

REMEMBERING AUSCHWITZ, REMEMBERING THE HOLOCAUST,
REMEMBERING GENOCIDES?
UK HOLOCAUST MEMORIAL DAY, 2005

27 January 2005 was the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the fifth UK Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD). This paper is intended to serve a double purpose, documenting some of the ways in which hundreds of events marked the events across the UK and investigating why significant sections of Britain's Muslim population felt not only disconnected from the day but actually opposed its commemoration with an intensity that appears not to have been present in previous years.

The Muslim Council of Britain, an umbrella organisation representing about 350 institutions and organisations “including mosques, education and charitable institutions, women and youth organisations and professional bodies”¹ has opposed Holocaust Memorial Day from its inception in 2001. A press release issued in January 2001 explained why, stating that while the MCB “fully condemn[s] the Nazi Holocaust and sympathise[s] with the families of the Holocaust victims, they have reservations about the actual ceremony.” It went on to elaborate, stating that while the MCB recognised the importance and necessity of reflecting on “this savage and painful event in recent history” it could not ignore other concerns of the community.

There is particular concern in the community that our government has done precious little to make clear its moral outrage nor has it exercised its considerable economic and political influence in order to help bring about an end to both the Israeli occupation and unceasing brutalisation of the Palestinian people and the deadly violation of their human rights. More recently, hundreds of children and civilians have been killed.²

This stance was repeated the following year with a significant addition. The closing paragraph of the press release stated that “The MCB urges the Home Secretary to reconsider Memorial Day; to make it inclusive of the sufferings of all people.”³ In 2005, this position had evolved into a proposal for Holocaust Memorial Day to be renamed “Genocide Memorial Day” for the following reasons.

Remembrance must, therefore, refocus our moral vision and rededicate our commitment to prevent current and future inhumanity, state brutality and crimes against humanity. In order to help ensure that such crimes against humanity do not recur and repeat themselves we believe that the Memorial Day can be better observed by making it inclusive to cover the ongoing mass killings and human rights abuses around the world, notably, in the occupied Palestinian Territories, Chechnya and Kashmir and also recent mass killings and genocide on [sic] Bosnia, Kosova [sic] and Rwanda.⁴

This call was amplified in September 2005 when the Secretary General of the MCB, Sir Iqbal Sacranie, wrote an article in the *Guardian* newspaper, explaining why he and others had delivered concrete proposals to the Prime Minister for such a day. He did so partially in

¹ Muslim Council of Britain (MCB), ‘The Muslim Council of Britain – its history, structure and workings’ (PDF) retrieved from www.mcb.org.uk on 20/10/05.

² MCB Press Release, 26 January 2001, ‘Holocaust Memorial Ceremony – MCB regrets exclusion of Palestinian tragedy’, retrieved from www.mcb.org.uk/news260101.html on 11/10/05.

³ MCB Press Release, 25 January 2002, ‘Holocaust Memorial Ceremony – MCB Regrets Exclusion of Palestinian Tragedy’, retrieved from www.mcb.org.uk/news250102.html on 11/10/05.

⁴ Salaam.co.uk, ‘Holocaust Memorial Day 2005 – Cause for reflection’, retrieved from www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthefmonth/september03_index.php on 6/10/05.

response to an article on HMD by Professor David Cesarani, one of the academic advisers on HMD, in the same paper the previous week. The delivery of the proposals had received considerable media attention both in the UK and worldwide, under headlines such as “Advisers tell Blair to ditch Holocaust Memorial Day.” Sacranie made a reasoned case and offered a compromise: “the MCB recognises that this is enormously sensitive political territory and if widening the scope of the day – while ethically right – is not politically feasible currently, then we should consider establishing a separate and fully inclusive genocide memorial day.”⁵ Alongside Sacranie’s reasoned proposals, however, there is evidence of a more militant approach among some British Muslims.

Salaam.co.uk is a website intended to provide British Muslims with a forum for discussion of issues relevant to the British Muslim community. In September 2005, it published a dossier on HMD 2005, arguing that it had been a “gruelling episode for Muslims in Britain.”⁶ It made three claims: firstly, that “immense pressure” had been brought to bear on organisations such as the MCB which had refused to attend the commemorations; secondly, that the refusal to attend had created a national conversation which would not otherwise have taken place; and, thirdly, that the reaction to the refusal to attend had provided evidence of an alliance between “supporters of extremist views on race” and “unquestioning supporters of Israel’s policy.” The paper failed to prove any of its claims, though it did demonstrate the use of intemperate language in some British newspapers to describe the MCB’s refusal to attend the HMD ceremonies.

