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NEGOTIATING THE MARKETPLACE:

The role(s) of Holocaust museums today

This paper explores four roles played by Holocaust museums today, as sites of mass tourism; memorials to the dead; vehicles of historical exposition; and living memorials educating subsequent generations about the “lessons” of the Holocaust. Whilst the paper refers to various Holocaust museums, it focuses on the Auschwitz museum and the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum (IWM).

Holocaust museums are complex, carefully scripted performance sites, playing a range of different roles. Focusing primarily on the Auschwitz museum and the Holocaust exhibition at the Imperial War Museum,¹ this paper explores four of these roles: sites of mass tourism; memorials to the dead; vehicles of historical exposition; and living classrooms communicating the “lessons” of the Holocaust.² In practice, this juxtaposition of roles often proves problematic. For example, what is appropriate from an educational point of view may be considered inappropriate, even offensive, in a commemorative context.

On 2 July 1947, the Sejm (Polish Parliament) formally established a state museum as “a monument to the martyrdom and struggle of the Polish and other peoples” on the site of the former concentration camp (Auschwitz I) and deathcamp (Birkenau),³ where an estimated 1,100,000 people perished between 1940–1945, including 960,000 Jews, 70–75,000 Poles, 21,000 Roma, 15,000 Soviet POWs and 10–15,000 people from other groups/nationalities (Piper 94–95). The museum employs over 200 staff, and has departments of collections, preservation, research, publications, education and visitor services, archives and a library. Its mandate is “to collect, preserve and conserve the collections and buildings of the museum, to conduct research upon them and to make them accessible to visitors and to all people from Poland and the rest of the world” (Oleksy, “Education Center” 86). Since 1989 over 500,000 people have visited the museum each year, roughly half of them young people, and 40–45% from overseas. Today, the museum grounds incorporate only part of the former camp.⁴ Both the physical site and the artefacts on display have been conserved.⁵ Consequently, what visitors encounter “is not and cannot be Auschwitz, but is merely and inevitably a representation – preserved, constructed, reconstructed, or distorted – of Auschwitz as it existed in the years 1940–1945” (Huener 21).

The IWM Holocaust exhibition is very different in terms of approach and content. It is one element within a museum dedicated to recording “all aspects of modern war, and of the individual’s experience of war, whether allied or enemy, service or civilian, military or political, social or cultural” (<http://www.iwm.org.uk>).⁶ In 1995 the IWM unveiled plans to open a new exhibition on

the Holocaust and genocide in the 20th century. Faced with criticism (Cooke 594–595), it decided to focus the new exhibition solely on the Holocaust. Over 400,000 people visited the exhibition in the eighteen months following its formal opening on 6 June 2000. The attendance figures reflected growing interest in the subject in Britain: the exhibition opened at a time when the British government was publicly committed to establishing a national Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) and the Holocaust and civil society were playing an increasing role in the national curriculum. The exhibition is located over two floors: the upper floor focuses on 1933–1939, culminating in the Euthanasia Programme; the lower floor covers events from the invasion of Poland to liberation. It concludes with “Reflections,” a contemplative space with benches and two screens – one portrays images of Auschwitz today, the other, survivors commenting on the “lessons” of the Holocaust. In December 2002 the IWM opened “Crimes against Humanity: An Exploration of Genocide and Ethnic Violence.” The introduction of these two exhibitions bears witness to the changes in the IWM’s understanding of its role, from a museum focused on war and empire to one exploring conflict (in all of its manifestations) in the contemporary world. The example of the IWM illustrates the ways in which the national, educational and political context of a museum influences the approach taken in its exhibitions. In analysing a Holocaust museum, we need to ask who the intended audience is, to whom a museum’s staff is formally accountable, and what conditions, if any, are attached to its primary sources of funding. An independent privately funded institution (such as Beth Shalom) operates under different constraints from those of a national museum (such as Auschwitz, Yad Vashem, the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum [USHMM] or the IWM) which are reliant, at least in part, on state funding. The Auschwitz museum, for example, has changed considerably over time, particularly following the collapse of Communism in 1989. From 1947–1989 it relied on state funding and operated under the constraints of a Communist regime. Since 1989 it has remained a state museum but depends increasingly on outside funding, particularly for conservation activities. In 1990, the prime minister Tadeusz Mazowiecki established the International Auschwitz Council (http://www.auschwitz.gov.pl/en_ustanowienie01.html), which was reconstituted in 2000 and its brief extended to include other Polish Holocaust memorial sites. The members of the Council are appointed by the prime minister and include survivors and non-survivors, Poles and non-Poles, Jews and non-Jews, representatives of organisations (such as the International Auschwitz Committee, the USHMM and Yad Vashem) and a small handful of academics. As an advisory body, the Council facilitates dialogue enabling a range of “outsiders” to influence the direction of the museum, and provides a forum for discussion with a wide range of interested parties, including senior officials from relevant Polish government ministries, local authorities, town planners, conservationists and so on.

