surpassed by the singular importance of survival over all else. In turn, feelings of disgust were not always accompanied by any real perception that these people were actually the survivors, despite their truly appalling situation, indeed that there had been something far worse than nakedness or dirtiness to have survived, that survival was not only physical, but mental and emotional too. Thus whilst the papers could not be accused of failing to show or to describe essentially accurate images of physical pain and distress, the victim's suffering is not represented or addressed as an end in itself, as a reality in its own right or as only the conclusion, however horrific, of a more prolonged and profound emotional experience. When reactions did focus on the victims and survivors themselves there remained then little sense of them as individuals, indeed as human beings with names and lives before the advent of the Holocaust. Instead, and shocking as it indeed was, attention is placed on their physical appearance and in so doing the reader's attention is once more returned to the Nazis. The physical suffering of the prisoners and their very own bodies do not appear to belong to them, but rather provide reporters and editors with the "proof" of Nazi depravity which they sought, becoming symbols to the outside world of Nazi brutality, not of the suffering of an individual person, as they are described variously as only still technically alive, as human guinea pigs, and as having thighs that were the size of a normal wrist. Essentially both Nazis and prisoners are dehumanised creating a point of unity between them which does no justice to the realities and consequences of the far more profound perpetrator/ victim connection between them, present throughout the years before liberation.

Finally, in his second report on Bergen Belsen, Richard Dimbleby was to write; `When I began this talk, I was going to try and divorce sentiment and practical measure of relief. But of course, you can't'[59]. What a study of the British and American initial reactions to the news of liberation would seem to suggest is that it is equally difficult to detach the nature and content of those reactions and their expression from the enduring complexities of the British and American relationship with the Holocaust, its perpetrators, its victims and its survivors.

[59] Dimbleby, "The World Goes By".

SECTION 3

Chapter 4: British Museums and the Holocaust; The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition

Introduction

This section of the thesis dealing with the representation of the Holocaust in a museum form will be based on the premise that the Holocaust museum serves as a concentrated illustration of the continuing difficulties of events such as Liberation, of their manifestation in the complex British self perceptions of their role as liberators and in the relationship between Britain and the Holocaust today. The museum serves not only as a key factor in an attempt to trace the roots of a British position on Holocaust memory but also provides one rich source for an exploration of the challenges of contemporary Holocaust representation, one which perhaps too often takes second place to the study of images of the Holocaust in literature, art or film. Drawing on resources for the study of museum historiography, the history of the role and significance of the museum in society will be addressed briefly. Also considered will be the extent to which a representation of the Holocaust might challenge conclusions or practices in the presentation of exhibitions otherwise considered to be the norm.

Questions such as `What is the purpose of a museum?', `To whom do museums belong?', `Whose past, present, culture of memories are truly represented?', take on a profound

significance when asked of a Holocaust museum and will be addressed in detail. Whilst making a specific case for the unique elements of Holocaust representation, the chapter will not seek to suggest that the Holocaust museum be placed beyond the realm of existing museum studies or to suggest that it should exist in a distinct category, but rather to illustrate how an attempt to bring the Holocaust within both the physical structures of a museum and intellectually within the realm of museum studies reveals the capacity of the event to continue to challenge the means available for that representation.

A consideration of the work in the field of museum studies will reveal the inherent connections between the museum and notions of memory, the idea at the centre of this thesis. The museum is perceived as a symbol of memory, especially on a national level, as the building that gives substance and even credence or justification to a memory through the physical representation of objects and text, a role which in turn bestows upon the museum a sense of authority and in turn a sense of authenticity upon the memory it constructs and represents, a role considered in detail later. The capacity of a museum to contain and accurately represent something as essentially ephemeral and individual as memory will be addressed, whilst the question of the extent to which it may be possible for a museum to represent the memory of a nation as a whole will be touched upon. Considering memory and the nature and content of a Holocaust museum also leads to questions regarding how far these museums could or should be interpreted as memorial sites or how far they may be

conscious of a difficulty when attempting to present an essentially historical representation of an event of mass murder without that representation simply becoming a memorial to the dead.

The visitor's guide to the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition has recently been revised to include on it's front page a favourable quotation from the Sunday Express writer David Robson, `Tireless searching for artefacts, relics and film has given us something which takes at least two hours to examine properly and, I suspect, will stay in the memory forever'.[1] Interestingly Robson does not speak of `my memory' when describing his reaction to the museum's exhibition but rather uses the phrase `the memory', conjuring notions of the existence of a wider, more universal memory beyond his own for which the exhibition's contents might have long term implications themselves existing beyond the physical boundaries of the London museum. Both Robson's turn of phrase and the prominent position of his comment on what serves as both advertising for, and an introduction to, the exhibition, illustrates how indelibly connected are notions of memory, it's preservation and representation and in turn the museum, it's contents, identity and place. A connection only deepened in it's complexity should that museum's subject be the Holocaust.

In her work entitled Museums and Memory Susan Crane has

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[1] David Robson, Sunday Express, included in The Holocaust Exhibition - Imperial War Museum - A Visitor's Guide, 2001

suggested that for those involved in the newly developing study of museums as a discipline in its own right, the question of memory and the significance of the development of theories of memory, particularly of collective memory, have been of consistent interest but are only recently being explored in any depth. In asking, `in what ways do museums and memories shape each other?'[2] , Crane seeks to illuminate both the nature of that complex relationship and in so doing to illustrate how far that connection may challenge or alter existing definitions of both the museum and the notion of memory.

What becomes clear is that in the same way as the subject and definition of memory is increasingly subject to change and debate, so to has the role and identity of the museum been seen to change and come under closer scrutiny in recent times. For Maurice Halbwachs, perhaps the most well known theorist of memory, individual memories depend on the existence of ` frameworks of collective memory' for their context and meanings. Thus the individual's expression of their own memory is dependent on the context of the times in which they live.[3] In turn French scholar Pierre Nora considered the relationship between notions of collective memory and history, arguing that history had taken the place of that memory in the consciousness of the modern society. In the absence of collective memory Nora suggests, `sites of memory' are

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[2] Susan Crane, (ed) Museums and Memory, (Stanford University Press; Stanford, 2000), p.1.

[3] Maurice Halbwachs, The Collective Memory, (New York; Harper and Row, 1980).

constructed as a means to organise the past and to cope with modernity. These sites, rather than the actual realities of collective memory, became key to the construction of new notions of collective identity, giving the institutions or bodies of which they form part an extensive degree of influence over society.[4]

The establishment of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition in London has ensured for Holocaust representation in Britain the prominence of a capital city location and the possibility of a far wider and more diverse public audience. The significance of the development and content of this major museum exhibition for the study of present day Holocaust representation naturally extends beyond the nonetheless noteworthy addition of the Holocaust to the British tourist and museum visiting itinerary. A study of the impact of this exhibition in Britain forms the basis of this section of the thesis whose overall primary interest lies with the complex relationship between Britain, the Holocaust and the formation of a British memory and sense of identity in relation to the Holocaust and its victims and survivors. The exhibition and the enduring debate that surrounds each detail of its existence, from its immediate location and surrounding environment to its source of funding, chosen content and design may be seen as a concentrated illustration of Britain's unique understanding and perception of itself in relation to the Holocaust. This chapter will therefore argue that the

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[4] Pierre Nora, `Between Memory and History; Les Lieux de Memoire', in Representations, (Vol 26, No. 7, Spring 1989).

formation of a distinctly British position with regard to the Holocaust, its victims and its survivors which may often be traced to the years of the Holocaust itself, permeates and defines the nature of this exhibition and thus of Holocaust representation as a whole in Britain. The centrality of a museum representation of the Holocaust in the formation of a national memory of the event, particularly in a country where the Holocaust did not take place is also clear in the United States for example. Here the development and content of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington raises many of the same issues as those surrounding the Imperial War Museum's exhibition in terms of both museum representation and Holocaust memory and will provide a useful point of comparison throughout. The London museum's content may be regarded not simply as a source of information about the Holocaust but also as an insight into both past and present day British self perception. Both British and American exhibitions reveal much with regard to the formation of that which may be defined as a Holocaust memory in Britain and America and to the public and organised expression and representation of that memory in two countries where the real and lived experience of the event remembered is absent. The notion of memory is at the root of the thesis as a whole and here is considered in terms of its connection to the role perceived for the museum as an entity in its own right by both the visitors and by those who fund, control and design their content. The question of memory is also considered in attempting to assess the presence of a national narrative of remembrance in Britain and the manner in which the Holocaust has, through the museum exhibitions

themselves and indeed through the establishment of days of national Holocaust remembrance, been introduced to that narrative. The museums provide a unique insight into British and American understandings of the Holocaust and of an attempt to assimilate the event and its "memory" into an existing and powerful narrative of national remembrance and representation. Essentially the two museums can be seen as a product of the complex and apparently contradictory process in Britain and America of forming a memory of the Holocaust without a physical past experience from which to draw that memory. In the place of that lived experience as a source of motivation and indeed justification for the presence of these two exhibitions, was to be found a gradual and slowly developing self conscious recognition in both countries, influenced by a discernable upsurge in interest in the Holocaust, of the absence of any physical and public representation of the realities of the Holocaust and of the lives of its victims and survivors. The two museum exhibitions may be regarded as concessions firstly to that external trend and later to that British and American self consciousness. Indeed an exploration of the Holocaust museum representations, within the framework of this thesis and thus with specific reference to London's Holocaust exhibition, illustrates the advent of such a self consciousness, the extent to which both countries were influenced by one another, and how far the reality of forming memory from absence has impacted upon the type of `Holocaust' with which visitors to these two museums are presented. The chapter will argue that the London exhibition is testament not to an attempt to explore and represent unique aspects of

British connections to the events of the Holocaust, but to that very present day self consciousness, simply to the desire to be seen to have such museum a exhibition at all. It is a point of contention that ensures the chapter must also consider the extent to which the museum exhibition has changed or challenged existing British perceptions of the Holocaust, its victims and survivors. Further it will be useful to question the impact of this Holocaust representation upon British visitors and to assess how far and with what consequences the Holocaust has been assimilated into a British or indeed an American narrative of remembrance as a result of the presence of such Holocaust museum exhibitions.

Within the main focus upon the relationship between Britain and the Holocaust, we will further consider the equally revealing interaction between the museum and the Holocaust. As studies of memory, of Holocaust memory and of Holocaust representation as a whole have rapidly developed, so too have those areas of museology concerned with the changing nature and role of the museum in present day society as we have seen. The impact of an attempt to represent the Holocaust within a museum setting on the traditional or accepted practices of museum ethos, planning, construction and layout will be addressed. Furthermore the debate over the very possibility of an accurate representation of the events of the Holocaust within the structured and controlled environment of a museum is raised, illustrating the close links between those questions that continue to be asked regarding the representation of the Holocaust in other mediums such as

literature, art and film.

Indeed what does it mean to be a "Holocaust museum"? The chapter will ask whether there are changes a museum must make to accommodate the Holocaust and more specifically whether the British exhibition under examination have felt any such changes necessary, concluding that a process of adaption and change of both the museum and of the Holocaust is a mutual consequence of their interaction, a process that, it may well be argued, is unique to the `Holocaust museum'. The question then becomes centred on the consequences of that process of adaption for Holocaust representation in Britain.

To begin this chapter the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition, opened by HM The Queen in June 2000 is considered in detail. First in that assessment will therefore be a consideration of the Imperial War Museum within the context of a study of the museum in general. The role of the museum and its connection to the events and remembrance of World War One will provide a means to consider how the museum is regarded by those who visit it and the extent of its role in the formation of British national discourses of remembrance and representation of past events, particularly of those deemed to be of universal national significance. Without that illustration of the museum's own history and of the perceived significance of its contents, it would prove difficult to establish a sense of the environment into which the Holocaust exhibition has been placed. It is an environment that, the chapter will argue, permeates the contents, design and narrative of the exhibition and is an influence from which visitors cannot be distanced. In turning to consider the

Holocaust exhibition itself, the history and initial conception of the idea for such an exhibition will be focused upon and followed through an assessment of the various debates surrounding suggestions for the location, content and funding of the planned exhibition. Questions raised at this stage of the exhibitions' history continued beyond its opening and in the following parts of the chapter are traceable when the particular objects and artifacts that make up the body of the exhibition and are themselves often subjects of some controversy, are looked at in detail. The exhibition structure, content and narrative will be the chapter's main focus and will raise points regarding the chronology chosen by the exhibition's curators, the language of the accompanying narrative, and the use of lighting, sound and video in the presentation of displays and of objects. In conjunction with this overview of the exhibition as a whole, the chapter will identify both particular areas and objects or artifacts that may be regarded as significant or indeed have been highlighted as such by the curators for the visitor's attention.

Specifically amongst these and with particular relevance to the wider aims of the thesis in placing such museums within a framework of British attitudes to the Holocaust and its representation, considerable space will be given to an assessment of the area allocated within the British exhibition to the Liberation of the concentration camps in Western Europe in 1945. As perhaps THE primary point of connection between Britain and the Holocaust, Liberation and the way in which it is remembered and represented by the museum provides a key

insight into the way in which Britain perceives itself and its role in relation to the Holocaust and to its' victims and survivors, both groups being indelibly connected with the events, images and experiences of Liberation. As an event experienced by troops both from Britain and America, Liberation and the manner in which it is displayed, its position within the narrative of the exhibition as a whole and the objects and images used within the specific display, provides one of the most direct and useful points of comparison between the London and Washington museums and naturally between the two countries. As part of an ongoing exploration throughout the thesis of the existence of something which might be termed a `Liberator identity' in the British, the chapter will argue that many of Britain's and indeed America's responses and reactions to the sights and sounds of Liberation and particularly to the Liberated themselves laid down in 1945, have endured and are evident in the exhibition's present day representation of the event.