Intemperate language was the hallmark of another organisation, the Muslim Public Affairs Committee (MPAC), which ran a disturbing report on 29 January, 2005, concerning Muslim community leaders who had chosen to attend the event. Entitled “Uncle Tom’s Sell Out on Holocaust Memorial Day”, the article described attempts to contact these leaders and question their actions, having (as MPAC saw it) “betrayed the common unity on this cause and attended the event.”⁷ Full of invective against “intransigent, arrogant, pig-headed Uncle Toms” the article concluded disturbingly by listing names and some telephone numbers of those concerned.

More interesting than the article, however, were the emailed comments which followed. Of the 38 emails displayed after the article, most (24) were supportive of the position expressed by the author. The article was also awarded an 80% approval rating, indicated by four (out of five) stars beneath the title. The tone of responses varied, from a simple “Well Done MPAC” to more militant reactions. The demand for those featured to be “held to account in the severest manner”⁸, as well as the comment that “we will keep an eye on whether they will attend next year”⁹ make for disturbing reading, as does the email promising details of “a young gentleman from Nottingham” who spoke at an HMD event. Few supporting the article criticised the decision to publish contact details, though more of those critical of the article did so. One response was very trenchant in its criticism of MPAC’s actions, as well as providing insight into the perception by Muslims of their portrayal in the media.

In the mindset of the British Public the perpetrators of the Holocaust were racist, tyrannical, fascist Nazis. Muslims today are also being labelled as such by many in the media. By

⁵ Iqbal Sacranie, ‘Holocaust Memorial Day is too exclusive’, *The Guardian*, Tuesday 20 September, 2005, retrieved from www.guardian.co.uk on 5/10/05.

⁶ Salaam.co.uk, ‘Holocaust Memorial Day 2005 – Cause for reflection’, retrieved from www.salaam.co.uk/themeofthemonth/september03_index.php on 6/10/05.

⁷ Muslim Public Affairs Committee, ‘Uncle Tom’s Sell Out on Holocaust Memorial Day’, retrieved from www.mpacuk.org/content/view/229/ on 11/10/05.

⁸ Response 34 (my numbering), ‘Some more details...’

⁹ Response 37, ‘sell outs’ [sic]

boycotting this event and forming a witch-hunt of fellow Muslims who go to this memorial event for innocent human beings who were butchered you re-affirm the public's image of Muslims as Fascist scum.¹⁰

While the number of responses is not statistically significant, the generally approving response to the article is striking in the context of British race relations. The concerns of MPAC and those who added their comments, alongside the concerns of Salaam.co.uk and the MCB, suggest the following questions have to be addressed in relation to UK Holocaust Memorial Day.

- Firstly, is Holocaust Memorial Day too exclusive? What are its frames of reference and what is the understanding of its purpose in official circles?
- Secondly, how well understood are the aims of HMD among the British public? How significant has the day become since its inception in 2001?
- Finally, in the light of the previous two questions, should HMD be replaced with a more general Genocide Memorial Day?

This paper will address each of these questions in turn, using HMD 2005 as a case-study, though not restricting its analysis to this year. In doing so, it will demonstrate that HMD has become part of the UK's national life and suggest reasons why replacing it with a more general day would be a mistake.

History of HMD: is it too exclusive?

The five years since the first UK Holocaust Memorial Day have been a period of intense racial and ethnic tension. The terrorist attacks in the USA on 11 September 2001, the resulting wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, and the major bombings in Madrid in 2004 and London in 2005 have all made issues of race, community and identity more pressing than ever. HMD, however, had been decided upon long before these events.

The first moves to create a European Holocaust Memorial Day began in 1998, with the creation in May 1998 of the Task Force for International Co-operation on Holocaust Education by Sweden, the United States and the United Kingdom. In December 1998, the Washington Conference on Holocaust-Era Assets, those attending issued a declaration stating that "Holocaust education, remembrance and research strengthen humanity's ability to absorb and learn from the dark lessons from the past, so that we can ensure that similar horrors are never again repeated."¹¹

A year later, the British Prime Minister, Tony Blair stated in response to a question in the House of Commons that "I am determined to ensure that the horrendous crimes against humanity committed during the Holocaust are never forgotten. The ethnic cleansing and killing that has taken place in recent weeks [in Kosovo] are a stark example of the need for vigilance."¹² A working group was subsequently appointed and reported in October 1999. It was decided that the first Holocaust Memorial Day would take place on 27 January 2001, the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz.