Today, Holocaust museums operate in a competitive, overcrowded marketplace (for example, over a thousand organisations are included in the Task Force for International Cooperation on Holocaust Education, Remembrance, and Research’s directory for 2000). Peter Novick observes that “Holocaust institutions, like all institutions, generate their own momentum; [and] at a minimum are dedicated to their own continuation” (277). This momentum stems, in part, from the existence of “competition.”⁷ The opening of the USHMM in 1993 had an instant impact as it rapidly emerged as a major player in international Holocaust commemoration, education and

research, challenging prevailing assumptions of what a Holocaust museum could and should be. Speaking during the planning stages of the IWM's exhibition, its project director, Suzanne Bardgett, observed that the USHMM "comes closest to the type of display which we would like to create. Indeed it is a very hard act to follow ... there is much to be learned from the rigorous thinking which they have applied to every element of their exhibition" ("Genesis" 32–33; for a range of responses to the USHMM, see Linenthal, Rosen and Young). The current redevelopment of Yad Vashem can also be seen, at least in part, as a response to this challenge. Its current director, Avner Shalev, acknowledges that the museum's permanent exhibition was "antiquated" in approach, content and capacity (originally 300,000 visitors per year were envisaged; in 2000 there were 2,000,000 visitors). The intention is that in its redeveloped form Yad Vashem will draw on the latest technology and pedagogical thinking "to present from a Jewish perspective the different facets of the Holocaust to the world" ("The New Museum Complex") – in stark contrast to the American perspective embodied in the USHMM.

Holocaust museums as sites of mass tourism

The publication of Marc Terrance's *Concentration Camps: A Traveller's Guide* bears witness to the growth of "Holocaust tourism." Such tourism takes different forms. For some visiting a Holocaust museum is a primary activity, that is, one of the main purposes of their visit. For others it is a secondary activity, for example, their primary destination is Washington, London or Kraków, and once there, they visit a Holocaust museum as one of the local places of interest. Thus, in Kraków, tourist information bureaus seek to attract such visitors by advertising half-day trips to the Auschwitz museum alongside city tours and visits to the Wieliczka salt mine. To cater for growing numbers of visitors many Holocaust museums have the standard accoutrements of any tourist site: coach parks, cafeterias, shops selling postcards, guidebooks and so on.⁸ Bardgett candidly acknowledges that "museums have long ago lost their innocence of the profit motive," adding that "it makes no sense to spend millions on a project one considers thoroughly worthwhile and then to shy away from promoting it" ("Exhibiting Hatred" 20). Prior to opening its exhibition, the IWM therefore employed an advertising agency. The success of this campaign is evident both in the number of visitors and in coverage of Britain's first Holocaust Memorial Day in 2001. News bulletins, documentaries, even the television programme *Songs of Praise* utilised the exhibition as a backdrop, indicating the significant role the IWM now plays in Britain's public Holocaust-related activities.

Holocaust tourism, in at least some of its forms, represents a branch of heritage travel and "dark" tourism. Such tourism feeds off the media; for example, coverage of the 50th and 60th anniversaries of the Second World War led to an upsurge in battlefield tourism, and the number of visitors to Omaha Beach rose following the success of *Saving Private Ryan*. Likewise, Holocaust tourism grew following the success of *Schindler's List*, particularly visits to sites in Kraków featured in the film. The USHMM capitalised on this increased interest by mounting an exhibition on Schindler. There are a growing number of "roots" or memorial tours to Central and Eastern Europe (for example, *Our Roots*, Warsaw, arranges visits to, and publishes guides of, Jewish sites in Warsaw, Kraków and Lublin). Explicitly Jewish versions of Holocaust tourism stress

the educational and identity-moulding benefits of such tours; for example, the March of the Living seeks to “bring Jews together from different countries, cultures, secular and religious, and of every religious denomination, to share a common Jewish experience” (<http://www.motl.org>. For more on the March, see Stier 150–190). Such tours blur the distinction between pilgrims and tourists and some of the problems this generates are discussed below.

Holocaust museums as memorials

Holocaust museums are simultaneously tourist attractions and memorial sites. As memorial sites, they can function as places of pilgrimage. Whilst it may be possible to differentiate between memorial (the primary focus for pilgrims) and museum (the primary focus for tourists),⁹ the distinction between the two often becomes blurred. The IWM is unusual: it decided against including a dedicated memorial space in its exhibition on the grounds that this was inconsistent “with the general purpose of the museum, which is to educate rather than to commemorate” (Bardgett, “Genesis” 37). The opening exhibit “Life Before the Nazis” could serve a memorial function, as could the explicitly meditative “Reflections,” but these two exhibits were primarily designed as liminal space enabling visitors to adjust first away from, then back to, the pace, tone and preoccupations of the museum as a whole. Deyan Sudjic maintains that if Holocaust museums “are not to seem heartless and exploitative, they must be memorials as well as museums. Yet that involves sacrificing detachment and objectivity” (19). Whilst the IWM exhibition certainly strives to be objective, the museum would be appalled at any suggestion that it is “heartless” or “exploitative.”