A study of the use and display of objects and artifacts within an museum environment will provide a starting point for a more detailed consideration of prominent objects in the London Holocaust exhibition, including for example the use of sections of a deportation railway carriage or the inclusion of shoes belonging to the victims of Auschwitz Birkenau brought from the camp site itself to the exhibition. The implications of the movement of these objects from their original environment and the reasons behind the curator's decisions to include or transport them are considered as a further means to

understand the motivation behind the establishment of such an exhibition. The objects themselves also raise once more similar questions of Holocaust representation seen in the study of literature or art pertaining to the Holocaust, not least regarding the very possibility of their being able to relay to visitors any true sense of the realities of the Holocaust environment from which they originated. They are questions that once more serve to illustrate the necessity of including museums that take the Holocaust as their subject within the focus of the study of Holocaust representation as a whole.

In turning to explore visitor reactions to the exhibition in London the chapter will seek to consider the impact of the exhibition upon those who visit it. The chapter will discuss the position of the Holocaust, of its representation and of any so called British Holocaust memory in the country since the opening of the exhibition, asking what may have changed and assessing the place of the exhibition as it reaches its third year.

The Museum, Memory and the Holocaust[5]

If the question `What is a museum?' appears to be a simple one with a simple answer conjuring images of the collection and storage of the signposts of the past, of a hushed, even

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[5] Susan Crane, (ed), Museums and Memory, (Stanford University Press, Stanford, 2000), p1.

refined atmosphere in which the visitor could, or perhaps should, learn `the lessons of history', of glass cabinets and today of interactive exhibitions, the museum shop and the worksheet clutching school child, then studies of the way in which the identity, role, design and contents of the museum have changed and developed suggest instead the extent to which that simple question does in fact generate complex debate. When that question becomes `What is a Holocaust museum?' then the complexities surrounding Holocaust representation in all forms are only added to the peculiarities of any such Holocaust presentation in a museum setting. The museum is one of the most recognisable symbols in our society and many people will encounter and experience museums throughout their lives. Their motivation for such a visit may change with time from the mandatory school visit to a holiday visit made in order to see a specific display, object or exhibition. Whilst they may arrive at the museum to be entertained, to learn, or to sightsee, the majority would largely recognise the significance and may even speak of the necessity of the presence of such museums. It is a universal recognition that has led museologist Susan Crane to speak of a `shared museal consciousness', that understands the significance of `collecting, ordering, representing, and preserving information in the way that museums do, a sensibility that has become more common in modernity than ever before'.[6] Whilst, as Crane suggests, the pace, diversity and disparity of modern living might generate an increased desire for the controlled order offered by our perception of the museum, any such sense

[6] Susan Crane, Museums and Memory, p1 - 2.

of order or consensus with regard to the content and meaning of that very museum representation may be increasingly difficult to identify. The museum, its role and place are changing always and it is in this period of flux that the two Holocaust exhibitions that form the basis of this study were developed and opened. Today a museum faces competition for an audience who are themselves increasingly demanding and as a result of the removal of admission fees from many major exhibits in Britain may become more numerous. Museums take on multiple identities, providing not only a repository for the objects, documents and artifacts of the past, but also must strive to create an environment that is both educational, interactive and now more than ever, entertaining.

The increasing competition between those aspects of a museum's identity is at the root of the continually changing definition of a museum's purpose and may also be at the root of a museum's struggle to retain its funding and visitor numbers. The museum becomes a `mass medium' and `spectators in ever larger numbers seem to be looking for emphatic experiences, instant illuminations, stellar events and blockbuster shows rather than serious and meticulous appropriation of cultural knowledge'.[7] Should we therefore bemoan the loss of the museum as the site of `cultural knowledge' and liken the content and design of the modern museum instead to the film, advertising or television industries?; `Banners and billboards on museum fronts indicate how close the museum has moved to the world of spectacle, of

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[7] Andreas Huyssen, `Escape From Amnesia: The Museum As Mass Medium' in Twilight Memories; Marking Time in a Culture of Amnesia, (Routledge, London, 1995), p.14.

the popular fair and mass entertainment. The museum itself has been sucked into the maelstrom of modernisation'.[8] Identified as foremost amongst the demands of modernisation faced by museums are the needs to satisfy sponsors and to appeal to the tourist; `museum shops are managed and advertised as major spectacles with calculable benefits for sponsors, organisers, and city budgets, and the claim to fame of any major metropolis will depend considerably on the attractiveness of its museal sites'.[9] Such concerns with regard to the impact of modernity upon the museum and particularly any closeness between the museum and the sources of entertainment at the heart of a mass media society evoke the words of Foucault who perceived the existence of an opposition between the museum and sources of entertainment such as the travelling fair, between static ordered representation and moving, loud chaos.[10] Foucault's distinction would also apply to the individuals who visited the museum and the travelling fair, to a belief in the ability of the museum to regulate and control the conduct of its visitors through a process described by one recent study as `organised walking'.[11] By comparison the open, moving nature of the fair ensured it attracted the uncontrolled, unregulated masses. It was a distinction which would identify the museum an having an authoritative role and as a source of control in society as a whole. That sense of authority is a

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[8] Andreas Huyssen, Escape From Amnesia, p.21.

[9] Ibid, p.21.

[10] Michael Foucault, `Of Other Spaces' in Diacritics, (1986) cited in Tony Bennett, (ed), The Birth of the Museum, (Routledge, London, 1995), Introduction.

[11] Tony Bennett, The Birth of the Museum, p.6.

key part of the museum's identity, of the manner it which a museum is perceived by its visitors and in its role as an educator. A study of the Imperial War Museum will however suggest that despite any inroads made by the demands of modern day entertainment, a museum's authority and particularly its ability to endow its contents with a degree of authenticity in the mind of its visitors, a concept explored in more detail later, endures and impacts upon the visitor's perception of the Holocaust with which they are presented.

The question of entertainment in relation to a museum exhibition dealing with the Holocaust seems an anomaly and indeed criticisms are often directed at the proximity of such Holocaust representations to other displays on so called lighter subjects, to the museum shop , or to other attractions whose subject might be regarded as detracting from the seriousness of a Holocaust exhibition. For the Holocaust exhibition concern over the place of entertainment often lies in attempting to strike the balance between utilising all modern means to explain and represent the event and falling into a situation whereby the exhibition is defined by its methods of display and not by the events of the Holocaust themselves. As a study of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum concludes, `the question remains the same; how to elucidate without lapsing into entertainment'.[12] The question of entertainment becomes relevant again in a consideration of the museum's use of interactive technology within the Holocaust exhibitions. Museum curators' concerns with regard

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[12] Adrian Dannatt, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum; James Ingo Freed - Architecture In Detail, (Phaidon Press, London, 1995), p.6.

to striking that balance between keeping a visitor entertained and avoiding accusations of bad taste and insensitivity may also affect the very structure of the museum building itself and were foremost in the thinking of James Ingo Freed, the architect who designed the building for the USHMM; `Any such building must show the human capacity for barbarism and vandalism whilst proving, once again, that we are also capable of creativity and construction'.[13]

Freed's words also indicate a debate that may be considered an extension of that regarding entertainment. How can a museum find a way to contain and to illustrate the truths of the Holocaust without making the content of their exhibition so unbearable that the visitors simply can not face seeing it? The desire to ensure that a Holocaust exhibition does not descend into the gratuitous, running the risk both of putting off a majority of visitors or indeed of attracting those whose curiosity regarding the worst aspects of the Nazis Final Solution outweighs their interest in the whole story of the Holocaust, may often lead curators to seek for, if not a happy ending, then for something `positive' to include in their exhibition.[14] The inclination toward finding that positive may be traceable throughout the narrative of the Holocaust exhibition and may have as many consequences for the `type' of Holocaust with which the visitor is presented as any

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[13] Adrian Dannatt, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, p.6.

[14] For further discussion of concerns over `swamping' the British public with images of the Holocaust see Hannah Caven, `Horror In Our Time; Images of the Concentration Camps in the British Media, 1945', Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, (Vol 21, No. 3, 2001), p.227 onward.

use of modern media within the museum setting. A consideration of the nature of both the London exhibition's sections dealing with Liberation will suggest that it is often this event and the involvement of their own country in it, that provides the British or indeed American curators particularly with the opportunity to ensure that their visitor's spirits are lifted if only momentarily throughout the exhibition.

Finally the raison d'etre of the exhibition is to be seen and curators must tread with a caution perhaps reserved only for the museum display of the Holocaust. In the case of the Holocaust exhibitions in Britain and America there is an additional discernible sense of pressure upon the exhibition's curators to ensure their work is seen, not least perhaps, as a means to justify the exhibition's presence and to placate potential critics. Indeed both London and Washington museums are proud of, and are keen to point out, their annual visitor numbers.

A crucial part of a museum's identity is defined by its relationship with its immediate environment and with the people who use it. How far should the museum be largely defined by the demands of its audience or retain an individuality shaped by its collection? Adrian Dannatt highlights the difficult balance a museum faces; `the museum must become assimilated whilst maintaining its own values, be part of a society whilst unique and resolutely independent'.[15]

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[15] Adrian Dannatt, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, p.8.

The question of the place of a museum in the society which surrounds it is of particular concern for the Holocaust exhibitions in London and Washington. Their location was a source of contention from their very inception and was used by both those who sought to support such projects and by those who questioned their relevance and relative importance. The presence of such museums in either country was questioned due to their being no direct experience of the Holocaust in either, whilst their eventual capital city locations and their position amongst other museums, buildings or monuments was a source of debate. If a museum in its own right must face a process of `assimilation' into its surrounding environment, then what are the consequences of attempting a similar merging process with a Holocaust exhibit in the powerfully symbolic surroundings of central London or indeed in Washington D.C? In the case of the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition that occupies a purpose built extension of the museum's original building, the question of just where that exhibition fits is not simply one of its relationship to the society in which the museum stands, but also of the Holocaust's place in relation to the museum's other exhibits. A study of the exhibition itself must ask how far it has been successfully assimilated into the established and powerful narrative of the war museum, dominated as it is by the story of British involvement in conflict. The construction of the purpose built extension illustrates the museum curators' struggle with finding a place for the Holocaust. Not wishing to exclude the Holocaust from the rest of the museum, they were still faced with the difficulty of making clear to the visitor the

Holocaust's essential differences. What then in terms of the Imperial War Museum's exhibition are the consequences of an attempt to make room both physically and figuratively for the Holocaust? Once more the museum representation of the Holocaust meets the wider questions regarding the place and representation of the Holocaust, not least in terms of the historical narrative itself. To place the Holocaust exhibition beyond the boundaries of the museum is as much to place it beyond the grasp of history, to suggest that it is somehow an alien occurrence beyond the understanding of the museum's audience with risk of losing its relevance and significance for present day society, as excluding the subject from academic historical analysis. And yet this is a museum of twentieth century warfare in which the representation of the Holocaust may seem an uncomfortable interruption. Of course to convey that sense of an interruption, or of a break in the seamlessness of the history otherwise on display may have been the intention. However whilst the Holocaust is that dreadful interruption and does not represent an act of war that might be included amongst the museum's other exhibits, ultimately the chapter will argue that any such sense of difference is lost. The exhibition is uncomfortably assimilated by that which surrounds it as the language, design and narrative of the existing exhibits permeates the Holocaust representation throughout. To the consequences of such a process the chapter will return.

The problems of place affect the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum equally despite its status as a self-contained

museum. Many of the debates surrounding the museum's design centred on the proposed position for the museum building on Washington's Mall, placing the museum within sight of some of the most powerful symbols of America's past and of American identity; `Washington D.C is a chain of symbols and monuments, producing a very American awe segueing into entertainment. Though all monuments are meant to be symbolic they seem oddly more so in Washington'.[16] Once more it would be the role of American soldiers in the events of Liberation that would be cited in response to questions regarding the necessity and relevance of representing in America an event that occurred in Europe and whose victims, perpetrators and survivors were European.

Scholars of museology argue that the legacy of community empowerment and of the self determination movements of the 1960's have changed our relationship with, and perception of, the museum to the extent that `virtually sacred spaces in the past, museums have become hotly contested battlegrounds'.[17] The Victorian vision of the museum, it is argued, has been surpassed by the changes in the identity of the museum's audience; `contemporary museums are potentially accountable to diverse constituencies instead of being subject to the whims of a single wealthy patron or collector'[18]. One scholar identifies the `democratisation' of the museum, whilst Edward

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[16] Adrian Dannatt, United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, p.8.

[17] Steven Dubin, Displays of Power; Memory and Amnesia in the American Museum, (New York University Press; New York, 1999).

[18] Ibid, p9.

T. Linenthal who has charted the development of Holocaust museums in America including the USHMM, has commented that `contemporary museums are more like forums than temples'.[19] The demands of this perceived change in a society's relationship with a museum are seen to impact on the place of the museum so that it `no longer merely provides a pleasant refuge from ordinary life, nor are they simple repositories for received wisdom'.[20] The modern museum may instead find itself at the centre of debates over the accurate and authentic representation of a people's identity and culture. A museum must aim to successfully represent a country's multicultural society both in terms of the exhibitions relating to the events of the past and through the manner in which they select which exhibitions might be relevant, interesting and representative for the lives of their present day visitors. Those choices illustrate the role a museum plays in endowing particular cultures, experiences or events with a degree of importance and of permanence to the extent that; `Museums solidify culture, endow it with a tangibility, in a way few other things do'.[21] Our perception of the museum as a site of learning and the accompanying assumption that we will be exposed to `culture' within its walls ensures that, that which is included within the museum is assumed to be of significance and of importance, whilst that which is excluded is not only perceived as less important but may also without the convenient and easy access of a museum representation go

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[19] Edward T. Linenthal, Preserving Memories

[20] Steven Dubin, Displays of Power, p.5.

[21] Ibid, p.3.

unnoticed completely. Once more it is the notion of authenticity that the museum generates for its exhibitions and it is a powerful one; `The authenticity of lived experience is a powerful credential to invoke, and it is virtually impossible for someone else to rebut without seeming arrogant or insensitive'.[22]

That unwillingness to question or to criticise a museum's display of an event or experience is frequently attributed to Holocaust museums where the visitor, often unable to disconnect the exhibition and the work of the museum from the realities of the event presented, senses that questions or doubts are not only out of place or callous but tantamount to a slur on the memory and suffering of the Holocaust's victims. In turn that sense of the museum's authority and of the sensitive nature of its content in the case of the Holocaust exhibitions extends to a sense of obligation in the visitor. A Holocaust exhibit becomes something which must be seen, a visit simply being `the right thing to do'. It is a reaction which often serves to further limit the expression of questions or concerns amongst the visitors. This influential combination of a sense of authenticity and of obligation that is so intimately connected with the perception of the role of the museum itself amongst its visitors and in general society may be seen at work in the visitor reactions to the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust exhibit included in the latter stages of this chapter.