In early 2000, the UK participated in the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, convened by the Swedish government to discuss ways to educate about racism,

¹⁰ Response 15, 'Sometimes MPAC Gets it Wrong'

¹¹ Needs original citation.

¹² Quoted in Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'Origins of the Day', retrieved from www.hmd.org.uk/about/origins/default.asp on 5/10/05.

intolerance and antisemitism. The sixth point of the declaration, signed by forty-four governments, read as follows.

We share a commitment to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and to honour those who stood against it. We will encourage appropriate forms of Holocaust remembrance, including an annual Day of Holocaust Remembrance, in our countries.¹³

The initiative by the UK was taken up by other European countries and 27 January became European Holocaust Memorial Day. Having founded the day, however, there still remained the question of what form the day would take and what specifically it would remember.

Holocaust Memorial Day is intended to exist on three levels. Firstly, a national event sets a theme for the year's commemorations. Secondly, this theme is taken up at local levels by local councils and city authorities, who are encouraged to hold local events. Thirdly, Holocaust Memorial Day is intended to be remembered in schools and used not only to remember the Holocaust, but to teach broader lessons about intolerance, prejudice and racism. As the Secretary of State for Education wrote in his foreword to the educational pack released in 2000: "The purpose of this annual day is to ensure that the terrible crimes against humanity committed during the Holocaust are never forgotten and its relevance for each new generation is understood."¹⁴

In each year preceding 2005, the theme of the day has addressed these twin concerns. In 2000, the theme was "Remembering Genocides – Lessons for the Future." In 2002, the theme was "Britain, the Holocaust and its Legacy"; in 2003, "Children and the Holocaust"; in 2004 "From the Holocaust to Rwanda: lessons learned, lessons still to learn." In all these years, the goal of linking memory of the Holocaust to the wider issues was very prominent, best summarised by the 2004 theme paper, setting out the issues for educators and event organisers.

In particular the day offers an opportunity for people in 21st century Britain to reflect upon, consider and discuss how those events [the Holocaust] still have relevance for all members of today's society. Ultimately, the Day aims to restate the continuing need for vigilance and to motivate people, individually and collectively, to ensure that the horrendous crimes, racism and victimisation committed during the Holocaust are neither forgotten nor repeated, whether in Europe or elsewhere in the world.¹⁵

In 2005, the theme was "Survivors, Liberation and Rebuilding Lives". This theme was more Holocaust-focused than in previous years, as Holocaust Memorial Day coincided with the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz and the end of World War Two. Nonetheless, the theme paper underlined that HMD 2005 "should be a time to hear the survivors recall their experiences, reflect on how our society treated them, and listen to what they can tell us that applies equally well to the world today. It should be a spur to action against all manifestations of racism, intolerance, dehumanisation of the 'Other', and incipient genocide." The question is; was this achieved?

¹³ Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust, 'Declaration of the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust', retrieved from www.holocaustforum.gov.se/pdfandforms/deklarat.pdf on 11/10/05.

¹⁴ David Blunkett, 'Foreword' in HMD Education Working Group, *Remembering Genocides – Lessons for the Future Education Pack*, Department for Education and Employment 2000, p.1.

¹⁵ Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, 'From the Holocaust to Rwanda: lessons learned, lessons still to learn', retrieved from www.hmd.org.uk on 5/10/05.

The national event, 2005: Survivors, Liberation and Rebuilding Lives

The theme of Holocaust Memorial Day 2005 was “Survivors, Liberation and Rebuilding Lives”. The national events were designed to honour both the survivors of the Holocaust living in Britain today and those who liberated them. The Prime Minister and Home Secretary explained why this theme had been chosen in the commemorative programme to the national event.