The Auschwitz museum differs in approach, emphasising its dual character. Its deputy director, Krstyna Oleksy goes further, insisting that not only is it a museum and memorial, it is also “the largest cemetery in humankind’s history” and, because of this, “a trip to this place should be something in the nature of a pilgrimage every time” (“The Educational Centre” 4–5).¹⁰ Those sharing Oleksy’s view of the site may well regard the museum as sacred space. There are specific memorial sites and shrines in its grounds; for example, the Wall of Death and Maksymilian Kolbe’s death cell in Auschwitz I, and the Field of Ashes and ruins of the gas chambers and crematoria in Birkenau. For many survivors, relatives, and the wider national and religious communities to which they belong, these locations are authentic memorial sites where they can pray, light *yahrzeit* candles, and leave flowers, flags and personal mementoes.

Motives for visiting a Holocaust site differ and the presence of tourists may seem out of place, even offensive, to those paying their respects at a shrine or cemetery. A museum may succeed in reducing some of these tensions by drawing attention to the multifaceted character of the site and appealing to visitors to behave appropriately. In the Auschwitz museum there are carefully worded signs at strategic points. Information and photo-boards provide visitors with basic historical facts and indicate how a building or location looked “then.” Some of this information has recently been relocated so it is outside, rather than inside, key buildings (for example, the crematorium and gas chamber at Auschwitz I) allowing visitors simply to contemplate or pray when inside. Factual information in the Sauna (Birkenau) is deliberately kept to a minimum: “all informational media and their contents should be subdued in order to convey

information without dominating the interior and its particular atmosphere.” (Świebicka 196) Black granite stones, designed to look like tombstones, with inscriptions in Polish, English, Hebrew and Yiddish¹¹ mark some of the locations in Birkenau where human remains were deposited, and draw visitors’ attention to the “cemetery” and memorial aspects of the site.

Despite such initiatives, the Auschwitz museum remains a source of controversy over what many see as commercial, political and religious exploitation of the site. Such disputes centre on “ownership” of the site and whose sensitivities should take precedence, and highlight the difficulty, even impossibility, of achieving consensus over appropriate ways of memorialising what happened at Auschwitz. The more symbolic the location, the fiercer the controversy is, and Auschwitz is currently regarded by many as the dominant symbol of the Holocaust.

Whilst the number of visitors to some Holocaust sites continues to grow, other sites are rarely visited and were largely overlooked in the forging of collective memories of the Holocaust.¹² The few have come to stand for the many. In part this is because the destruction of many communities was so comprehensive that few survived to remember it. In part it is because there is often no memorial and little or nothing to see in the form of memorials or artefacts. Few therefore visit such sites despite recent attempts to change this, for example through the provision of more appropriate memorials (such as at Belzec, where a joint initiative of the Polish government and the American Jewish Committee resulted in the dedication of a new \$5 million memorial on 3 June 2004). These “forgotten” places bear witness to the constructed, even arbitrary, nature of collective memories of the Holocaust.

Holocaust museums as narrators and preservers of history

Memorial complexes such as the Auschwitz museum, the USHMM and Yad Vashem are dedicated to conserving, researching and disseminating the history of the Holocaust. These research activities have a direct bearing on their memorials and exhibitions and are disseminated through conferences and publications.¹³

Holocaust museums interpret events in ways that reflect their immediate context, prompting James Young to observe that “in every nation’s memorials and museums, a different Holocaust is remembered, often to conflicting political and religious ends” (ix). Museums communicate their own particular interpretation of the Holocaust via permanent exhibitions, as well as through publications and programmes of educational activities. Is the intended audience primarily survivors or non-survivors, Jews or non-Jews, children or adults? Whose story should take centre stage, that of the perpetrators or the victims? What of bystanders? Can these perspectives be combined? What of experiences that were exceptional rather than the norm, such as armed resistance or the activities of righteous gentiles?¹⁴ How a museum answers such questions reflects what it hopes to achieve. Today, the Auschwitz museum seeks to communicate a complex history to a largely young and increasingly international audience. For Oleksy, “it is necessary to state unambiguously what happened here, and who did what to whom – to say who the perpetrators were and who the victims were” (“The Education Center” 81). The IWM primarily focuses on the needs of schools (25,000 secondary school children

visited the exhibition in its first year) and pays limited attention to its British context. By contrast, and reflecting its geographical distance from Nazi-occupied Europe, the USHMM stresses that “one of the Holocaust’s fundamental lessons is that to be a bystander is to share the guilt” (Weinberg and Elieli 18). The Kiddush Hashem Archives and Memorial Center in Bnei Brak differs again, and is unusual amongst Holocaust museums in catering for the specific sensitivities and needs of a *haredi* audience.

An implicit or explicit hierarchy of victims operates in many Holocaust museums, often influenced by current political concerns.¹⁵ For Irving Greenberg, the USHMM achieves “a superb balance, it is deeply Jewish, yet all the universal implications are drawn.” It defines the Holocaust as the death of six million Jews and five million others:

The Holocaust was the state-sponsored, systematic persecution and annihilation of European Jewry by Nazi Germany and its collaborators between 1933 and 1945. Jews were the primary victims – six million were murdered; Gypsies, the handicapped, and Poles were also targeted for destruction or decimation for racial, ethnic, or national reasons. Millions more, including homosexuals, Jehovah’s Witnesses, Soviet prisoners of war, and political dissidents also suffered grievous oppression and death under Nazi tyranny.