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[22] Steven Dubin, Displays of Power, p.5.

It is not simply the details of a particular event or experience that are endowed with that degree of authority generated by their inclusion within a museum. More accurately it is a memory of the event that is recorded and indeed endorsed by the museum and it is with notions of memory and remembrance that a museum is most indelibly connected. Susan Crane writes, `Being collected means being valued and remembered institutionally; being displayed means being incorporated into the extra institutional memory of the museum visitor'.[23] The museum thus serves both functions in formulating an institutional, established memory endowed with a sense of authority through the very collection of the objects relating to the event remembered, whilst influencing the wider memories of the museum visitor through its display of those objects. The choices over that which is collected and that which is displayed are both however those of the museum and its curators. Whilst a visitor may possess what Crane describes as an `extra institutional memory' it may be argued that such a memory can never fully be disconnected from that formulated and controlled by the museum.

The contents of a museum are regarded as being of collective significance by their very presence within the museum, whilst the presence of the museum itself confirms for a community or for a country, the existence of a past that whilst in need of preservation nonetheless existed and is in itself reconfirmed by the very process of preservation within the museum. The `remembered' authority granted to a museum allows it to select and construct its own memory

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[23] Susan Crane, Museums and Memory, p.2.

interpretations and representations, apparently bringing to something as essentially ephemeral as memory a sense of stability; `the fixing of memory in the museum constitutes an apparent permanence of the recollected, organised in static time and space'[24]. The narrative that accompanies a museum exhibition should often be regarded as an extension of this controlling element in the museum's representation choices. The narrative in turn may exert no small degree of control over the visitor, conditioning their reactions to, and interpretations of, that which is presented to them;

> `the institutional nature of the museum has encouraged the construction of narratives that inhibit random access in favour of orderly, informative meaning - formation. It is worth inquiring whether the memories associated through objects to form meaningful narratives do not in effect prevent other memories from being associated with individual objects, stifling the multiple possible meanings of any single object perceived subjectively'.[25]

As becomes clear in terms of the Holocaust exhibitions, the choice, location, display and description of a particular object or image plays a key role in influencing the type of Holocaust with which visitors leave. The direction and content of the narrative may also serve to condition their conclusions on the subject so that they are homogenous with those preconceived for the exhibition by the museum and its

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[24] Susan Crane, Museums and Memory, p.4.

[25] Ibid, p.4.

curators.

`The issue of remembrance and forgetting touches the core of Western identity, however multi faceted and diverse it may be'.[26] The museum audience will bring with them their own memory of the museum and in turn will arrive with their own memories, be they a product of actual experience or not, of that which is presented to them in the museum. That a visitor's memories need not be a product of experience is best illustrated by the example of an recent American exhibition addressing the Second World War. The National Museum of American History opened its World War Two exhibition with the words `We all remember World War Two'. As Steven Lubar comments, it is at first a strange statement in the sense that only a certain age group can say honestly that they remember the war and yet Lubar continues, `in another deeper sense we do all remember the war. We remember it in family stories, national mythology, the history we learned in school and the movies we saw on television'[27]. This type of memory without experience, accompanied by the powerful effects of nostalgia, something that should be regarded as much a partner of memory as forgetting and to which the chapter returns, are often more prevalent than those generated by actual experience. They are able to permeate whole societies and are maintained through organised rituals of remembrance such as Armistice or Veterans Day. The representation in a museum of artifacts associated

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[26] Andreas Huyssen, `Monuments and Holocaust Memory in a Media Age', in Twilight Memories, p.251.

[27] Steven Lubar, `Exhibiting Memories', in Amy Henderson and Adrienne Kaeppler, (eds), Exhibiting Dilemmas; Issues of Representation at the Smithsonian, (Smithsonian Institute Press; Washington, 1997), p.15.

with these events ensures that the memories they signal, `then become components of identities - even for individuals who would in no other way feel connected to these objects'.[28] The museum audience may seek to have their `memories' challenged, although more often a fundamental part of their museum - going enjoyment and of their motivation for their visit, stems from a desire to see those memories confirmed. They may seek in the museum a type of reassurance and an affirmation of a memory that forms a distinct part of their sense of identity, more often than not because that same memory conception occupies a similar place in the identity of their community or country. Indeed, `the potential target audience of the representation of the past has an important role to play, for it is usually a construct - hidden or overt - of the exhibition narrative'.[29]

If a museum is both a product of, and subject to, the memories of the individual visitor then it is no less conditioned in the nature of its representations by the memories of the country in which it exists. The museum in the national context may be used to maintain memories that have been identified as of collective importance as Wallis suggests, `Visual representations are a key element in symbolising and sustaining national communal bonds'.[30] It is a point which suggests that despite the demands and diversity of

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[28] Susan Crane, Museums and Memory, p.3.

[29] Arvella Azoulay, `With Open Doors; Museums and Historical Narratives In Israel's Public Space', in Daniel Sherman and Iritt Rogoff, (eds), Museum Culture; Histories, Discourses and Spectacles, (Routledge, London, 1994), p.100.

[30] Brian Wallis, `Selling Nations; International Exhibitions and Cultural Diplomacy', in Sherman and Rogoff, (eds), Museum Culture, p.271.

its modern audience, the museum may still be subject to the control and politics of those in power. In turn the museum may be used to construct an image of a country's history that seeks to exclude, `unflattering, embarrassing, or dissonant viewpoints' so that,

> `through the engineered overproduction of certain types of images or the censorship or suppression of others, and through controlling the way images are viewed or by determining which are preserved, cultural representations can also be used to produce a certain view of a nation's history'.[31]

The museum becomes key in a process of confirming national Self image and is utilised to ensure the place of a particular country in the eyes of another;

> `in order to establish their status within the international community, individual nations are compelled to dramatise conventionalised versions of their national images, asserting past glories and amplifying stereotypical differences'.[32]

And yet if, as James Young has commented, `memory is never shaped in a vacuum; the motives of memory are never pure', how far might we realistically expect the museum and its chosen

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[31] Brian Wallis, Selling Nations in Sherman and Rogoff, (eds), Museum Culture, p.271.

[32] Ibid, p.271.

form of representation to exist beyond the influence of the national memories, real or constructed, of the country in which it is placed?[33] Moreover how might we expect this of a Holocaust museum in London or Washington?

The Imperial War Museum perhaps more than many other museums is indelibly connected to British national memories, ideals and self perceptions. The museum, housed in buildings formerly occupied by the Bethlem Royal Hospital for the insane was founded by the British government in 1917 as a national war museum with the purpose of displaying objects relating to the Great War as it was being fought. The museum stores, displays and preserves material relating to the two world wars and other conflicts that have involved Britain and the Commonwealth countries since 1914. Holdings on the Great War are particularly extensive, ranging from archive photography and recruitment posters to the salvaged engine of the Fokker DR 1 triplane flown by Baron Von Richthofen. The museum's entrance is dominated by the twin 15 inch Royal Navy gun barrels that signal the primary nature of the rest of the museum's contents. The museum's inception was therefore based in a conflict, and significantly victory in a conflict, that would shape British attitudes to warfare and to the memorialisation of warfare for the following century. The war museum stands alongside the poppy and Armistice Day in having a key role in the way in which the First World War and those that followed it are remembered and memorialised in Britain

[33] James Young, The Texture of Memory; Holocaust Memorials and Meaning, (Yale University Press, London, 1993).

and as such is perceived by many of its visitors as having the status of a memorial as well as that of a museum. That dual role of museum and memorial is one often cited in the case of the Holocaust museums or exhibitions. In the case of the Imperial War Museum, the Holocaust exhibition and any possible memorial role it might have must exist alongside and indeed become secondary to the more powerful and established memorial narrative generated by the museum's initial raison d'etre of 1917. Young states, `memorials and museums constructed to recall the Holocaust remember events according to the cue of national ideals, the cast of political dicta'.[34] Believing that each `site of memory' must be allowed to suggest its own definition of the Holocaust, each in turn to be grasped in its local context (and both of the museums discussed here may be said to have that locally influenced definition of the Holocaust), Young concludes; `In every nation's memorials and museums, a different Holocaust is remembered, often to conflicting political and religious ends'.[35] Andreas Huyssen writes, `we have come to recognise that our present will inevitably have an impact on what and how we remember. It is important to understand that process, not to regret it in the mistaken belief that some ultimately pure, complete and transcendent memory is possible'.[36] In the case of the Holocaust the influence of the present on museum representations and indeed the implausibility of their

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[34] James Young, The Texture of Memory, Introduction.

[35] Ibid, Introduction.

[36] Andreas Huyssen, `Monuments and Holocaust Memory in a Media Age' in Twilight Memories, p.249.

representing a `pure' memory of the event displayed may be clear. Nevertheless not to question the extent of, and motivation behind, those present day influences, to settle for the inevitability of a museum representation shaped by them and so not to question the consequences of that representation for the memory of the Holocaust, echoes the arguments levelled against those who may seek to question or criticise the exhibitions in general - namely that the very presence of the Holocaust exhibition in whatever form should be enough. If the representation of a `real' memory of the Holocaust cannot, and perhaps should not, be the exhibition's aim, then an accurate understanding and representation of the consequences of the dilution of that original memory and of the external influences upon it, must be, not a point of regret for a London or Washington exhibition, but a starting point.

Deciding On and Developing A Holocaust Exhibition

Before the opening of the large permanent exhibition on the Holocaust in June 2000, the Imperial War Museum's only concession to the growing interest in the Holocaust was a small exhibition entitled `Belsen 1945', opened in 1991 and displayed for the following ten years. This exhibition drew the visitors attention primarily to the role of liberating British troops in the camp. Belsen, its victims and survivors were not presented as part of a narrative of Jewish suffering during the Holocaust. Imagery from the liberation of Belsen would feature prominently in the new exhibition and whilst that representation would dwarf its predecessor, the focus on

the British role in Liberation would endure.

The Imperial War Museum's decision to proceed with a full scale permanent exhibition on the Holocaust was officially announced by the chair of the museum's Board of Trustees, Field Marshall Lord Bramall, a Normandy campaign veteran on 23 April 1996. A publication of the War Museum's Report bulletin on the progress of the proposed exhibition illustrates the role perceived by the museum for the developing exhibition.[37] The report cites the Director General of the museum, Robert Crawford for whom the location of the museum and the `need' to put the events of the Holocaust `on record' in a British capital city location were of prime concern;

> `We have long felt it necessary to develop at our headquarters building in Southwark a major narrative historical exhibition which will place on record forever in the UK's capital, the hideous story of the Nazi regime's persecution and destruction of the Jews of Europe'.[38]

Crawford does not specify exactly when the concept of a Holocaust exhibition had been first discussed and there would appear to have been no desire to make any additions or changes to the existing `Belsen 1945' exhibit before this point. Nevertheless within the report the museum is concerned to provide examples of the connections between Britain and the Holocaust and thus to justify the presence and uses of such an

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[37] Imperial War Museum Report, Holocaust Exhibition Report, (London, Winter 1996/7).

[38] Ibid, p.2.

exhibition in the country. The report points to the proposed introduction of the Holocaust on to the National Curriculum and to the dwindling numbers of Holocaust survivors as motives for the exhibition's construction. Lord Bramall once more places the proposed exhibit in partnership with British wartime activity, illustrating that whilst the very possibility of a Holocaust exhibition on such a scale in the museum may have represented a `fundamental shift in the museum's outlook',[39] the desire to highlight British connections had not, changed; `It was the Allies' discovery of the Nazi death camps throughout Europe which, more than anything, had convinced them that they were fighting a just war'.[40] Indeed that notion of Liberation as a source of justification for Allied action during the war years and of `our discovery' of the horrors of Nazism in 1945 as the primary point of connection between the British and the Holocaust, would shape the narrative of the completed exhibition as Lord Bramall's phrase `Discovery' became the title of the completed section dealing with Liberation. The use of Liberation and the notion of a `just war' illustrates the way in which the future exhibition would be presented to the British public in close connection with the `remembered' imagery of the Second World War. When reminded of their `just war' the notion of a Holocaust exhibition is thought more palatable to the British public, not simply in its own right ,

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[39] Tony Kushner, `Oral History at the Extremes of Human Experience; Holocaust Testimony in a Museum Setting', in Oral History, (Autumn 2001, Volume 29, Number 2), p.89.

[40] Imperial War Museum Report, Holocaust Exhibition Report, p.1.

but also as a source of confirmation of their existing perception and `memory' of their country's wartime activity. Martin Gilbert, a member of the museum's Holocaust Exhibition Advisory Group and author of the exhibition's accompanying book `Never Again' would speak of the `inspiring features' of `Britain's own part in the terrible drama' as reason enough for the exhibition's development.[41] In so doing Gilbert would conjure images of British wartime heroism and stoicism that need no introduction amongst the wider public. These images would often serve to supplant any further consideration of the real distinctions between British wartime activity and Britain's connection to the Holocaust as a separate event.