2005 is a particularly important year for the nation as we remember – sixty years on – the end of the Second World War. As the spotlight is focused on the wartime generation it is especially fitting that we listen to their first hand testimony. [...] We recognise and deeply respect the courage and determination of survivors who rebuilt their lives in harsh and difficult circumstances, having lost families, livelihoods, communities and culture. We must also pay tribute to the liberators of the camps who, unprepared for the scenes of human catastrophe they encountered, responded with stoicism and compassion.¹⁶

The Prime Minister and Home Secretary highlighted an uncomfortable fact about HMD 2005; that, with so many anniversaries taking place it would be hard – indeed probably unjust – not to focus on the Holocaust itself with unusual intensity, which made references to other genocides seem more fleeting than in the past. Nonetheless, the speakers tried to emphasise the lessons that the testimony offered taught. The Chief Rabbi, Dr Jonathan Sacks, expressed it concisely: “We can’t change the past, but each of us, by challenging prejudice and intolerance, can help change the future.”¹⁷ The speech by Tony Blair addressed these themes but focused on the role of human agency in bringing about the Holocaust: “This was no natural disaster. No act of God. But an act of deliberate, calculated evil such as humanity never in its existence knew before, and let us pray, never knows again.”¹⁸

Blair’s final wish, though doubtless sincere, was somewhat problematic since, as he acknowledged the following day, other genocides have occurred since the Holocaust. He asked his audience to remember that “it happened in my father’s lifetime under the Nazis. That it was repeated in Cambodia and Rwanda in my own lifetime. And again in the Balkans in the lifetime of my children.”¹⁹

In the context of HMD 2005, however, a greater focus on the Holocaust itself was probably inevitable. Quite apart from the fact that Blair was addressing 600 Holocaust survivors invited to the ceremony in Westminster, his speech was given in the knowledge that as he spoke, hundreds of world leaders and thousands of others were gathered on the site of the Auschwitz concentration camp in the town of Oswiecim in southern Poland to remember its liberation. The coincidence of the sixtieth anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz – inevitable given the date selected for HMD – meant that greater emphasis had to be put on the Holocaust. The national event was in fact timed to coincide with the moment of liberation of Auschwitz.

The programme of the event further reflected this focus. In addition to speeches by Britain’s Chief Rabbi and the Prime Minister, there were remarks by Stephen Fry attempting to explain the significance of “Six million...and more”, readings from Primo Levi, even a short address by the England football team manager, who had taken the team on a visit to

¹⁶ Holocaust Memorial Day Commemorative Programme, received electronically from Aideen Lee of Luther Pendragon 17/10/05.

¹⁷ BBC News, ‘In quotes: UK marks Holocaust Day’, retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk> on 6/10/05.

¹⁸ Tony Blair, ‘PM’s Speech on the Holocaust, 27 January 2005’ retrieved from www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page7007.asp on 6/10/05.

¹⁹ Tony Blair, ‘PM’s Speech on the Holocaust, 28 January 2005’ retrieved from www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page7446.asp on 6/10/05.

Auschwitz before a match in Poland. Rather than focusing on the wider lessons of the Holocaust and Auschwitz, the aim was more to make clear that the Holocaust is relevant to British society by exposing the public to the survivors who settled in Britain. It served to illustrate that, as US Vice President Dick Cheney said at Auschwitz: “this immense cruelty did not happen in an uncivilised, faraway part of the world, but at the heart of the civilised world.”²⁰ This was emphasised by the setting of the national event in Westminster Hall which, in the words of the BBC commentator “encased a thousand years of our history.”²¹

More personally, Stephen Fry acknowledged the significance of how his family found refuge in Britain in the 1930s. “So I thank you, Great Britain, for allowing me, my brother, and my sister, and their children, to have life.”²² The simple statement drew intense reactions from those present, including the Queen.

Other suffering was given some attention. Ade Adepitan, a disabled athlete, asked “What chance would I have had in Nazi Germany, being disabled and black?” He focused attention on the murder of the physically and mentally disabled: “I grieve for those who were never given the chance to prove they were worthy of life.”²³ The “Forgotten Holocaust” of the Gypsies was given musical expression by the Boros Gypsy Ensemble.

For many, the most moving element of the coverage was a film, entitled “The Return”, describing the journey by a Holocaust survivor, Susan Pollack, to Belsen, where she had been liberated sixty years earlier. A flame lit by her at Belsen was brought into the hall and used to light candles by the Queen, the Duke of Edinburgh, and sixty survivors, one for each year since liberation. Holocaust survivors now living in Britain were thus brought into the spotlight and the Holocaust absorbed into Britain’s national history and consciousness, at least on the official level. As guidelines for local organisers noted; “Survivors and refugees who rebuilt their lives here are part of our national heritage.”²⁴ The spectacle of the British grandchildren of survivors reading the names of their murdered relatives was powerful testimony to this, particularly as they stumbled with the ‘foreign’ names. Was the significance of HMD understood, though, by British society?