(Image of God 232)

This definition consists of three circles: the experience of the Jews; “other victims” targeted for “racial, ethnic, or national reasons”; and those who experienced “grievous oppression and death.” The internal ordering of such definitions is significant; for example, the positioning of Soviet POWs in the third rather than the second group. Despite this definition, “other victims” only figure sporadically in the exhibition, primarily in the context of the racial state, the early concentration camps and as “a mosaic of victims.”

The IWM “takes as its departure point the persecution and annihilation of the Jews, but introduces the stories of other victim groups at appropriate points” (Bardgett, “Holocaust Exhibition”). It adopts an inclusive definition, seeking to relate the exhibition to the Second World War and the broader context of the museum:

Under the cover of the Second World War, for the sake of their “new order,” the Nazis sought to destroy all the Jews of Europe. For the first time in history, industrial methods were used for the mass extermination of a whole people. Six million were murdered, including 1,500,000 children. This event is called the Holocaust.

The Nazis enslaved and murdered millions of others as well, Gypsies, people with physical and mental disabilities, Poles, Soviet POWs, Trade Unionists, Political opponents, Prisoners of Conscience, Homosexuals and others were killed in vast numbers. This Exhibition looks at how and why these things happened and why.

(Holocaust Exhibition, IVUM)

“Other victims” feature in the context of the first concentration camps and the invasion of Poland, and are prominent in exhibits on Nazi racial policy and the Euthanasia Programme. There is a small exhibit on Soviet POWs but, significantly, it is located

opposite another on the involvement of local populations in the killing process in the Baltic States. Visitors can access further information via touch-screen computers towards the end of the exhibition. Clicking on “Who were the victims?” they are confronted by twelve photographs: Roma, the disabled, Soviet POWs, Poles, Serbs, Other Slavs, Jehovah’s Witnesses, “Politicals,” Christian clergy, homosexuals, Jews and “Blacks.” For visitors relying solely on this exhibition for information on how and why these things happened to “millions of others” some of these groups could come as a surprise.

The IWM’s exhibition devotes considerable attention to what was done (anti-Jewish legislation, the mechanics of mass killing) and who did what (there is much “naming of names” of perpetrators). An exhibit on “the ‘Final Solution’” lays out the organisational structure of the Reich and Protectorate, the railways, the SS and police, the occupation of the Netherlands, Poland, Norway, the Soviet Union, Serbia, Greece, Belgium, France and the Channel Islands, Hungary and “Other Countries.” The design of this section makes it stand out from its surroundings: it is brightly lit, with white text on a black background, set off by a white floor, whereas most of the lower floor exhibits are dimly lit, an effect enhanced by black/grey floors – perhaps an attempt to contrast the darkness of the Holocaust (the Kingdom of Night) with a commitment to highlighting the misdeeds of the perpetrators?

Answers to the question “why?” are hinted at in exhibits on antisemitism, “the Racial State,” “Propaganda and Race Hatred” and personal accounts by perpetrators. The largely perpetrator-centred narrative is counterbalanced by the inclusion of testimony by survivors (audio, videotape and written text) and emotive personal artefacts (for example, a doll that belonged to a child in hiding). Those interviewed are mainly Jewish (one is a Jehovah’s Witness but this is not immediately obvious). The representation of victims and survivors is less detailed than that of the perpetrators: survivors cease to be identified on video, their stories blend into each other so that we encounter what is, in effect, a composite survivor. Many photographs are not captioned: the intention seems to be to prompt an emotional reaction rather than convey historical information.

How something is said impacts on what is said, raising the question of whether some modes of representation are more appropriate than others. In its exhibitions, a Holocaust museum may decide to be as graphic as possible, or to approach the subject more tangentially, stressing the ethical and aesthetic difficulties inherent in representing it.¹⁶ Just because a museum possesses certain artefacts, it does not necessarily follow that it should put them on public display, and the educational justifications museum staff give for exhibiting human hair, and film or photographs of the moment of death are questionable.¹⁷ Opinion differs over the age at which it is appropriate to expose children to explicit images of violence. Paul Salmons, Holocaust Education Coordinator at the IWM, maintains that “it is possible to teach the Holocaust effectively and movingly without such images, and none appears in any of the classroom resources produced by the IWM” (“Moral Dilemmas”). Yet such images are present in the exhibition, hence the museum’s belief that it is unsuitable for children under the age of 13.

In the past there was a tendency to present “the Six Million” as a homogenous group who experienced the Holocaust in broadly similar ways, thus ignoring the impact factors such as age, class, gender, sexuality, religious and political affiliation had on *the way in*

which it was experienced. Established museums such as Yad Vashem are now beginning to adopt a different approach and are trying to present the victims more as individuals and less as a statistic (“the Six Million”):

In the past, when we had a picture, and had a positive identification of the person depicted on it, we would refrain from writing his or her name, because we wanted them to represent a phenomenon and not just themselves. Today, we are taking the opposite approach. Now we are seeking the pictures and photographs in which we can identify the person.