The decision to proceed with the exhibition had been preceded by a debate which would encompass many aspects of the complex notion of British Holocaust memorialisation. The content and work of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum, opened in 1993 was influential throughout the design of the London exhibition and it was the presence of this and other US Holocaust projects that prompted the initial calls for a similar representation in Britain. In July 1994 the Jewish Chronicle addressed the absence of a national exhibition or museum dealing with the Holocaust;

> `British Jewry has never acknowledged the Holocaust in the same way that continental Jewry has done. After all, this country was spared the full horrors of Nazism. Without a museum however, future generations of Jews - and non Jews - here will know even less about it than

[41] Martin Gilbert, in Jewish Chronicle, 9 June 2001.

their parents'.[42]

In November of that year another Jewish Chronicle editorial commented; `The recent opening in Washington of a nationally supported Holocaust museum provides an impressive and instructive model'[43]. It soon became clear however that the scale and nature of the USHMM were not considered to be `possible' or significantly `appropriate' for a British Holocaust exhibition. Combined with a distinctly British, or English, reserve that arguably is traceable throughout the now completed exhibition, were expressions of concern over the necessity of such a museum, and amongst the Jewish community, over the consequences of a focus on a difficult past to the detriment of the formation of a more positive future. Concerns were expressed that such a focus on the murder of European Jewry might, `in a country where Jews are a small minority, and which took no part in the mass murder - alienate the wider public'.[44]

Questions over just what was `appropriate' for a British Holocaust exhibition would continue. Initially the exhibit was to examine the Holocaust alongside other examples of genocide in the twentieth century. This option, placing the Holocaust alongside details of the Armenian genocide and that which occurred in Rwanda with the potential risk that the particularities of each would be lost, prompted criticism from participating academics and concern and disappointment from the Jewish community. The questions regarding the very

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[42] Jewish Chronicle, Editorial, 26 July 1994.

[43] Jewish Chronicle, Editorial, 18 November 1994.

[44] Ibid, 18 November 1994.

definition of the Holocaust and its relationship to other genocides was very much present in these early debates over the shape of the future exhibition. They would reappear vociferously with the introduction of an official British Holocaust Memorial Day. Gradually the proposed exhibition's identity would undergo a process of change, moving from a focus on the more generalised notion of `man's inhumanity to man' to a closer focus on the Holocaust alone.

Initial Reactions To The Exhibition

The prospect of the new Holocaust exhibition would in general find widespread support and encouragement, almost unanimously positive responses that would continue beyond the exhibit's opening. Political parties and leaders expressed their support drawing again on the now widely used `Never Again' terminology and granting the exhibition a key role in future British Holocaust education. Tony Blair, then Leader of the Labour Party stated with his now familiar Churchillian overtones; `Let the Imperial War Museum exhibit serve as our nation's site of remembrance and honour to the victims of the Holocaust, act as a symbol of our diligence that never again will man's evil capabilities have such despicable consequences'. The desire to be seen to be positive illustrates the early stages of a general reticence to question or criticise the exhibition that would continue amongst its visitors. Whilst the decision to move away from a more universalised approach to the Holocaust may have been intended to illustrate the events' uniqueness, the universally

positive nature of reaction to the exhibit may in fact only serve to distance the visitor from making any connection with such uniqueness and the challenges it raises.

As the exhibition opened the Wiener Library News Bulletin declared that `the exhibition, the creation of which is a truly remarkable achievement, is set to make a major impact on Holocaust education in Britain'.[45] The article points out the role the library and its volunteers, `often part of a Kindertransport or refugees themselves', played in the exhibit's development. Two such volunteers, Peter Ross and Charles Danson, `praised the exhibition for enabling the public to understand the long history of anti Semitism which forms the background to the Holocaust', and commented that `the exhibition has not been mounted for people like us, but for the British public and most especially young people'.[46] The notion that the exhibit was according to Danson and Ross, `not for people like us' suggests the extent to which they perceived a vital educational role for the museum amongst the general British public, a role that would fill a long term gap in the understanding of the British public regarding the Holocaust. Recognising the wealth of information in the exhibit and hinting at the possible limitations for the visitor's understanding as a result, they note that more than one visit to the museum would be necessary. The article concludes by stating that the Wiener volunteers were `very

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[45] `Holocaust Exhibition Opens At War Museum', Wiener Library News Bulletin, Number 35, (August 2000), p.1.

[46] Wiener Library News Bulletin, p.2.

impressed that the facts were presented without any obvious political slant or polemical intention'[47]. It is a statement that hints at a continued desire amongst many in reaction to the exhibit to emphasise the `non political' nature of the Holocaust representation. The very possibility that the exhibition might have succumbed to `polemical intentions' illustrates the true depth of sensitivity generated by the presence of this exhibit. It is noteworthy however that the volunteers did not consider that the exhibition's location and its position in terms of British attitudes to the Holocaust to be if not `polemical', then certainly an influential force over the exhibition.

With the opening of the exhibition in June 2000 the Jewish Chronicle ran an article in which Martin Gilbert discussed his reaction to what he described as `the shocking new Holocaust exhibition'.[48] Once more emphasising British connections Gilbert points out Britain's admission of `more than 50,000 refugees before the war'. Gilbert also takes the opportunity to remind the readership that `it was the American government which had declined to take action' on the subject of bombing Auschwitz and that instead Churchill had reportedly said, `get anything out of the airforce that you can'.[49] Gilbert's comments hint at the tensions that can be found between Britain and America over their interpretations of the Holocaust still today. The trading of what amounts to suggestions of blame on the subject of Auschwitz bombing

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[47] Wiener Library News Bulletin, p.2.

[48] Jewish Chronicle, 9 June 2000.

[49] Ibid, 9 June 2000.

between both countries lies in direct contrast to the expressions of recognition and mutual assistance exchanged between the developers of the Imperial War Museum exhibition and the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum. Wartime `memories' of one another and self perceptions continue again to impact upon present day Holocaust representations. The Jewish Chronicle editorial on the opening day of London's exhibit continued that dual approach to the American Holocaust representations, seeming on the one hand to congratulate the USHMM, whilst on the other to suggest, again in what might be regarded as a quintessentially British tone that `we do things differently here'. The paper writes of the USHMM, `an enormous, complex and painfully moving exhibition which has been visited by millions, old and young'.[50] The following sentence reads, `Britain's response, if on a fittingly smaller scale, has been no less powerful'. The suggestion that the smaller nature of the British exhibit is `fitting' leaves the reader with the misleading sense that somehow the United States was more involved, had more of a significant role in the Holocaust - equally that its burden of responsibility in terms of representing and remembering the Holocaust is larger than that of Britain. Despite its praise for the London exhibition the paper remains cautious of generating a degree of attention and interest in it that might in any way be comparable to that encountered daily by its larger American counterpart. The editorial continues once more drawing on images of the Second World War and suggesting that the paper believes it possible that the Holocaust exhibit would fit

[50] Jewish Chronicle, Editorial, 9 June 2000

comfortably into the existing narrative of the war museum; `the fact that the Holocaust display is part of a broader national museum ensures that the many individuals and groups who already visit the Imperial War Museum will understand the Shoah as an inextricable part of their nation's wartime history alongside the Battle of Britain and the Normandy landings'.[51]

Describing the exhibition as a `Holocaust display' once more serves to understate the size of the museum's representation. Further it is noteworthy that whilst the representation of the Holocaust alongside other examples of genocide was deemed a potential cause of the dilution of the Holocaust as an event in its own right, the coexistence of the Holocaust exhibition and the museum's powerful existing wartime narrative is not regarded as having the same potentially damaging effect.

Support and welcome for the new exhibition was not however totally complete. Indeed the general unquestioning positive reaction is something of which Rebecca Abrams, writing in The New Statesman a month after the exhibition's opening is most critical, `In this of all contexts such public consensus of opinion is alarming, suggestive of complacency or anxiety or both'.[52] Describing the use of film and photographs in the exhibit that often depict appalling images of the suffering inflicted during the Holocaust, Abrams asks, perhaps echoing those who initially expressed concerns for the impact of the

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[51] Jewish Chronicle, Editorial, 9 June 2000.

[52] Rebecca Abrams, `Showing the Shoah', The New Statesman, 17 July 2000, pp.43 - 46.

exhibition on the future of Jewish identity;

`Is this the way to represent the victims of the Holocaust? Is this the way to make people think about what happened across Europe? Is this the way to make people think about the relevance of the Jewish Holocaust to more recent events in Rwanda and Bosnia?'[53]

Abrams does not answer her own questions. She goes on to criticise the Jewish community in Britain stating that they are guilty of a `pathological reticence' and that it should be noteworthy that `all three major Holocaust exhibitions in Britain, Beth Shalom near Nottingham, the Shoah Centre in Manchester and the Holocaust exhibition in London - have non Jewish directors'.[54] The article points to what the author perceives as fundamental gaps in the exhibition's narrative; `There is nothing at all on the plight of Jewish enemy aliens; nothing about the experiences of the Kindertransport children after 1939; very little about how far the Church responded to Nazism'.[55] Finally in a frustrated tone that suggests the writer feels isolated in her view and perhaps pointing to the consequences for the exhibition of the search for what was `appropriate', Abrams asks a question directly relevant to this study; `What about the bizarrely British "take" on the Holocaust? Didn't that bother anyone? Despite depicting events that took place in central and eastern Europe, the exhibition has a decisively English flavour; detached, objective,

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[53] Rebecca Abrams, "Showing the Shoah", p.44.

[54] Ibid, p.43.

[55] Ibid, p.45.

preoccupied with gadgets and gismos; purient, faintly evasive'.[56] The manner in which the British or English environment permeates the curators' choice of display becomes evident in an exploration of the exhibition's content in detail and the visitor reactions to the exhibit will confirm Abrams' belief that for many of the visitors' the effects of that environment went unnoticed.

Before attempting to place the various discourses evident in these initial plans for, and reactions to the Holocaust exhibition in the context of the exhibition itself, we might return to the words of that Imperial War Museum Report of 1997. The report declared that `the Holocaust exhibition will be the museum's principal contribution to the commemorative events marking the Millennium in Britain'.[57] Arguably that image of allying the exhibition with an event like the Millennium illustrates, in terms of the relationship between Britain and its Holocaust representation, a perspective that would endure throughout the development and content and reaction to the exhibition. The statement is notable in the sense that in 1997 the museum should wish to present the Holocaust and their representation of it as part of a British narrative of commemoration, and yet in the same phrase place the notion of the Holocaust beyond any specific and distinct t connection to Britain through allying it with the Millennium. The Millennium would be an event during which arguably any

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[56] Rebecca Abrams, `Showing the Shoah', p.45.

[57] Imperial War Museum Report, Holocaust Exhibition Report, (Winter 1996 /7).

notion of commemoration would be superseded by an emphasis on celebration that may not seem to sit comfortably with the opening of an exhibition dealing with the Holocaust. Further the Millennium is an event with an essentially universalist implication in the sense that, whilst not being marked by all as a Christian event, nevertheless was to be experienced by all.

From its inception, and establishing a discourse that persists throughout the completed exhibition, the motivation and justification for the exhibit's presence in Britain is allied to another event or narrative and is universalised as a result. It is a discourse that permits the specific connections between Britain and the Holocaust, particularly those that may prompt difficult questions, not to be denied but rather universalised and in turn equalised with those of other countries or groups. The essentially positive, even honourable notion of a universal need to represent and remember the Holocaust in which Britain makes clear it wishes to be part, makes any engagement with those difficult connections seem inappropriate. The presence of the representation in the museum becomes enough in itself, and significantly, something that should be regarded with gratitude.

The universalism surrounding the Holocaust exhibit serves to disarm any engagement between the visitor and the complicated connections between their country and the event represented. Any interaction with the Holocaust is not

promoted and an atmosphere in which the visitor may question, challenge or be challenged by what they are witnessing is not provided. Instead this distancing universalism creates what might be deemed a sense of obligation both to visit such an exhibition and to remain respectfully silent throughout and beyond, something Abrams suggest in referring to the exhibition's imagery; `These images used in such ways are deeply distressing for sure, but do more to inhibit discussion than promote it'.[58] The visitor connects with the events depicted only on a generalised level allowing he / she to feel shock or horror, yet in turn they move no further than these reactions. As their opportunity for a more individualised or more in depth reaction to, and connection with the event are limited , equally reduced may be their ability to recognise the individual, personal element for those who experienced the reality of the Holocaust, be it a perpetrator, bystander, victim or survivor.[59] This is not the universalism envisaged by those initial reactions to the plans for an exhibit dealing with `man's inhumanity to man'. And yet its consequences for Holocaust representation in Britain may be as significant. Equally it is a perspective that does not (perhaps could not) replace the uniqueness of the Holocaust nor indeed the particularities of the connections between Britain and the Holocaust. Instead, rather more profoundly, it may serve to conceal those connections from the very people who should be

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[58] Rebecca Abrams, `Showing the Shoah', p.44.

[59] For more on an inability to connect with individuals represented in images of atrocity or to develop any greater depth of feeling than initial shock see, Barbie Zelizer, Remembering To Forget; Holocaust Memory Through the Camera's Eye, (Chicago; University of Chicago, 1998).

confronted with them - the British general public and the visitor's to the Imperial War Museum's Holocaust Exhibition.

Arriving At The Imperial War Museum Holocaust Exhibition

Visitors may take a lift or climb three flights of stairs to access the purpose built annex to the Imperial War Museum that contains the Holocaust exhibition. To do so they must pass the tanks, guns and military aircraft that dominate the museum's entrance and that signal the subject material of the museum's other exhibits. Access to the Holocaust exhibition is limited to one set of double doors which provide a starting point for the carefully constructed narrative that will accompany and direct the visitor in their `controlled walking' throughout the exhibition. The exhibition is completely enclosed throughout and visitors can only leave by one exit, suggesting a degree of concern amongst the exhibit's curators that visitors should both follow the established chronology of the exhibit and should not leave with a visit to the exhibition incomplete. The museum's attempt to put distance between the Holocaust exhibit and the rest of the displays does serve to suggest a distraction, of the starting point for something different in a museum whose other displays loudly proclaim themselves and their contents through signs, pictures and the use of visitor enticing audio and video imagery.

`Life Before the Nazis' is the exhibition's introductory space. It is a small and softly lit space in which visitors gather and in which the rest of the exhibit is not immediately

visible to the visitor. Instead they are confronted with numerous black and white photographs of individuals and family groups which cover the wood lined walls of the space. The wall of images is broken by a small video screen on which individuals speak of their childhoods and early lives. These people are not identified as being Holocaust survivors or as being Jewish or non Jewish. The assumption that they are both Jewish and survivors is a product of visitors' assumptions rather than of any clear identification by the museum. The decision not to identify the people in the photographs or indeed in the video testimony is a conscious decision on the part of the museum. It is a decision which would appear to suggest an attempt on the part of the museum to forge connections between the visitor and those in the black and white images, to remind the visitor that the Holocaust happened to ordinary people in no way different from themselves in having their childhood memories caught in family photographs. Why the museum should feel that to name and identify these people as Holocaust survivors, Jewish or non Jewish would make any such connection difficult to sustain, reveals the consequences of a perceived need to universalise the Holocaust in order to justify its presence in this exhibition and in this country.