Local events: building communities?

Without popular participation, days such as Holocaust Memorial Day are meaningless. The aims of the day to educate and promote reflection and tolerance cannot be achieved without events held at a local level. The number and scale of events held across Britain for HMD 2005, along with other data, suggests that HMD has become a part of British life. Furthermore, examination of the content of some of these events suggests that awareness of HMD does not stop at a general feeling of sadness at the Holocaust, but is linked to a commitment to deal with issues of racism and tolerance in a more universal manner.

Estimating the number of events held to mark HMD is difficult. A press release by the organisers of the event on 24 January claimed that “500 regional, community and school events”²⁵ took place “across Britain” in the period around 27 January 2005. The website somethingjewish.co.uk carried a list of 108 events²⁶.

²⁰ BBC News, ‘In quotes: Auschwitz anniversary’ retrieved from <http://news.bbc.co.uk> on 6/10/05.

²¹ Quote obtained from video of the BBC programme of the event. Thanks to Julie Heptonstall of the BBC for providing this invaluable resource. Quotations have been verified with written sources where possible; any mistakes are the responsibility of the author.

²² BBC video.

²³ BBC video.

²⁴ Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, ‘Local Activities Guidelines’ (PDF) retrieved from www.hmd.org.uk 6/10/05.

²⁵ ‘Operational Note: Arrangements for UK Holocaust Memorial Day’, (PDF) retrieved from www.hmd.org.uk on 6/10/05.

²⁶ Citation!

At this remove, it is impossible to estimate the true figure or to examine in detail many of the events which took place. The transitory nature of events listings means that it was only possible to obtain details for a very small number of events, though these are very interesting in their content, and are discussed below. Before doing so, however, it is worth examining the types of events that were carried on somethingjewish.co.uk. For ease of analysis, the events were broken down into categories:

Ceremonies	29
Memorial services	16
Talks/lectures/workshops	9
Talks by survivors	6
Displays and exhibitions	13
Theatre and drama	6
Musical events	8
Film shows	6
Other	20

The popularity of ceremonies and memorial services is interesting, suggesting that local events tended to be passive, small-scale models of the national event in London. Similar events were, in fact, held in Birmingham and Manchester. As examination of two ceremonies will show, however, the category does not do justice to the full extent of what actually happened. Furthermore, from the brief descriptions offered, it is hard to estimate how much cross-over there was between categories or how often a single ‘flagship’ event was at the centre of a series of related events. It is also impossible to establish the nature of what happened, except in the cases detailed below. While one has to be cautious in drawing general conclusions from these commemorations, they paint a very hopeful picture of Britain’s commitment to the aims of HMD.

The guidelines for organisers of local events stated four aims: “To remember all victims of Nazi persecution”; “To reflect upon those affected by more recent atrocities”; to educate about the dangers of “antisemitism, racism and all forms of discrimination”; and to build bridges between local communities. Specifically, the guidelines emphasised the importance of promoting “community cohesion so that the diversity of people’s different backgrounds and circumstances are appreciated and positively valued, and to establish a greater sense of citizenship.”²⁷

The guidelines went on to explain the background of HMD and emphasise that the commemorations were not “just a Jewish issue” and had relevance not only to all groups persecuted by the Nazis but also survivors of other genocides, singling out Rwanda and Kosovo for special mention. The guidelines acknowledged the potential concentration on the Holocaust and reminded organisers that “these others can and should be remembered.”

Although the liberation of the camps 60 years ago provides the central theme for 2005, it should be acknowledged that there are many people who have struggled and are still struggling to rebuild their lives in the shadow of their experiences.

The London Borough of Barnet held its Holocaust Memorial Day ceremony on 23 January, probably to accommodate the presence of Trude Levi, a Holocaust survivor who was also present at the national commemoration later in the week. The choice of a Sunday rather than the midweek anniversary itself, though, made it possible for more people to attend.