(Shalev)

Recently established museums also seek to personalise “the Six Million.” The USHMM does so using video and audio testimony, photographs and film footage (for example, of life in the ghettos), the Tower of Faces,¹⁸ two bridges of names (destroyed communities and victims’ first names). The IWM exhibition employs a similar approach. It opens with “Life before the Nazis” (pre-war photographs with Klezmer music playing in the background) which is based on similar principles to the Tower of Faces, albeit on a smaller scale. The strength of these photographs is that they portray individuals as they wished to see themselves and their families (as opposed to perpetrator images intended to dehumanise and humiliate). However, whilst effective as a collection of images, “Life before the Nazis” tells visitors little about those depicted: individuals are not identified and we are not told of their fate. The images chosen are reassuring, familiar, respectable and celebrating innocence. The intention seems to be to emphasise that those represented were *just like us*; they were mothers, fathers, sons, daughters, brothers, sisters, friends, lovers, with hopes and dreams for the future, engaging in normal everyday activities (going to the beach, playing music, sport and so on). Whilst such collections of photographs can be very effective as acts of ritual mourning, they also run the risk of becoming exercises in idealisation and nostalgia.

The designers of the exhibition in the Sauna at Birkenau sought to avoid such dangers. As the building where new arrivals were “processed” into the camp from December 1943 to January 1945, the Sauna is itself an artefact. Visitors to the renovated building follow a glass walkway over the “original” floor. A small exhibition seeks both to describe the building’s role and commemorate the victims. Before leaving, visitors enter a dimly lit room and come face to face with a large panel of photographs – mainly pre-war, with some from the ghetto – reflected in the glass floor. Brought to the camp by new arrivals (probably in August 1943), they are of Jews from Będzin and Sosnowiec. Some are damaged, indicating their traumatic history. At this point none are identified. At the close of the exhibition, the photographs – now interspersed with quotations from Yitzhak Katzenelson – are captioned (where possible) and visitors are given more details about some of the families represented; for example there are over 250 photographs of the interrelated Broder and Kohn families. In commenting on the Huppert family, the caption notes “all that is known about this family is what can be inferred from the photographs and the inscriptions on these photographs by family members. No one has been found to fill in the details from their own knowledge.” The exhibition concludes:

These are special photographs. Looking at them, we see portraits of individuals, histories of families and scenes from everyday life. We can compare these photographs with the ones we have in our own family albums.

However, there is a fundamental difference. The people whose photographs have been placed in the Sauna building are representations of the world that was destroyed as a result of the Holocaust.

They symbolize the whole people that was sentenced by the Nazis to the destruction of which Auschwitz is the symbol.¹⁹

(Exhibition in the Sauna, the Auschwitz museum)

Some permanent exhibitions are factual and artefact-based, seeking to provide visitors with a coherent linear historical narrative. Others question the possibility of a single narrative or history. The permanent exhibition at the Auschwitz museum focuses on the development of the camp, paying limited attention to its broader historical context. The standard tour consists of blocks 4–7 and 11 (Extermination, Material Evidence of Crimes, Everyday Life of the Prisoner, Living and Sanitary Conditions and the “Death Block”), concluding with the gas chamber and crematoria. “The principle of representation which organizes Auschwitz is the principle of nationality: we have national pavilions, national monuments and national languages conscientiously employed to represent particular nations” (Kapralski 16), hence the museum’s decision to include a number of national exhibits which offer differing interpretations of the camp and/or the Holocaust. For Foley and Lennon, this plurality provides visitors with an “opportunity to reflect without prescription or direction” (25). Yet defining Jewishness as a “nationality” is problematic and, in this emphasis on nationality, these exhibits fail to consider the Holocaust in its entirety or incorporate different Jewish communities’ experience in the various national histories: many national exhibits ignore or present the experience of the Jews as “other.” The new Czech exhibit is a notable exception in presenting national minorities, including Sudeten Germans, Jews, Sinti and Roma, as part of the Czech experience.

The Auschwitz museum is currently rethinking its permanent exhibition and some national exhibits have closed or been redesigned. There is a new exhibit on the Destruction of the European Roma (Block 13), a redesigned Hungarian exhibit (Block 18) and new Czech and Slovak exhibits (Block 16). Such changes are essential if the museum is to provide visitors with more background information on the Jews of Europe (particularly Polish Jews) and a greater sense of the historical, political and religious context of Nazism and the Holocaust. As other exhibits are redesigned (work on the French and Dutch national exhibits is currently underway), it is to be hoped that the museum continues to offer multiple narratives, for

any attempt to cultivate or enforce a single memorial narrative dishonours the memory of countless victims and survivors because, simply put, it distorts Auschwitz history. Indeed, the diversity of memorial narratives of Auschwitz that have proliferated in recent years is the result of that history – a history that defies quick categorisation, easy generalisation, and the “master narrative.”

(Huener xvi)

The Holocaust museum as educator

Holocaust museums regard education as central to their mission²⁰ and seek to communicate the “lessons” of the Holocaust clearly, summarising them in inscriptions at key points. The Auschwitz museum stresses the importance of learning from history (“The one who does not remember history is bound to live it through again”). The IWM exhibition warns against indifference (“For evil to triumph it is only necessary for good men to do nothing”). Beth Shalom emphasises individual responsibility (“Whoever saves one life, saves the world entire”). The USHMM and Yad Vashem both have substantial educational centres, providing programmes both at home and overseas. The Auschwitz museum’s Educational Centre offers one and two-day seminars for secondary school-children, as well as four- and six-day seminars for university students and teachers. It also runs a postgraduate course “Totalitarianism, Nazism and the Holocaust” in conjunction with the Pedagogical Academy in Kraków. The museum is planning to open a new international education centre, intriguingly located in the Old Theatre Building which controversially housed Carmelite nuns from 1984–1993. The IWM does not have a centre dedicated solely to Holocaust education but does employ a Holocaust Education Coordinator and runs an educational programme related to the exhibition.