Eighteen survivors, as they indeed are, will feature throughout the exhibition. Their testimony is accessible through video recordings and in sound booths played at significant junctures throughout the exhibition. The museum is keen to emphasise the involvement of the survivors and it is

one part of the exhibition that receives positive acknowledgement even from those who may otherwise be critical of the exhibition, for example Rebecca Abrams comments, `At the newly opened Holocaust exhibition the faces and voices of survivors are crucial and dominant'. However despite being given this opening space of the exhibit and providing the last word in the area that forms the exhibit's conclusion, the survivors' testimony does not direct the narrative of the exhibition, is used selectively and with the intention of creating maximum effect in particular areas of the exhibit, and despite arguably representing one of the most `authentic' sources for the exhibit becomes merged within the narrative and object rich nature of the exhibit. As a result any real connection a visitor might make with the realities of their Holocaust story is difficult to sustain throughout the exhibition.

The black and white imagery and the words of the survivors are accompanied in this first part of the exhibition by music, beginning the format of presenting the visitor with a dense mixture of still and moving images, spoken word, written narrative and a variety of sounds present throughout the exhibition. The title of this space combined with its understated lighting, music and the memories of the survivors, not all of which portray a perfect past life before the Holocaust, nonetheless aims to create for the visitor a concentrated and atmospheric glimpse at a lost world of life before the Holocaust. The space provided to represent that depth of life and experience before the Holocaust for those

pictured who can themselves only represent the smallest percentage of those affected, is too small. Yet the almost claustrophobic nature of the display and the suggestion that each picture is only the smallest token of a lifetime succeeds in making clear to the visitor the impossibility of accurately representing each of the lives affected by the Holocaust and therefore emphasises the scale of the disaster.

The atmosphere created in this stage of the exhibit generates a sense of nostalgia in which the visitor becomes enveloped despite, in large part, the absence of any personal connection to the events and people portrayed. For whom and what then is the visitor feeling nostalgic here? The visitor makes a connection, not so much with the individuals portrayed, but with the notion of a world lost, of a better world having passed by and yet the world in the images on the exhibition's walls is not theirs. The visitor did not experience the event that caused that world to be destroyed, the one experience that ensures they will always remain essentially different from the people in the pictures with whom they have been encouraged to feel an affinity. Whilst the presence and promotion of such an affinity on a simple human level cannot be denied, the failure to identify these people and more profoundly the suggestion to the visitor that in being no different from them they too may have been subject to a similar experience but for the distinctions of circumstance, is to deny the individuality and uniqueness of the Holocaust reality. The sense of nostalgia is involuntary, unconscious in the visitor and is triggered by a connection with the

universally recognisable symbols of the past - the black and white photographs, the spoken words of memories and reflections on childhood. It is with the objects and the atmosphere that the visitor connects, not with the individuals portrayed or with the significance and unique of their experience. Rather than allowing the visitor a means to engage with the world into which the Holocaust arrived, the blanket effects of a universalised nostalgia instead distance them from that world as the starting point for the visit to the exhibition.

This initial display of the exhibit also contains the museum's definition of the Holocaust as the murder of Europe's Jews, going on to comment that `the Nazis enslaved and murdered millions of other people as well', simple statements that conceal the complicated questions over the inclusion and exclusion of victim groups in a definition of the Holocaust that preceded the exhibition and are evident throughout Holocaust representation. The exhibition does not refer to these difficulties. Instead such things as the definition of the Holocaust are presented to the visitor as conclusive and without controversy. It is a perspective only enforced by the authoritative role perceived for the museum by its visitors before they even arrive at the Holocaust exhibition. The visitor expects to learn and that the museum will present them with the answers. The Holocaust exhibit narrative continues to explain that it will seek to `look at how and why this happened', again suggesting the presence of conclusions that may be reached and understood within the space of the

exhibition so that the visitor may leave with the question of how and why the Holocaust occurred satisfactorily answered.

The First Stage of the Exhibition

In the introductory space of the exhibition the photographic images had largely been presented without the accompaniment of extensive written narrative following the assumption that they should create their own narrative for the visitor. Having turned a corner the visitor is presented with the first stages of the exhibit that are dominated by a concentrated amount of written and visual information. It is from this point that the chronological approach to the story of the Holocaust followed by the museum is established. The chronology combines with the clearly controlled direction of the physical layout of the exhibit to ensure that the visitor is not diverted from the representation of the Holocaust chosen by the museum. Whilst a subject as potentially huge and unruly as the Holocaust must, if it is to be contained within a museum setting have a clear direction, the museum's choice of the textbook chronological approach that takes the visitor from post World War One Europe and the origins of Nazi anti-Semitism to the Nuremberg war crimes trials seems to suggest a degree of caution on the part of the museum, a lost opportunity to present the more controversial areas of the Holocaust in more detail or indeed to focus on those areas of the narrative with particular relevance for Britain. Bound by the limitations of dates and times the exhibition essentially chooses the safest path in representing the Holocaust to the visitor. It is also a

chronology that in beginning with the development of the Nazi party from 1918 onward and concluding with 1945 and the end of the war is perpetrator - centric, focusing on the activities of the Nazis whilst the impact of those activities on the lives of their victims are addressed only afterwards.

The starting point for this chronology and the first display with which the visitor is confronted is the state of post World War One Europe and Germany represented by a large map of the continent. The visitor is informed of the nature of post war relations between the Allies and Germany and of the clauses of the Versailles Treaty. The consequences of that treaty and the post war economic and political struggles in Germany are pointed to as the origins of the early Nazi party. The significance of these interwar years for the development of the Nazi party is once more a potentially large subject that must be accounted for in a relatively small space within the museum setting and whilst the visitor must absorb an extensive amount of information at this stage, the limitations of the display are directed by the demands of space as much as by any desire not to overload the visitor or the exhibition with information.

The first level of the exhibition takes the visitor from 1918 through to 1939 and the invasion of Poland and therefore contains a vast amount of information illustrating the level of attention and concentration that this particular exhibition asks of the visitor. The focus in this initial stage of the exhibit is on the development and activities of the Nazis and

their ideology. Their political leaflets and campaign posters are displayed as are examples of their uniforms. Indeed the sound in this section of the exhibition is dominated by the Nazis. A large screen suspended above the open staircase that will lead the visitor to the second stage of the exhibit repeatedly plays recordings of Nazi rallies, images of Nazis involved in acts of book burning and the speeches of senior Nazis. Throughout what is a fairly concentrated space, becoming more so as it reaches a tight point and angle at the end before turning to the following section, these sounds surround the visitor. It is an extremely effective mode of illustrating the sense of omnipresence that the Nazis' would have both over German daily life and later in the lives of their victims, who themselves are not represented here. It is undoubtedly disturbing, even threatening for the visitor whom, once within the exhibition finds there is little space to escape the sound. The sounds of the Nazis may be head throughout this first level of the exhibit and will follow the visitor down the staircase to the second level, ensuring that the voices of the perpetrators often permeate the sections of the exhibit that are dedicated to the Holocaust victims or indeed to the survivors.

Throughout the physical design of the exhibit plays a prominent role in the museum's choice of representation. Visitors walk on tiled floors the colours of which change at points throughout the exhibition from red, to black or white. The choice of colours are a product of a deliberate design decision and are clearly regarded as adding significance to

the visitor's appreciation of various topics. The changes appear to signal to the visitor changes in mood. The tiles are white in the area designated for a discussion of the Nazis pseudo - scientific or medical theories of race - although how far the suggestion of a hospital interior serves to make clear the Nazis' perversion of medical science is debatable.

The sections dealing with the introduction of the Nuremberg Laws and at points such as at the invasion of Poland the floors and walls are tiled in black. The effect is subtle and may even go unnoticed by the visitor. Yet just as with the black and white imagery of the introductory space such design techniques, combined with lighting and temperature changes, create mood and seem to influence and direct visitor reactions throughout the exhibition. That the museum should feel such methods necessary in order to create a reaction in the visitor beyond the simple display of the events of the Holocaust illustrates the extent to which the techniques of modern museum display permeate and in many ways come to define exhibitions, more so often than the very subject material of the exhibit itself. Such subtle design methods are also a factor in the very polished, sophisticated and conclusive nature of the presentation of this exhibit, something that the visitor will both expect and be impressed by as much as they will be affected by the representation of the Holocaust. Indeed at various stages throughout the exhibition it might be said that the method of representation is in direct competition for the visitor's attention with the very event that is the subject of that representation.

At the half way stage of this initial section of the exhibit that the Nazis' victims are considered. A small darkened space set to the side of the main walkway contains a film charting the history of Jewish communities across Europe and the development and origins of anti Semitism. Space is limited to no more than a few visitors at a time. A display cabinet contains Jewish religious artifacts and early anti Semitic publications and illustrations including, `The Longest Hatred' and `The Protocols of the Elders of Zion'. The often complex and informative histories of these documents and the place they would hold in the formation of the Nazis' own anti Semitism is not developed in detail. However, whilst the lives and identities of those individuals that the visitor witnessed on entering the exhibition are not developed here, nevertheless a general consideration of the early lifestyles of those Jewish communities in Eastern Europe that would bear the brunt of the Nazis' Final Solution does allow the visitor to briefly picture the impact of that onslaught on long established Jewish communities and on Jewish culture.

On leaving this space the visitor is confronted with a large picture of an SS man and his muzzled dog. An SS uniform is displayed alongside him. The narrative moves with speed through the following sections concentrating a lot of information in a small space. The development of the first concentration camps and the origins of Dachau is signalled by a large photograph of the bowed, shaved heads of the first

Dachau prisoners. With the exception of its location on this first level and therefore not alongside the displays dealing with the later camps, what distinguished these early camps and their prisoners both in the Nazis' mind set and in terms of the Holocaust as a whole is not really developed for the visitor. Indeed alongside the pictures of the SS and of the Nazis' image of the `perfect' Aryan, the identity of the photographed prisoners is once more secondary.

The visitor is directed to the white tiled area entitled `Pursuit of Purity'. Here the Nazis' `tools' for defining the `racially unpure'. The display illustrates how the Nazis' attempted to put their theories into practice and in presenting the physical examples of that attempt the display makes real the scale and implications of the Nazis' thinking for the visitor and has considerable shock value. A propaganda film is played in which a Nazi doctor is seen to explain to his assistant how the notion of the survival of the fittest amongst animals is proof of the legitimacy of a notion of racial hierarchy amongst humans. Both the lengths to which the Nazis' would go to prove the legitimacy of their notions and indeed the extent to which these crude and amateur films had the power to convince huge numbers of the German population, are powerfully displayed here.

`Outcasts' is the title of the next stage in the exhibition and, despite the title, it deals with the themes and imagery of Nazi propaganda rather than with those cast out by the effects of that propaganda. The black tiled, small and

concentrated space in which visitors seem momentarily to be forced together is dominated by the voice of Nazi propaganda minister, Joseph Goebles. Goebles' speech in which the minister claims that there can be no room for Jews in German society is played repeatedly. It is only in the following section dealing with the Nuremberg Laws that would put Goebles' claim into practice that the effects of those words on individual lives is considered. Here in a separate annex the details of the laws line the walls and are accompanied by video testimony from the `talking heads' of the survivors used at the outset. The small space of the annex in which only a few visitors at a time can fit suggests the small and ever decreasing space afforded the Nazis' victims in German society as the laws and their consequences surrounded them, the same laws that surround the visitor in the annex. However a secondary impact of such a design feature is that many people on seeing the cramped and busy space will pass by, moving on toward the larger displays of the exhibition and therefore missing a vital part of the survivors' testimony. Perhaps in any museum it is the more detailed and narrative dependent displays over which visitors are less likely to linger when compared to the more enticing object dominated displays. However in a Holocaust exhibition the implications of such a process may mean the visitor leaves the museum with an incomplete understanding of the event.

As the visitor reaches the end of the first level of the exhibition they are met with a wide ranging amount of information much of which such as the expansion of the Nazis

across Europe and the reactions and actions of other countries to the first attempts of Jews to escape Nazi Germany are worthy of whole levels in themselves. However as space demands these topics occupy the walls of this display area. The section entitled "Thousands Seek Refuge" charting the early attempts of the Jews to flee Germany is based on four case studies of individuals and families. There is nothing more powerful than putting names to faces and here the visitor is asked to engage with the experiences of Richard Siegelmann, the Blechner family, the Siegel family and the Kraus family whose attempts to escape to various countries were in the large part unsuccessful. The details of their stories are laid out in a display cabinet containing their letters requesting help with passage to a safe country and photographs of the individual family members.

Above the case studies stands a large map that details the countries to which those who managed to escape fled and thereby which of the other countries took the highest number of refugees. The intention would appear to be to remind the visitor that the case studies only represent a tiny percentage of those who tried, managed or failed to escape as the museum is once more faced with the difficulty of maintaining the human face of statistics and numbers in detailing the scale of the Holocaust. There remains however a distinct sense of otherworldliness about the experience of becoming a refugee from Nazism, a sense that this happened not only physically but figuratively in another time and space to the named but unknown faces in the black and white photographs. The

complicated and telling reactions of those countries who agreed or disagreed to accept refugees and the difficult lives of those who did manage to escape but who had to watch the Holocaust unfold from a distance are not detailed. Further a sense of distance from those whose experiences are detailed makes difficult the forging of any connection in the mind of the visitor with the difficulties of being a refugee today and with the present day attitudes of countries such as Britain and America to refugees.