²⁷ Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, ‘Local Activities Guidelines’ (PDF) retrieved from www.hmd.org.uk 6/10/05

Barnet's event was attended by "over 700 people"²⁸ and consisted of speeches by local politicians, an address by Trude Levi, words from local clergy and music performed by local schoolchildren and the London Cantorial Singers. Ten minutes in the programme was also given to members of the Holocaust Survivor Centre Creative Writing Group. These items might lead the casual observer to conclude that the ceremony was simply a small-scale version of the event in Westminster. One element runs counter to this impression.

One of the bases of Holocaust Memorial Day is a national "Statement of Commitment" (based on the Stockholm Declaration) which sets out the vision for Holocaust Memorial Day. Barnet also has a statement, which was read out by schoolchildren. Mostly copied from the national statement, the final two points address local concerns in a very positive manner, embracing the wider lessons of HMD in a distinctive way.

We in Barnet are proud of our multicultural, multi-faith community. We pledge to strengthen our efforts to promote education and research about the Holocaust and other acts of genocide. We will do our utmost to make sure that the lessons learnt from these events are fully understood.

We in Barnet condemn the evils of prejudice, discrimination and racism, and value the right for all to live in a free, tolerant and democratic society.²⁹

In addition, the commemorative programme for the event also carried details of a continuing "Children of the Holocaust Memorial Project", which aims to "plant, over time, enough snowdrops to represent the 1.5 million children's lives that were lost." Such projects serve a questionable purpose in remembrance; it is doubtful that any frame of reference can convey the enormity of the Holocaust and any such approach obscures the individuality of the victims. As Stephen Fry remarked at the national ceremony after attempting to convey the scale of the Holocaust with such metaphors as "six cities the size of Birmingham" or "every name in 55 telephone directories": "I am falling into the same trap, trying to understand what six million means by throwing other numbers at it."³⁰ The sincerity of the project, however, is inarguable. Furthermore, the evidence of a continuing commitment to the issues of HMD suggests that "making sure the lessons learnt from these events are fully understood" does not stop with the day itself.

The London Borough of Hackney also commemorated HMD officially, with exhibitions in the Town Hall and Central Library, speeches from local councillors, a candle-lighting ceremony, and the planting of a tree, intended to "become a monument to mark Hackney's tolerance and ethnic diversity."³¹ The very specific focus on Jewish suffering during the Holocaust was offset by an exhibition, entitled SITE, created by On Site Arts documenting the continuing problems faced by contemporary Gypsy/traveller communities. The press release for this began with a bald historical and contemporary statement.

*It is estimated that between one and one and a half million Gypsies were exterminated by the Nazis between 1939 and 1945. Gypsy/Travellers continue to face persecution, prejudice and widespread disadvantage.*³²

²⁸ London Borough of Barnet, 'Barnet Holocaust Memorial Day 2005. 23 January, 1pm', retrieved from www.barnet.gov.uk/holocaust/index.php3 on 5/10/05.

²⁹ Commemorative programme, (PDF) retrieved from www.barnet.gov.uk on 5/10/05.

³⁰ BBC video.

³¹ London Borough of Hackney, 'Holocaust Memorial Day – 27 January 2005' retrieved from www.hackney.gov.uk on 11/10/05.

³² On Site Arts press release, 'SITE' (PDF) retrieved from www.hackney.gov.uk on 11/10/05.

Hackney does not seem to have gone as far as Barnet in drawing lessons from the Holocaust and HMD. Nonetheless, the separate commemoration of Sinti and Roma victims, and particularly the explicit comparison with modern society, suggests that these events were worthwhile additions to the day.

The University of Sussex also held an event to mark HMD, in keeping with its academic status. Two lectures, one by a Holocaust survivor and the other by the author Eva Hoffmann, were hosted by the University Chancellor and the Director for German-Jewish Studies.

So far, the events described have been focused on a particular occasion. More active series of events were held by the authorities in Northern Ireland and in East London.

The approach in Northern Ireland was dominated by the representation of the Holocaust on film, though lectures and exhibitions also formed part of the month's activities. A lecture on "The New Lives and Businesses established by Jewish Refugees in Northern Ireland" went alongside an exhibition "A haven on the Foyle", presenting documents and photographs concerning refugees to the region. A series of workshops on "The Holocaust: Image and Memory" was complemented by screenings of films about the Holocaust. Some of these were not well-known, though both *Schindler's List* and Roman Polanski's *The Pianist* were screened. A separate programme of films was aimed at schools. All these events appear to have been free. In addition, a memorial installation "In their own words" of "first hand accounts by individuals now living in Northern Ireland who were affected by the Holocaust and the genocide in Rwanda" ran at various locations in the region.³³

One unusual element of Northern Ireland's programme was the inclusion of a day-trip to Auschwitz and Krakow in March, which participants had to book by 1 February. The trip, along with the length of time over which the events took place – almost two weeks, from 17 January – demonstrates a commitment to serious education, albeit perhaps overly focused on the Holocaust itself.