For Annegret Ehmman the “classical rationale for Holocaust education is the expectation that knowledge about the committed atrocities and the suffering of the victims, especially if conveyed to the young generation, will immunize them against racism, intolerance, bigotry and hate” (607). As a consequence, Nazism is often presented as a radical attempt to demonise then eliminate difference, whilst civil society is presented as its opposite, celebrating diversity and individual moral responsibility. The desired response is an active commitment to defend and celebrate those values that Nazism sought to destroy: if the lessons of the Holocaust are learnt, being a bystander will no longer be a feasible option as visitors have seen where such indifference can lead. The fundamental “lesson” is therefore that each individual can make a difference. Hence, for the USHMM, “study of the Holocaust ... addresses one of the central tenets of education in the United States, which is to examine what it means to be a responsible citizen” (USHMM 1). Holocaust educators stress the importance of identifying early warning signs, and encourage students to confront prejudice, intolerance and discrimination at every level, even in the form of something as seemingly mundane as bullying in schools.

While these lessons are laudable, why is Holocaust education seen as one, if not the main vehicle for communicating them? There would appear to be an assumption that exposure to the events of the Holocaust sensitises us to injustice, thereby motivating visitors to take appropriate action in the present and/or future. Thus, Novick suggests it is now “accepted as a matter of faith, beyond discussion, that the mere act of walking through a Holocaust museum, or viewing a Holocaust movie, is going to be morally therapeutic, that multiplying such encounters will make one a better person” (13). Is such an assumption valid? Given the extensive media coverage of events in Rwanda, Bosnia, Kosovo and the Sudan, it seems that commitment to the rhetoric of “Never Again” has brought about limited practical change in terms of genocide prevention or domestic policy towards asylum seekers. As one survivor caustically observed during the 50th anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz, an equally powerful “lesson” of the Holocaust is that “you can get away with it” (quoted in Miles 17).

Contra Novick, it is important to note that few, if any, Holocaust educators would claim that “the mere act of walking through a Holocaust museum” is sufficient. Holocaust museums offer a narrative account of the Holocaust and employ slogans to communicate key “lessons,” but do not systematically unpack the complexities and significance of the events they represent. Visiting the exhibition is therefore only a start, particularly where schoolchildren are concerned. Museums design specific programmes for schools and groups of professionals,²¹ often including pre-visit preparation and follow-up work. The IWM’s Paul Salmons notes that “while the exhibition offers a comprehensive account of the Holocaust, it is hoped that schools will not see a visit to the museum alone as being sufficient for the study of this complex history. The visit should be set within a broader scheme of work, and careful pre-visit and follow-up work is essential” (“Imperial War Museum”). Prior to visiting, schools are sent a video, *The Way We Lived*, focusing on pre-war Jewish life, a topic on which there is little in the exhibition. The visit includes an orientation session and opportunities for students to discuss what they have seen. The IWM has also produced a teachers’ resource pack, *Reflections*, and students’ guide, *Torn Apart*, as well as a programme of conferences and seminars for teachers.

Holocaust museums differ in the relative weight they attach to studying the past on its own terms and identifying lessons for the present. For the USHMM, “the most crucial aspect” of its mission is demonstrating “the applicability of the moral lessons learned from the Holocaust to current and future events” (Weinberg and Elieli 19). The Auschwitz museum places the emphasis more on the need to learn what happened, who did what to whom, and why. For Oleksy, Holocaust education can adopt one of two approaches: it can focus on armed and spiritual resistance, identifying “moral models” such as Maksymilian Kolbe, or emphasise “the world and the mechanisms that govern the world, in order to try and prevent danger.” (“Education Center” 80) In both cases, she argues, “questions about the place of the individual in society must be asked within the context of the history of the Auschwitz concentration camp.” (78) Post 1989, educators at the Auschwitz museum have played an important role in counteracting fifty years of Communist misrepresentation of Polish-Jewish history and Polish-Jewish relations, designing programmes to “help young people to understand that the Holocaust was not just a terrible crime and a tragedy for the Jewish people, but also an irrevocable loss for Poland. It meant the end of an epoch that can never be recovered” (81). The IWM is equally committed to educating visitors, particularly children, about what happened and why. Paul Salmon stresses the importance of learning about individual and collective moral responsibility, but insists that this is best done by making schoolchildren aware of “the complexities of the world in which choices were made and decisions taken,” for “only then can people’s actions (and inaction) be judged within the context of their time, and only then can we begin to draw meaningful lessons for today” (“Moral Dilemmas” 3)

Holocaust museums seek to combine the rhetoric of remembrance with a commitment to practical action. Thus, whilst Beth Shalom began as a dedicated Holocaust museum, it is now part of a broader complex including the Aegis Trust (committed to working on the study and prevention of genocide), and its staff played an active role in helping both volunteers and the government commemorate the Rwandan genocide (see <http://www.aegistrust.org>). The USHMM’s Committee on Conscience embodies its determination that memory of the Holocaust should contribute to combating genocide

in the present (<http://www.ushmm.org/conscience/about/about.php>). In discussing its work, Greenberg maintains, contra Novick, that “there is no reason for cynicism if in fact this value of “never again” cannot in itself transform the world at once” (“Remembrance and Conscience”).