It is at this stage of the exhibition that the first of several displays dealing with Britain and the developing Holocaust is included. These are small displays often occupying corners in the wider narrative of the exhibit. Centred around the Kindertransport programme this section also refers to the 1938 Evian Conference at which countries met to discuss the refugee crisis reaching infamously few useful or practical conclusions and making clear the attitudes of the major powers toward the notion of assisting or indeed of rescuing the Jews of Europe that would prevail throughout the war. Any potentially ambiguous elements of the conference or indeed of the reaction in Britain to the refugee crisis is signposted only briefly by quotation from the national press and is somehow negated by the proximity and essentially positive slant of the display on the Kindertransport positioned alongside. For the visitor the concept that Britain `rescued' children from the terrors of Nazism has a far more lasting impact and will be the lasting element of this section that they will take with them on to the next part of the

exhibition. It is a notion that fits comfortably in a British wartime narrative and memory of good fighting evil for the sake of the innocent. In `doing the right thing' by visiting the exhibition, the visitor can regard themselves as having continued a British tradition of `doing the right thing'. The limitations of the Kindertransport process itself are secondary - the heartache of being apart from family members faced with an uncertain future, the difficulties faced by Jewish children placed in British Christian homes and the British government's reasons for allowing the children and not their parent who were instead regarded as posing an economic threat to the employment opportunities of British citizens.

Telephone handsets allow the visitor to listen to the recordings of a speech made in 1939 by the Archbishop of Canterbury outlining the plight of the refugees and the need for action - a singular and essentially positive representation of the attitude of the Church in this section of the exhibit. Visitors may also hear the experiences of a British woman who took in refugee children and the testimony of Henry Fulda who was interned in Britain, a significant part of Britain's attitude to the events in Europe and one not considered in much detail.

The final image with which the visitor is presented before leaving the first level of the exhibition is that of a surgical table used as part of the Nazis' so called Euthanasia Programme. The significance of this part of the Nazis' developing extermination policies, the role of the staff

involved in the Euthanasia programme in the later elements of the Final Solution and the factors that the Nazis' would change and develop after the Euthanasia programme are not given a great deal of space, contained as the display is, in a small corner area at the top of the staircase. Again the area may easily be passed by despite the undoubtedly unnerving sight of the surgical table. Despite a location that could not be further from that in which it might have been used, it is the object itself rather than the details of the Euthanasia Programme that provides a deliberately dramatic conclusion to the first level of the exhibit. Arguably an object that would instill a sense of concern or fear in most visitors in whatever context, it is however the image of the table sat alone in the middle of the exhibit, white, clean and brightly lit, rather than the idea of its use in the Euthanasia Programme that strikes the visitor. The object, out of its defining context, nevertheless dominates the display and serves instead to detract from that very defining context to be found in the Euthanasia Programme. On leaving this first level of the exhibit it is the table and not the details of the Euthanasia Programme that the visitor remembers. The museum's motivation and intention in choosing, using and displaying this object and the other larger artifacts will be considered further.

The Second Level of the Exhibition

The visitor may interpret the staircase and the descent to the second level of the exhibition in a variety of ways. On

the one hand the descent serves a rather dramatic purpose in suggesting to the visitor still attempting to process the information with which they have already been confronted that there remains more, and indeed worse, to come. The staircase may therefore be as much a concession to the museum's need to retain visitor interest as it is to the realities of the progression of the Holocaust. In turn the staircase may create a disjuncture rather than acting as a point of continuation in the narrative, allowing the visitor the perception that not only is this an exhibit on two levels but that it is also one that represents two distinct issues. The foot of the stairs is in almost complete darkness and the temperature in the rooms in the second level of the exhibit drops. The semi-darkness also seems to prompt silence amongst visitors as the museum's representation tools once more suggest the appropriate reaction to the change in scene. These effects are confounded by the huge image of a young Polish girl stooped over the body of her dead sister, murdered during the invasion of Poland, the subject of this next stage of the exhibit. The voices of survivors Esther Brunstein, Kitty Hart Moxon and Tauber Biber recall the arrival of the Nazis in their home towns and the processes of humiliation and degradation inflicted upon them as a result - wearing the yellow star, not being able to use the pavements and for one survivor, witnessing her young friend being shot dead for failing to leave the pavement quickly enough as the Germans approached.

A small cabinet entitled `News Reaches Britain' positioned opposite the video screen on which the survivors

are speaking informs the visitor that `Britain was reasonably well informed of events in occupied Europe' and that `as events unfolded the British government would be pressed to condemn Nazi crimes, to to try to stop or hinder them by military and diplomatic means, and to help thousands of refugees who managed to escape from Nazi occupied countries'. The use of the conditional tense and the lack of detail referring to just what Britain actually did may allow the visitor to pass with the sense that the latter was what Britain did, rather than what it was only `pressed to do'. There are four of these `News Reaches Britain' cabinets often occupying corner locations or overshadowed by a larger graphic or pictorial display. The complex reasoning behind Britain's reactions to the events in Europe, their roots in British attitudes to Jews across the years and how these attitudes would impact on British activities throughout the Holocaust, is not explored.

The extent to which gender plays a role in shaping visitor reactions to the imagery presented to them and to the words of the survivors may not be accurately quantifiable; however, it is noteworthy that many of the museums' picture and testimony choices represent the suffering of women at the hands of the Nazis - be it as in this section of the exhibition, the large image of the humiliation of Polish Jewish women or as previously in the picture of the suffering of the young sisters during the invasion and the abuse of young women during the Nazis' `pursuit for purity'.

With the `Invasion of the Soviet Union' the exhibition turns to encompass the actions of the Einsatzgruppen, or mobile killing squads that followed the advancing German army across Easter Europe with the task of murdering Jewish communities. The display dealing with the Einsaztgruppen contains film footage of one of the squads at work. The film is played on a small screen and is, as the visitor passes, at some distance from the main walk way of the exhibit. The visitor must approach the screen themselves in order to see clearly, although the content of the film is signalled even without being wholly obvious by the almost complete darkness of this section. The impact of the film lies as much in the visitor's recognition of the film as a recording of an actual event as opposed to a post war reconstruction intended to show how things might have been. Whilst the victims are clear the presence of the perpetrators is still very much evident, their status as such confirmed by a representation of their desire to film and record their acts.

The process of requiring the visitor to approach the exhibit is continued throughout this section. An almost totally darkened room contains one glass cabinet, its isolation once more however signalling the nature of its contents. Those include images of the Einsatzgruppen's preparations and procedures for murder and examples of the personal belongings of the murdered found at the sites where their bodies had been left. These are again not visible until the visitor stands directly over the cabinet. It is a mode of representation that both removes any sense of the gratuitous

from the display of these images and objects and also serves a dramatic purpose in terms of generating the visitor's interest, a drama it might be said that the objects and images are themselves alone more than capable of producing. A visitor may also be concerned to approach such displays, to be seen to be `inappropriately' interested in their content and indeed in this section of the exhibit the extent to which visitors are affected by the behaviour of those around them may be more evident than at other stages.

A narrow darkened corridor takes the visitor to the section of the exhibition entitled `Ghettos'. This area contains a place to sit. Here the survivors that have not been used since the earliest part of the second stage of the exhibit now recount their experiences of the ghettos and of their deportation from them. The use of their testimony does not represent a continuation of each of their individual stories that the visitor may follow throughout. Instead their words become another source alongside written narrative, photographs and large objects provided for the visitor at moments in the narrative regarded as being of particular significance by the museum. As such, the reasons why each survivor came to be in a particular ghetto, what had happened to each of them before hand and indeed the unique nature of their individual experiences are not developed for the visitor. The genuinely moving content of their testimony needs no embellishment but instead becomes the embellishment in itself, the tool used when `proof' of lived experience is required or when a particular atmosphere or reaction in the

visitor is thought necessary by the museum.[60]

Illustrating images of the Warsaw ghetto and others, the display addresses the existence of spiritual resistance and the cultural and intellectual life of the ghetto, the events and consequences of `Liquidation' and the `Dilemmas of Leadership'. Again potentially huge topics are contained within the relatively small space of the ghetto section of the display. In conjunction with the images of the suffering within the ghetto and the words of the survivors the display includes a wagon used to collect and carry the dead of the Warsaw ghetto. It is an object that is clearly regarded as of particular significance by the museum. It is referred to in the exhibition's recently revised accompanying leaflet as an example of the `photographs, documents, newspapers, artifacts, posters and film' that `offer stark evidence of persecution and slaughter, collaboration and resistance'. The `funeral cart from the Warsaw ghetto' readers are told, `sits adjacent to diaries and photograph albums of those who died through hunger and disease'. The language used here and the presentation of the wagon along with that of the other larger artifacts in the exhibition ensure they become the `attractions' of the exhibit for the visitor. The leaflet points out to the potential visitor that `part of a deportation railcar - given by Belgian railways - is on display; visitors can walk up to a wagon once heaved by slave labourers in a concentration camp'. Once again the museum

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[60] See Tony Kushner, `Oral History At The Extremes of Human Experience; Holocaust Testimony In A Museum Setting', in Oral History, (Autumn 2001, Volume 29, Number 2).

faces the difficulty of an attempt to attract visitors to the exhibition using the usual tools of advertising and publishing but with potentially difficult and sensitive material.

The Display of Holocaust Related Objects and Artifacts

The use and display of objects and artifacts in a museum setting commands a section of the study of museology in its own right, raising complex questions over the decisions made regarding the choice and display of objects, their role in the exhibition and their relationship to the museum visitor, issues only confounded should the subject of the exhibit be the Holocaust. `How does one establish relative priorities in the display of artifacts?'.[61] In a museum such as the Imperial War Museum those processes in which priorities are established in the selection of objects or artifacts are largely unknown to the exhibit's visitor, as are the often complex debates that surround decisions regarding the obtainment and display of particular objects. Instead as the exhibit's own narrative suggests the objects appear without controversy, the information given regarding their identity pertaining only to that identity in its own right and not to the place of the object in the developmental process of the exhibition. The museum's classification and ordering of objects is regarded as a means by which a visitor may derive a certain degree of knowledge from each object. The ordering process controls the visitors responses to the object and suggests the most

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[61] See Essays Included in Peter Vergo, (ed), The New Museology, (London; Reaktion Books, 1989).

`appropriate' kind of knowledge and information that may be derived from it.

Thus the value judgment made in relation to the object that began with its very selection by the museum's curators is extended in the mind of the visitor by the manner in which it is presented and labelled. By consequence a similar judgment is made over those objects not considered for inclusion in the exhibit, with the result, perhaps particularly in the case of the Holocaust exhibit, that those objects are not regarded by the museum visitor or the general public as being sufficiently significant, sufficiently connected to the Holocaust to be included. The choice of objects defines the narrative of a particular event and fixes it in the museum setting from which it becomes difficult to deviate or to suggest an alternative. The visitor is conditioned as much by their response to the positioning, description and mode of display of the object as they are by the object in its own right.

Thus an object can be used to maintain a narrative established at the outset of an exhibition by the museum. The visual impression of the object is regarded as only the starting point of its significance and uses. An object becomes a trigger in the visitor's mind for a wide range of museum - controlled emotions, connections and conclusions about the subject that is being represented. The objects in the exhibition and the museum visitor's expectations and interpretations of them are also influenced by their surroundings, by the building in which they are contained and

by the other displays that surround them, a process at work in the case of the Imperial War Museum and its Holocaust Exhibition.

The display of objects in a museum setting also endows both the object and the event being represented with a degree of authority and of authenticity. It is a process that is a product of the visitor's perception of the museum as a source of learning, as an educational tool allowing objects to be preconceived of as being of intellectual or cultural significance by consequence of their museum display alone. An artefact is seen to authenticate the event or experience being represented, as a physical manifestation of the information contained within the narrative. As such the search for an `authentic' artefact is intimately connected to a need amongst visitors for `proof' of the events being described and to a concern amongst museum curators to be seen to have searched and researched far and wide for that proof for their exhibit.

The extent of a museum's search for, and inclusion of particular `authentic' objects becomes both a means to attract and maintain visitor numbers but also a symbol of the stature of the museum and its curators in their professional world. In the case of the Holocaust exhibit it seems unclear how far the display of the ghetto wagon, or later of a deportation railway car, clean, well presented, labelled and crucially beyond their original defining contexts, might provide the visitor, or indeed their exhibit, with an `authentic' sense of the Holocaust. Yet the museum felt their inclusion not only

necessary but significant. In turn it may be asked how the display of a singular object, presented in isolation as a means to represent a complex and multi-layered experience can accurately represent that experience. How far, might we ask, can the singular display of the rock collecting wagon used by prisoners at Mauthausen concentration camp be said to represent the slave labour experience of a concentration camp prisoner?

In terms of Holocaust museum representation any question of authenticity is accompanied by that regarding what is thought `appropriate', not here in the sense of what is right for the particular country in which the museum exists, but rather simply in terms of decency. The museum must account for the implications of the display of objects indelibly connected to suffering and organised murder, but also for the possibility that for some these objects have a sacred identity that puts them beyond being available for display or for external criticism by museum visitors. The desire to collect and display these objects may form part of what museologists have defined as an increasing trend toward a state in which there are no limits to what it is legitimate to collect for museum representation. This trend is connected to the increasing emphasis on the construction of large, multi-media museums. Objects become a source of competition amongst institutions seeking not only the most authentic representation but also the most enticing and marketable exhibitions.

Returning to the Exhibition

At the halfway point on the second stage of the exhibit the visitor is offered the opportunity to divert through a small walkway to the final stages of the exhibit, in this way avoiding the parts of the display that deal with the Final Solution. It isadesign feature that both draws the visitor's attention to the nature of the following exhibits and which provides an opportunity for the visitor to arrive early at the displays dealing with the questions of rescue, resistance and liberation and thus to leave the exhibit without being exposed to perhaps the most significant part of the Holocaust narrative.