In East London, ceremonies at the Central East London Synagogue in Tower Hamlets were set off by survivor testimony and a presentation of "Entartete Musik" by the Amazonia Music Theatre Company. A candle-lighting ceremony was also held during the evening of 26 January. An exhibition "The Vanished Shtetl" ran at various venues in the area. Most interestingly, on 23 January a historical walk took those interested around sites connected with Jewish immigration to the area in the 1930s as a result of Nazi persecution, and also discussed the discrimination and persecution these immigrants faced. The walk concluded with a film, "We Want the Light", about the effect of the Holocaust on music.³⁴

There is no way of ensuring that the events discussed above are a representative sample of what took place across the UK on HMD 2005. On the other hand, the events from previous years described in the guidelines for local organisers suggest they are typical. In any case, they offer a positive picture of the significance of the day. Generally, local communities seem to have responded to HMD and made an effort to commemorate it. Equally, these events suggest that most of those organising understood the theme of the day, as well as how that theme related to the wider lessons of the Holocaust. The nature of the theme perhaps made it inevitable that other genocides would be somewhat forgotten, though, positively, local communities seem to have made a concerted effort to explore how the Holocaust affected them. One crucial audience, however, has not yet been discussed.

³³ Office of the First Minister and Deputy First Minister, 'Holocaust Memorial Day Forthcoming Events', retrieved from www.nics.gov.uk/press/ofmdfm/050114g-ofmdfm.htm on 6/10/05.

³⁴ eastlondonhistory.com, 'UK Holocaust Memorial Day', retrieved from www.eastlondonhistory.com/holocaust%2Fmemorial.htm on 5/10/05.

Schools: building citizens?

Schoolchildren are an essential part of Holocaust Memorial Day. Tony Blair, in his speech at the national event, addressed “the generations even younger, some of whom may wonder what it is we commemorate and why.”³⁵ From the outset, the educational purpose of HMD was reflected in both statements and practice. Point three of the national Statement of Commitment is clear.

We must make sure that future generations understand the causes of the Holocaust and reflect upon its consequences. We vow to remember the victims of Nazi persecution.³⁶

In accordance with this aim, 2001 saw the production of extensive educational materials aimed at primary and secondary students. The durable format and high quality of these materials indicates that they were intended to be retained for use well beyond the first HMD. The booklet is at pains to emphasise that it should not “be seen as a substitute for teaching about the Holocaust as part of a scheme of work within the National Curriculum”³⁷ though it acknowledges that the activities may be used in conjunction with the regular curriculum in History, English, Religious Studies, PSHE and citizenship.

The materials approach the Holocaust thematically, under such headings as “Democracy and diversity” and “Racism and responsibility”, and historically, focusing on key events such as the Euthanasia Programme and *Kindertransport*, and locations such as the Warsaw Ghetto and Auschwitz. Other genocides are addressed in two sections, on “Bosnian Refugees” and “Genocide in Rwanda.” The 2001 materials were supplemented in subsequent years by other materials addressing the year’s theme more specifically – though they needed little further detail for the first four years of HMD.

Understanding how UK schools responded to HMD 2005 is very difficult to assess. Internet searches produced only one school with a webpage dealing with HMD still extant.

Clounagh Junior High School in County Armagh, Northern Ireland marked HMD in a very unusual way. Although details of ceremonies are unclear, the school’s website described how the students felt.

On Thursday 27th January 2005 on the 60th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz the pupils at Clounagh Junior High School decided to pay their respects to the victims of the Nazi genocide and to show their determination that such things should never happen again. The pupils also decided that the occasion should demonstrate their abhorrence of any forms of bullying and racism. To show their feelings the pupils made and wore yellow stars in imitation of those that the Nazis forced the Jews to wear.³⁸

Details of any similar activities have not been found at the time of writing, probably due to the speed with which school events succeed one another. Schoolchildren, though, are frequently mentioned as participants in acts of commemoration, reading, singing, and performing as part of their local events. The Holocaust Educational Trust, which arranges visits by survivors to schools as well as a detailed follow-up programme, is also one of the organisations which work to make HMD meaningful to schools. It therefore seems safe to

³⁵ Tony Blair, ‘PM’s Speech on the Holocaust, 27 January 2005’ retrieved from www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page7007.asp on 6/10/05.