Nevertheless, Novick’s critique retains some validity. What basis is there for assuming that learning more about the Holocaust will sensitise museum visitors to injustice and atrocity in the present? If extensive media coverage of contemporary atrocities is insufficient to awaken our interest, why should reflecting on a “past” disaster do so? Using the Holocaust as a yardstick or prism risks diminishing subsequent atrocities. Despite their public commitment to acknowledging and celebrating pluralism and difference, Holocaust education and Holocaust museums run the risk of homogenising all genocides and all victims into greater or lesser reflections of the original template – the Holocaust. There is an increasing tendency, particularly in the West, to measure atrocity and victimisation against the yardstick of the Holocaust. The rationale for adopting 27 January as Britain’s HMD was partly historical (the anniversary of the liberation of Auschwitz) and partly practical (it fell in term-time). This date was already a European-wide day dedicated to remembering genocide, albeit one rarely observed. The British government stressed that the aim of HMD was to commemorate the Holocaust *and* genocide, identifying lessons for the future. However, controversy over the relationship between the Holocaust and genocide continues to dog HMD; for example the omission of any specific reference to the Armenian genocide in the first national ceremony and the decision to focus the 2004 HMD on the Rwandan genocide.

Whilst the opening of the Holocaust exhibition at the IWM proved relatively uncontroversial, responses to the establishment of HMD were considerably more mixed (see Bloxham, Yuval-Davies and Silverman). Yet neither event triggered any serious interrogation of the purpose, content and value of Holocaust education. There seemed to be a consensus that the world would be a more humane and safer place if only there was more Holocaust education, more children visited Holocaust museums, saw films such as *Schindler’s List* and so on. Few questioned whether there *should* be so much emphasis on Holocaust education, or whether it *should* be so closely tied to questions of multiculturalism and civil society. More attention was paid to the efficiency and effectiveness with which the “message” had been communicated to the general public.

There needs to be greater clarity as to what the precise objectives and implicit and explicit assumptions of Holocaust education are. In visiting Holocaust museums, watching Holocaust films and being educated about the Holocaust, visitors may learn more about what happened, and experience a momentary or longer lasting sense of shock and horror, maybe even pity, and/or a sense of loss. Whether this generates greater understanding of why such things happened, what leads someone to become a perpetrator or bystander, or how to prevent similar events happening in the future is open to question. For example, being educated and having detailed knowledge of what was taking place did not prevent many of the perpetrators from carrying out their duties.

The role and possible consequences of studying the Holocaust differ depending on the context. To take just three examples: (1) the effect on Jewish schoolchildren studying the subject may well be counter-productive, increasing their sense of

vulnerability and alienation when it comes to issues of citizenship and national identity. (2) Studying the Holocaust in a German context may prompt questions about national identity in a society capable of producing such horrors. (3) Post 1989, many former central and eastern European countries emphasise the importance of a regime of truth, an unflinching confrontation with the past. As more evidence emerges of the part played by national institutions and specific local communities, in what took place – for example, in France, Hungary, Poland and the Baltic states – the disturbing nature and potentially unsettling effects of learning about the Holocaust becomes clearer. The intense, ongoing public debate on Jedwabne in Poland is just one example of the problematic questions relating to national identity and citizenship that Holocaust education can generate.

In their exhibitions Holocaust museums generally address such questions in fairly simplistic terms. This is unsurprising as they do not have the time or space to explore the complexities of these issues, save in specially designed seminars (as at the House of the Wannsee Conference). How does a national museum on the Holocaust explore complex questions such as collaboration, the murderous behaviour of nationalists in some countries towards the local Jewish population or the blurring of boundaries between categories such as victim, bystander and perpetrator? Part of the purpose of Holocaust education should be to point to the complexity of these prevailing categories, of what is meant by “the Holocaust,” of understanding why it happened and of the relationship between the Holocaust and genocide. One of the questions of increasing public concern, as witnessed by the discussions surrounding HMD, is the need to understand the relationship between the Holocaust and subsequent genocides. Thus far, the Auschwitz museum has avoided addressing this issue, preferring to focus solely on the history of the camp and, more recently, on questions of Polish-Jewish relations. The IWM reached something of a compromise in introducing separate exhibitions on the Holocaust and genocide. This raises the future possibility of exploring the Holocaust and genocide, both in relation to each other and in relation to the nature of war and conflict (the subject of the museum as a whole).

Whilst the two museums considered in this article pay some attention to such questions in their educational programmes (particularly those aimed at teachers), much more could be done in this direction. One of the issues for the future could be the need to develop closer professional relationships between those who work in museums and memorial sites (particularly those whose expertise relates to issues such as the design of exhibitions, conservation and so on), those engaged in academic research and those involved in Holocaust education. Given that museums such as Auschwitz, the USHMM and Yad Vashem are heavily involved in all three areas, they are in a strong position to provide a forum for such dialogue and professional interaction, and to offer a lead to similar institutions in other countries that could benefit from their experience.