The sections dealing with the Final Solution begin with a display entitled `New Ways Of Killing' that deals with the Operation Reinhard camps and the Nazis' first use of gas vans and the development of killing centres at Chelmno, Sobibor and Treblinka. Glass cabinets contain items of personal belongings found at the camps and murder sites. The final part of this area deals with the Warsaw Ghetto Uprising and is dominated by a large print of the ghetto burning as it was systematically destroyed by the Nazis in the aftermath of the uprising. Whilst the chronological nature of the exhibition's narrative means that the display on the uprising should be placed at this stage, the connections between that event and the development of the Operation Reinhard camps may not be so clear. Indeed the unique aspects of the development of the uprising, the identities of those involved and perhaps the

question of why such an uprising did not occur on a similar scale in other ghettos, may be overshadowed by the more attention demanding details of the formation of those first sites of organised murder. It is a distancing that is perhaps also confounded by the exhibit on the uprising being positioned away from the display on the ghettos as a whole. As such the visitor may not be in a position themselves to chart the development and changing nature of the Warsaw ghetto and the events that led up to the uprising and to place these in the context of the history of ghetto existence or indeed in that of Jewish resistance against the Nazis as a whole.

A second `News Reaches Britain' cabinet provides the visitor with the opportunity to listen to recordings related to the development of a picture of what was happening in Europe in Britain and to the campaign to ensure that the plight of Jews in Europe was recognised and responded to in Britain and in America. Visitors hear the words of Stefan Korbonski, a member of the Polish underground recalling a telegram he sent to the BBC detailing the conditions in the Warsaw ghetto in 1942. Also included are the words of Gerhard Reigner, representative of the World Jewish Congress, explaining how and why he knew the reports of events in Poland to be true, and finally visitors hear from Anthony Eden as he recalled the reaction of MP's in the House of Commons following the Allied Declaration of the 17th December 1942. The display also includes a copy of Victor Gollancz's Let My People Go. Gollancz, as the thesis has previously explored, was at the forefront of calls for Allied action to save the

Jews in the form of a concerted effort for their rescue. Again in the small space allocated to the development of this campaign that has significant bearing on British relations to, and understandings of the Holocaust, the identities of those involved and the responses of the British government and British general public to the calls for rescue are not detailed. Thus just as the work of these unique individuals, including amongst others Eleanor Rathbone and James Parkes, only momentarily caught the attention of the British government during the years of the Holocaust, so too might it be said that their significance and the telling nature of British reaction to them retains that momentary status in the museum representation of the Holocaust today.

A strongly lit room with black marble effect walls covered with a diagram detailing the Nazi chain of command and the involvement of each aspect of the Nazi economic and social structure in the implementation of the Final Solution represents the next stage of the exhibit. The exit doorway from this room is surrounded by displays explaining the origins of the use of the yellow star to alienate Jewish people. The visitor may recall the earlier testimony of a survivor recounting the humiliation of being forced to wear the star, although similar testimony is not included at this point. Beyond this display the visitor finds themselves on uneven wooden floors and alongside a carriage from a train identified as one similar to that used by the Nazis to deport Jews to concentration and extermination camps. The display opposite the carriage is dedicated to illustrating the

processes of deportation and the manner in which the Nazis collected and moved their victims across Europe. The museum resists allowing visitors to have access to the inside of the carriage and instead the effect is created of moving through one. Whilst the reasons for the inclusion of this carriage as perhaps one of the most recognisable symbols of the Holocaust are clearer than those for the inclusion of the ghetto wagon, there remain questions regarding why the museum felt its presence necessary and the effect they perceived it would have on the visitor. The intended effect could not have been to allow visitors to experience the realities of a journey inside such a carriage. And yet the darkness, the wooden floors and the presence of such subtle design techniques as small slits in the opposite walls that allow the visitor small glimpses of the large model of Auschwitz Birkenau that dominates the next display, may appear to suggest that the visitor may momentarily join with the victim in that first glance at the train's final destination. The claustrophobic atmosphere of the section on deportation is added to by the despair of last letters thrown from the windows of carriages like the one displayed. Once more in a section where they are accompanied by multiple sources of information and where the proof of lived experience may be needed to convince visitors that something so appalling could happen, the survivors voices return, recounting their memories of the trains, of being separated from loved ones and of arriving at the camps.

The large model of Auschwitz Birkenau and the arrival and subsequent `selection' of a group of Hungarian Jews deported

to the extermination centre in 1944 is another of the `attractions' to which the museum's accompanying literature points. Auschwitz, as perhaps the most recognised of the camps is given precedence throughout this section dealing with camp experiences. It is a position of priority that serves to illustrate the museum's recognition that Auschwitz is for many people the symbol of not only the horrors of concentration and extermination camps, but also of the Holocaust as a whole, even if this might be to the detriment of a wider knowledge of the unique distinctions between the camps and their victim's identities and experiences. The model's size and white colouring are design features clearly regarded as having a potential impact on the visitor. That the model could add to the visitor's understanding of Auschwitz, beyond some sense of its geographical and physical layout (something which in itself had not been constant up until the point in 1944 at which the model has `frozen' time in the camp, thus presenting a moment that cannot be representative of the identity of the camp throughout its years of existence - further the model does not include the prison complex at Auschwitz One) or indeed can hope to provide any sense of what it meant for those Hungarian Jews to arrive there, is questionable. The model through being just that - a model - makes the camp seem less and not more `real' for the visitor.

Above the model stands a large picture of the arched entrance of the gatehouse at Birkenau that might be deemed THE symbol of Auschwitz. The visitor is given the opportunity to sit alongside the model and to hear recordings of testimony

from Auschwitz survivors that are played to each individual seat. The model is flanked by glass cabinets containing the shoes and personal belongings removed from the camp's victims. The display is on a much smaller scale than those cabinets used to store and display those items at the Polish museum that now exists on the site of Auschwitz One, and yet the exhibit's designers are clearly conscious of the manner of display in that museum. The necessity of the inclusion of the shoes in particular in the London exhibit is once more questionable and raises issues over the extent to which these particular objects, along with the railway carriage, have become symbols of the Holocaust in the public mind so that their inclusion within any representation is regarded as necessary and is expected. The use of the shoes as the image to front the museum's advertising for the exhibition may provide an example of just such a process. The shoes have no connection to the model in the literal sense and appear rather isolated in this display.

Beyond the camp model, a display entitled `The Camp System' includes images of gas chambers, of prisoners held at the camp and examples of camp uniforms. Recessed into the wall are photographs and brief biographies of the most well known of the Nazis involved in the murder including Josef Mengele, Rudolf Hoess and Irma Grese. The museum, perhaps aware of the possible criticism that the faces of the killers may impinge upon the display dealing with the suffering of the camps' victims, again enure through its design that the visitor must approach these faces themselves in order to see them clearly.

The visitor moves to a darkened section entitled `Life In the Camps'. A visitor is met with a large wall containing the individually lit registration photographs of Auschwitz inmates. The images are powerful in the sense that they illustrate the diverse nature of the prisoners' ages. Survivors once more tell of their arrival and initial experiences in the camps in an overhead audio recording. The central artefact for this display is a wagon taken from the notorious quarry and camp at Mauthausen. The wagon is placed in front of an image of the quarry steps up which prisoners were forced to carry vast amounts of rock, many falling to their deaths or dying of exhaustion. Alone in the room the wagon is indeed imposing. How far it might bring the viewer any closer to the world portrayed in the photograph remains doubtful. Beyond the wagon the focus returns to the Nazis and to the weapons used to inflict injury upon prisoners, before the visitor moves to the final stages of the exhibition.

The Closing Stages of the Exhibition

From the semi darkness of the `Punishment and Cruelty' section, the visitor enters a brightly lit room and finds a distinct change in tone and atmosphere and no small sense of relief in reaching displays with the essentially positive titles `Rescue', `Hiding' and `Resistance'. A desire to leave behind the exhibits on the camps may also mean that the third `News Reaches Britain' cabinet is passed by. Here the narrative notes that the British Government was aware of the situation in Europe from 1943 onward, `but public awareness

lagged behind'. Included are examples of publications made by the National Committee for Rescue from Nazi Terror. The debate over the notion of rescue and the relationship between the government and those calling for rescue is once more not covered in detail and thus the opportunity to consider what these interactions were to reveal about British attitudes to the Holocaust is lost. Instead the question of rescue is dealt with not in terms of those cases where calls for help were made and rejected, but rather from the more positive and yet more exceptional perspective of individual acts of rescue. Included are references to the actions of Oskar Schindler, to Raoul Wallenberg and the museum is careful to include `Britain's own Schindler', Frank Foley. The reaction of the British and of the Allied governments to calls for rescue is explained to the present day visitor in the same terms as it was by those governments at the time, namely that military victory was considered to be the best form of rescue for all the people suffering under the Nazis, the Jews of Europe receiving no specific distinction. The reasoning behind that failure to identify the Nazis' treatment of the Jews as being different from that meted out to others and the connection of such a perspective to the history of British attitudes towards Jews as covered in the earlier stages of the thesis, is not considered in detail. Indeed the exhibition's particular stance on the experience of Liberation and the role of Allied troops in that process may represent the persistence of the `victory is best' perspective into present day British thinking on the nation's role in the Holocaust.

The middle of the room is lined with the computer workstations that the modern day museum visitor has come to expect, providing the opportunity to pause and to return to some of the major questions raised by the earlier stages of the exhibition. The visitor can chose to explore a variety of questions ranging from `What is the Holocaust?', `Who were the victims?' to `What could be done to help?'. The volume of material contained on the computers is extensive and requires a certain amount of time that a visitor may be unwilling to give at this late stage of a difficult and packed exhibition.

The exhibition's section dealing with the liberation of the concentration camps is entitled `Discovery'. Whilst accurately depicting the reality that in many cases the Allied soldiers came upon the concentration camps by accident rather than intention, the phrase `Discovery' also implies that it was not until this point that the Allies had any knowledge of the nature or contents of the camps. For the alert visitor who may have read the details of the last section on `News Reaches Britain' it is a notion that seems to contradict the information provided there regarding official British awareness of the Holocaust from 1943 onwards. In an exhibition containing many, often by necessity, black and white images, the print that marks the starting point of the liberation display and which depicts American soldiers standing at the liberated camp at Buchenwald, is in colour. It is a subtle design feature that serves to suggest if not a happy ending, then at least the possibility of a more positive conclusion to the exhibition. The well-lit display contains three video

screens on which the viewer can see film of the Allied troops working in liberated camps. Testimony is provided by survivors Esther Brunstein, Daniel Faulkner, Roman Halter and Ruth Foster who recall their moment of liberation and whose voices have been absent since the display dealing with Auschwitz. The testimony of a British soldier, Gunner Illingworth from Cheshire and from an Army chaplain, the Reverend T.J.Stretch, present at the liberation of Belsen is included also.

The survivor testimony briefly raises for the attentive listener some of the complexities of the liberation experience; the shock, the continuing presence of illness and the deaths of friends and family, the beginnings of a sense of guilt regarding personal survival, the sense of loneliness and the difficulties faced by many survivors on attempting to return home to a place that had become alien to them. Whilst the choice of the phrase `Discovery' may be diverting, the absence of the alternative word `Liberation', with its accompanying connotations of joy and happiness, may seem fitting considering the ambiguous nature of the real liberation experience.

However any recognition of those ambiguities by the visitor is surpassed by their other and more positive recognition of the fact that there were some who survived and indeed that it would be British and American troops who would find them and help to facilitate that survival. The visitors attention and sympathies are focused both on the victims and survivors of the camps but also on the Allied troops

confronted with conditions in the camps, a process enhanced by the disturbing image of the British soldier using a bulldozer to move the dead in the liberated Belsen that dominates the exhibit. The uniqueness of the differing experiences of liberator and the liberated become blurred, the word `Discovery' conjuring images of innocently unaware soldiers being confronted with such dreadful scenes. The title of the display is not `Discovered' or indeed `Liberated', both phrases which would place the core of the experience represented with the survivors and the victims, with the liberated. Instead `Discovery' is the act carried out by and experienced by others, by the Allied troops and not by the victims or the survivors. They become secondary instead to the tale of that `discovery' and of the experiences of those who made it.

`Discovery' does not represent the final stage of the exhibit despite Liberation being frequently looked upon as the conclusion to the Holocaust. A wall of faces represents the museum's display dealing with the Nuremberg Trials. The faces are those of the Nazis brought to trial and of those who escaped either through death or by disappearing. Whilst details of their capture and of the crimes with which they were associated are included, the limitations of time and space mean that the complexities of the trials and the attitudes of the Allies towards the Nazis, the German people and the Nazis' victims are not covered in detail. Nevertheless when combined with the Liberation section, the existence of the trials allows the visitor to leave the exhibit with a

sense that a process of right surpassing wrong had at least been begun at the hands of the Allies, something which, as British visitors particularly, they will have been conditioned to expect by the country's existing wartime memory. A sense that the evidence discovered at the point of liberation and the subsequent trials provided the Allies with further justification for the war effort is reconfirmed in the visitor's minds and is given further credence by the words of Gunner Illingworth who comments on witnessing the camps that, `he realised what he was fighting for'. It is at this point perhaps more than any other that the visitor becomes aware of the contents of the museum's other exhibits displaying British military success and at which they may find their answer to the question regarding the relevance of a Holocaust exhibition in this museum, indeed in this country.

The final stage of the exhibition constitutes a small seating area in which visitors are encouraged to sit and listen to the testimony of survivors and to see images of the camps as they are today. The survivors, given the last word and for the first time in the exhibit a space of their own, speak of the difficulties presented by that very survival and of their interpretation of the effect the Holocaust experience has had upon their lives. Survivors speak of their difficulty in communicating their experiences to others and their recognition of the arbitrary nature of their survival. However the extent to which any visitor may pause for long enough at this final stage of the exhibit to hear and consider the questions of survival, of the difficulty of living with a

survivor identity and of the ways in which various individuals would go on to cope with that identity is questionable.

Considering Visitor Reactions

The Imperial War Museum provides visitors with an opportunity to record their thoughts at the conclusion of the Holocaust exhibition. The exhibition's accompanying literature has recently been revised to include some of these comments and they are also to be found on the museum's website suggesting the degree of importance the museum grants to these chosen comments in terms of reaction to the exhibition. In turn the act of taking comments from visitors may also be regarded as part of an increasing trend toward public expressions of feeling for example in the use of books of condolence or in laying flowers in public places associated with a particular person or event.