³⁶ Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, ‘Statement of Commitment’, retrieved from www.hmd.org.uk on 5/10/05.

³⁷ HMD Education Working Group, *Remembering Genocides – Lessons for the Future Education Pack*, Department for Education and Employment 2000, p.4.

³⁸ Clounagh Junior High School, ‘Holocaust Memorial Day’, retrieved from www.clounagh.com/news/holocaust.html on 11/10/05.

assume that there was widespread involvement and awareness among British students of HMD 2005.

Conclusions

Holocaust Memorial Day has, from its inception, attempted to address the wider issues raised by the Holocaust. In all years, the “lessons” component of HMD has been given considerable attention. HMD 2005 was less concerned with other genocides and human rights abuses than in previous years, largely because the theme and the coincidence with the Auschwitz anniversary focused attention more directly on the Holocaust than before.

As far as the UK population is concerned, the number and scale of events suggests that HMD has become a part of the national commemorative calendar. Generally, communities seem to take the day seriously, committing significant time and resources to producing events and materials in keeping with the day.

The calls by the Muslim Council of Britain to replace HMD with a broader Genocide Memorial Day have to be evaluated in this context. Holocaust Memorial Day is not exclusively about the Holocaust. As the Home Secretary, Charles Clarke, emphasised in a letter to the chairman of the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust in September 2005:

While the suffering of Jewish people remains central to the Holocaust, the Government has always regarded Holocaust Memorial Day as an important event for the country as a whole, and has always taken a broad and inclusive approach in designing its content and community reach. Thus, during the first five years since its inception, the day has been used to commemorate the other victims of the racial policies of the Nazis, to draw lessons for today’s generation, to recognise and hear survivors from more recent tragedies such as Bosnia, Rwanda and Kosovo, and to highlight the importance of confronting not only anti-semitism [sic] but also other forms of racism and persecution, such as islamophobia [sic].³⁹

The Home Secretary’s remarks also draw attention to a further problem with the MCB’s proposals. “The Holocaust”, for a variety of reasons beyond the scope of this paper, is a concept that enjoys broad understanding among the public as well as an academic consensus about its meaning. “Genocide” is a far more contested term. The MCB has to consider that a Genocide Memorial Day would likely run into what Marcel Berlins in the *Guardian* termed “definitional uncertainty”⁴⁰ to the point where either individual days would have to commemorate specific instances of genocide (however defined or agreed upon) to the exclusion of others, or apply the label of genocide in a way that robs it of all significance. In particular, it remains open to question whether the suffering of the Palestinians could, realistically, be remembered as an example of genocide. Instead, perhaps, the MCB could follow the suggestion of David Cesarani, who argued in the same newspaper that, given co-operation in remembering HMD, it “could become a rallying ground for Jews and Muslims resisting all forms of racism, the abuse of human rights, ethnic cleansing and genocide.”⁴¹

Fundamentally, the lesson from the MCB’s calls for a change to HMD is that observers must pay attention to what is being remembered on HMD and how; to ensure that other genocides and human rights abuses, as well as lessons of tolerance and responsibility,

³⁹ Holocaust Memorial Day Trust, ‘Home Secretary re-affirms support for Holocaust Memorial Day’, retrieved from www.hmd.org.uk/presscentre/releases/pr_160905.asp on 5/10/05.

⁴⁰ Marcel Berlins, ‘Victims of the Holocaust get a memorial day. Victims of other atrocities do not. Isn’t it time we dropped the whole idea?’ *The Guardian*, Wednesday 14 September 2005, retrieved from www.guardian.co.uk on 11/10/05.

⁴¹ David Cesarani, ‘A way out of this dead end’, *The Guardian*, Friday 16 September 2005, retrieved from www.guardian.co.uk on 5/10/05.

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continue to be a part of the day. The choice of theme for 2006, “One Person *Can* Make a Difference” suggests that Holocaust Memorial Day will continue to use the Holocaust as a starting-point for broader reflection rather than, as its opponents argue, being a narrow remembrance of particular suffering.