A visitor to the Holocaust exhibition writes, `You will never let them say "it never happened". Do not close this exhibition - we should all see and weep'.[62] Clearly illustrating the idea that it should be considered a social duty to visit the exhibit, the visitor also alludes to the role the exhibit might play in challenging Holocaust denial. The phrase `Never Again' appears frequently in visitor comments and is a phrase that is increasingly becoming the token phrase of organised Holocaust remembrance. It is an easily accessible phrase that does not require any great assessment of the events of the

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[62] Imperial War Museum, `Visitor Reactions', (Exhibition Website, www.iwm.org.uk).

Holocaust nor does it pose any real challenge to the individual's existing opinions or beliefs on the subject or indeed on the relationship between themselves and the Holocaust.

For other visitors the exhibition's responsibilities lie in education for the future; `Hopefully my children will never be prejudiced against another race or colour'. That belief in the exhibition's educational qualities represents an extension of the visitor's perception of the museum as a whole as a site of learning. It is also something that ensures the museum is endowed with a great deal of responsibility in the minds of its visitors and the surrounding society. For one visitor that responsibility spreads beyond Britain; `My thanks to all who put together this impressive memorial. I live in Vienna and would dearly like to make it possible for as many Austrians as possible to visit this'. Here the exhibition's responsibilities extend to those of a memorial, illustrating the potential additional roles a museum dealing with the Holocaust is seen to adopt. The concept of the museum as both museum and memorial changes the relationship between it and its visitors further, particularly in terms of shaping their reactions to an exhibition they may now perceive of as having the sacred status of a memorial. Many of the comments are very emotional in response to the exhibit; `This is the most stunning exhibition I have ever seen. It moved me to tears' and `an absolutely outstanding and compelling exhibition'. Finally one person writes, `Without fail the best exhibition I have ever seen. Chilling in the extreme. No hatred could ever

have been imagined than that which has been committed'. The visitors regard the source of their emotional response to be the exhibition itself and not the Holocaust as a distinct entity, although how far visitors make any distinction between the two - the representation and the reality - is unclear. The exhibition becomes the Holocaust in their mind. A museum goer comments, `The most outstanding Holocaust exhibition I have ever seen - showed in a neutral, informative way that pulls no punches'. Despite the exhibition's location the visitor speaks of the neutrality of the Holocaust representation and thus suggests that there is a less neutral way to present the event. The museum itself is proud of the `understated' nature of its exhibition, of that understated approach that was always considered `appropriate' for a British Holocaust museum from the moment of its inception and which may lie at the root of Abrams `bizarrely English take' on the Holocaust in this museum. The comments, particularly those displayed in the museum's advertising, overwhelmingly positive. Their use suggests the persistence of a sensitivity regarding British reactions to the exhibition. The visitor's comments reflect that trend toward public expression of feeling, of a desire to say the right thing and of the existence of that same universalism evident throughout the exhibit that allows them to make general expressions of feeling without any direct connection to the event and to its victims or survivors beyond the museum's representation. It is that same universalism in the representation of the Holocaust that allows for, and exists comfortably with the `appropriate' British identity of the exhibition.

Conclusion

What Really Makes Us Free?

In an article which formed part of a collection entitled From the kingdom of memory published in 1990, Elie Wiesel asked `What really makes us free?'[1]. It is indeed the relationship between the survivors' understanding of freedom and its connection to their experience of liberation which is perhaps at the heart of any exploration of survivor testimony and its representation of liberation. It is a relationship which, like that regarding the survivors' conception of the connection between their survival and the experience of liberation, is revealed in testimony as a complex one. Whilst survivors' often recognised the inherent connection between their pyhsical freedom and their liberation, for many the two concepts of freedom and liberation were frequently considered as far from one in the same, both in their lives and in their testimony. Indeed as their words have shown, liberation would not correspond to many survivors' image of freedom. And yet the experience of liberation cannot be dismissed from any discussion of the survivors' understanding of freedom, not least in the practical sense that it was to be that event in most cases which would signal their being freed from the hold of their Nazi captors. It is however once more in that shortfall, in that distance, between the image and the reality of freedom, the existence of which would be revealed by the events of Liberation and with which the survivors struggle, that the clearest window upon their true understanding of freedom and the distance which would exist between it and their experience of liberation, is revealed. Wiesel explores the significance of a sense of freedom, the multiple defintions and understandings of the term itself, and its relationship to a person or a people's identity, beginning by commenting that `It is by his freedom that a man knows

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[1] Elie Wiesel, From the Kingdom of Memory, (New York; Schoken Books, 1990), pp.219 - 225.

himself'.[2] Humanity and freedom are inherently connected for Wiesel and indeed he comments `to strip a man of his freedom is not to believe in man'. In pointing to the words of the Ten Commandments, Wiesel suggests that freedom is both a right and a responsibility, `Every man was free, but no man was free to give up his freedom'. And yet Wiesel is not suggesting that once freedom is taken from them, a person no longer has a claim on life or a part in humanity. Indeed in going on to assess the way in which the removal of freedom becomes both a source of power for the dictator and yet also his/ her downfall as `anyone who claims the right to deprive others of their right to freedom and happiness deprives himself of both', Wiesel concludes by suggesting that `it is often the prisoner who is truly free' and therefore that it is the dictator, the taker of freedom, whom has excluded themselves from humanity; `The dictator does not believe in man'. Whilst the image of the prisoner as the `truly freed' may seem difficult alongside the details of suffering and death which shape much survivor testimony, what Wiesel seems to suggest is that a sense of freedom can take many forms from simple hope to acts of active resistance, can be present within captivity and need not be confined to a state of pyhsical freedom. Wiesel suggests that during life in the ghettoes and even in the death camps, freedom resided in the smallest acts from preserving food to simply attempting to remember your name; `the prisoners managed to carve out a patch of freedom for themselves'. Himself liberated at Buchenwald, Wiesel is not however suggesting that such a sense of personal freedom was easily sustained or that it formed a sure way of opposing the Nazi system. He comments; `Do not misunderstand me; I am in no way trying to minimise the Nazis' evil power. I am not saying that all prisoners succeeded in opposing them by their will to be free' and indeed as testimony suggests a prisoner's hopes for liberation and their belief in the freedom that it might bring, whilst often providing a vital sustenance for the

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[2] Elie Wiesel, What really makes us free?, p.219.

individual, could in no way remove the arbitrariness of their survival. Wiesel does conclude however that it is that internal sense of freedom which would be one way `of saying no to the enemy, of showing that we were free, freer than the enemy'. Therefore does liberation represent in any of its multiple forms the ideal of freedom of which Wiesel speaks, or indeed do the words of the survivors suggest that it is to the point of their liberation that they trace their personal understanding of what it is `that really makes us free'? Wiesel's sense of being `freer than the enemy' is the construction of an image of being free from within captivity and it is that construction, that hope for freedom that can take a diversity of forms and expressions, mirrored in the survivors' relationship to liberation as an ideal during their imprisonment, that marks the closest point between such an image of freedom and the experience of liberation as the survivors represent it. The Day of Liberation would however signal an end to that image, as we have seen, in removing the circumstances of imprisonment which had fuelled it, and in so doing bringing the challenging realities of a liberation and a physical freedom, which would be such that any accompanying sense of emotional or pyshcological freedom would in no way be guaranteed. If Liberation brought a freedom by which the survivor might `know himself', it would be such that the survivor would equally know his or her loss. It brought a freedom that represented the unknown and not a sense of security, a freedom that had to be learned and as such it seems that ultimately it is the connection between the words and concepts of `liberation' and `freedom' that is fundamentally undermined by a study of the experience of liberation in testimony, confirming finally, as perhaps evident throughout, the limitations of the word `liberation' itself. Liberation, both as an idea and as an event, has clearly proved a complex and ambiguous issue for the survivors both in their experience of it and in their attempt to represent it within their testimony. It stands as a symbol of joy and hope, a role which despite the further ambiguities

attached to the event, should not be diminished. In turn it became the starting point for a series of new and often difficult challenges and changes, bringing sadness and disorientation into the survivors' lives. It is a subject which can form either a beginning or an end in their testimony, or exist throughout as a subtle preoccupation, suggesting unresolved questions and fears as it had done throughout their captivity.

Equally the impact and consequences of liberation may be present in the shape of the survivors' struggles with time and memory, part of their experience of survivorship, the roots of which, in many cases as a study of the language of survival has suggested, may be traced to liberation experiences. It is a subject which continues to prove a challenge for the historian both in its exploration, representation and memorialisation and one which contains in concentrated form many of the wider questions and complexities of Holocaust studies as a whole. A study of the representation of liberation in survivor testimony has proved that liberation was many things, all of which ensured that it can never be described as simply a conclusion, as `the good ending to the harsh story'. Finally, to conclude with certainity on just what liberation meant to those who both imagined it and experienced it, is perhaps not for us to do. It may be more useful and more revealing to recognise that it was an event, the impact of which was so profound that it could lead survivor Eva Braun to comment of something as significant as her personal liberty and that of her fellow Holocaust survivors, simply that `freedom is relative'.
Having considered the final thoughts of those for whom Liberation was a reality and having attempted to consider the way in which the survivors perceived of their freedom and of their liberators, the thesis finally turns to the image of both liberation and the Holocaust as a whole that is represented in the Britain of today. Connecting the thoughts of those who were there and the nature and content of

Britain's Holocaust exhibition serves to illustrate finally the roots of Britain's relationship with the Holocaust today.

The Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum allows the British visitor to leave with their sense of social duty fulfilled and with their perception and `memories' of their country, its activities then and now and the role those activities played in the formation of their own British self identity, unchallenged, confirmed and intact. Whilst its very presence and the scale of its representation may be new, the Holocaust presented to the British museum visitor here is the Holocaust that they will essentially recognise. The structure to which the exhibition must conform as dictated by the traditional practices of museum representation that are adhered to throughout the London museum ensures that the narrative, the methods of display, and the material presentation of the exhibit as a whole, follow a pattern recognisable to all those who have made museum visits. In its representation of the Holocaust and Britain's role during those events, especially in the latter stages, it would also be further recognisable to all those visitors influenced by, or aware of, a collective British memory of the Second World War as it both conforms to, and offers no challenges to, the most dominant `victory' based elements of that memory. This is a point further confounded by the very surroundings of the Imperial War Museum in which the exhibition resides and on which the thesis has previously commented. The positioning and nature of such topics as Rescue for example, and of the events of Liberation especially, also confirm for the visitor their understanding of the role of their country in these events, the roots of such a `memory', may, as we have seen, be traced back to the years of the Holocaust itself.

In a study of the impact of the first photographic images of the camp to reach Britain after Liberation, Hannah Caven has commented, `it is easy to forget the impact that these images had on the unsuspecting public that saw them for the

very first time and the subsequent answers that they must have demanded'.[3] In terms of the representation of those same images today in the museum format there is indeed no question of their impact. However the assumption that they should necessarily create questions amongst the general public, either then or now, beyond their initial shocking impact is less clear. In fact what their presentation in museum format in a British exhibition would suggest is that as a result of the exhibition's narrative and its carefully constructed display techniques, questions are the last thing that occur to the visitor. Instead through a recognisable and controlled format the museum exhibition provides all the answers. The visitor leaves with his/ her `completed' version of the Holocaust and, in turn, with his/her expectations of finding `all the answers' within the museum walls fulfilled - testament to the enduring perception of the role of the museum as educator and illustrating the impact of such a perception when combined with a representation of the Holocaust.

In the Holocaust exhibit it is the images, the objects and the concept of the time from which they came that shocks the visitor. (although that level of shock in a world where atrocity images cover our television screens and newspapers, may be diminishing, and indeed perhaps remains as fleeting as it was in 1945). It is not the museum's method of their display, it is not the narrative that accompanies them or any challenging questions or issues posed by the exhibition that shocks. In turn, and perhaps most importantly, it is not the representation of any ambiguities in the relationship between Britain and the events portrayed that prompts any disquiet or questions from the museum visitor. Whilst the facts of the Holocaust are presented before the visitor, it seems that with regard to Britain's connection to those facts, not only does

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[3] Hannah Caven, `Horror In Our Time; Images of the Concentration Camps in the British Media, 1945', Historical Journal of Film, Radio and Television, (Vol.21, No.3, 2001), p.205.

the distance between knowing and understanding identified by such groups as the National Committee for Rescue still remain, but that also the process by which that period of calls for rescue and the failure to recognise the specific plight of the Jews of Europe was submerged in Britain by the image of a British liberating nation constructed after 1945, remains ongoing and is confirmed in the museum format.

With reference to the use, display and impact of the photographic imagery of atrocity and especially of the Nazi death and concentration camps, Barbie Zelizer has commented, `Visualising atrocity lends perspective, positions boundaries, and concretizes standards of appropriate behaviour in a so-called civilised world'[4] In its `visualisation' or representation of the Holocaust the London exhibition has provided just such a process of confirmation for Britain's `perspectives', `boundaries' and especially its' `standards of appropriate behaviour' when it comes to the Holocaust and the country's relationship with its events and victims. Indeed in many ways this exhibition reassures the British visitor. That such reassurance can be on offer alongside the contents of such an exhibition reveals further the possibly unique coexistence of apparently parallel perspectives in this exhibition that must be traced to the equally unique and complex relationship between Britain and the Holocaust, evident then and now. You can be both shocked and reassured, but it is reassurance that you will ultimately leave with (not least in the practical sense that one of the final points of the exhibition covers liberation and war crimes trials, - freedom and justice - in however a limited form, as discussed earlier). The exhibition allows Britain to make a concession to the growing interest in the Holocaust and indeed to the trend for public expressions of mourning, memory or memorialisation, whilst maintaining its existing and subtly pervasive bank of national memories and the marginalised place

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[4] Barbie Zelizer, Remembering To Forget - Holocaust Memory Through The Camera's Eye, p.238.

of the Holocaust in those memories. In this way Britain can be part of the notion of `Holocaust Memory' without granting the Holocaust any greater place in Britain's memory than it had before the advent of a capital city, large scale, national Holocaust exhibition.

THE LIBERATION OF THE NAZI CONCENTRATION CAMPS IN BRITISH MEMORY

AIMEE BUNTING

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