Notes

1. Originally *Pastowe Muzeum w Oświęcimiu* (State Museum in Oświęcim), in 1999 the Sejm formally renamed it *Państwowe Muzeum Auschwitz-Birkenau w Oświęcimiu* (the State Museum of Auschwitz-Birkenau in Oświęcim). In this paper it is referred

to as “the Auschwitz museum.” My discussion draws on field notes from visits to the site since 1990. Whilst there is a burgeoning literature on the Auschwitz museum, little has been written to date on the IWM’s exhibition. I would like to thank Jonathan Webber for commenting on an earlier draft of this paper.

2. A further role, often overlooked, is that of social/community centre (primarily for survivors and their families). Part of Beth Shalom’s success stems from its reputation as a welcoming, supportive environment. Beth Shalom is Britain’s first dedicated Holocaust Memorial and Education Centre. Created by Stephen and James Smith, and located on the edges of Sherwood Forest, Nottinghamshire, it opened in September 1995.
3. The museum opened on 14 June 1946 (that is, prior to the Sejm’s announcement). The first exhibition opened in 1947; the first national exhibit in 1960; and the International Monument to the Camp Victims (Birkenau) was unveiled in 1967.
4. At the height of its operations, KZ-Auschwitz consisted of Auschwitz I, Auschwitz II-Birkenau, Auschwitz III-Monowitz and 40 sub-camps, and an exclusion zone of 40km². The boundaries of the museum were formally defined in 1957 and include 191 hectares (20 in Auschwitz I, 171 in Birkenau). Buffer zones were established around Birkenau (1962) and Auschwitz I (1977). Auschwitz was added to UNESCO’s World Heritage List in 1979.
5. In 1989 the Lauder Foundation established an International Project for the Preservation of the Auschwitz-Birkenau Museum to coordinate fundraising for the long-term conservation of Auschwitz.
6. The IWM, established by act of Parliament, opened in June 1920. In 1936, it moved to its present site in Lambeth. Its brief was to record the story of the Great War and the contributions of the British and peoples of the Empire. This remit was extended twice, first to include World War II, then in 1953 to cover all military operations since 1914 involving British and Commonwealth forces. Four further IWM sites are open to the public: the Cabinet War Rooms, Whitehall; HMS Belfast in the Pool of London; IWM Duxford, a former air-force base near Cambridge; and the IWM North in Trafford.
7. It should be noted that competition and cooperation coexist: the Auschwitz museum, IWM, USHMM and Yad Vashem all participate in the Task Force; the Auschwitz museum and Yad Vashem hold joint seminars for staff.
8. At the Auschwitz museum these facilities are located in Auschwitz I, with a bookshop and information point at Birkenau. Some argue that it would be more respectful to relocate such facilities *outside* Auschwitz I, thus differentiating between memorial and commercial space (Dwork and van Pelt). The complexities of these issues was evident in the controversy surrounding the proposed establishment of a commercial facility or “supermarket” opposite the main entrance to the museum at Auschwitz I. Volume 12 of *Pro Memoria*, the museum’s information bulletin, focuses on the complex relationship between the museum and the city of Oświęcim, particularly in relation to economic regeneration.
9. At Beth Shalom the museum is located beneath the main hall with memorial gardens outside. The hall serves an educational or memorial function depending on the context.
10. It is important to note that, despite such claims, the museum does not formally present itself as a cemetery and, if it is a cemetery, it is one of a most unusual kind: there are no marked graves and the ground was never formally sanctified as a burial ground or marked off from its “profane” surroundings. To see the site as a cemetery begs the question of who is “buried” here and who has responsibility for memorialising

- the dead appropriately.
11. The museum uses languages to stress the national/ethnic diversity of the victims, for example, the inscription on the International Monument at Birkenau is given in twenty different languages. Some would say that this emphasis on diversity conceals the overwhelming nature of Jewish victimhood, and this was certainly true during the Communist period (when Russian was used consistently throughout the museum). The main exhibition is primarily in Polish. Today, for the benefit of visitors, the reception building at Auschwitz I provides information in twelve different languages. Since 1989 an attempt has been made to drop Russian and introduce English throughout, but this has not been done systematically. In 1995, for the first time, the photo-boards referred to above were provided with captions not only in Polish and English, but also in modern Hebrew. The co-existence of these different languages may be hard for the average visitor to understand.
 12. In an attempt to counter this tendency, some have argued that something analogous to the Commonwealth War Graves Commission should be established to register such sites.
 13. Franciszek Piper is the museum's senior historian. His research on the number of victims of Auschwitz eventually led to the removal of the original inscription on the International Monument (referring to four million victims) early in 1990. The new inscription, unveiled in January 1995, stated that "the Nazis murdered about one and a half million men, women, and children, mainly Jews from various countries of Europe." The figure of "one and a half million" may be inflated given that Piper, after much detailed argumentation, proposes a minimum figure of 1,100,000 and 1,500,000 as the maximum (95).
 14. Richard Harries, Bishop of Oxford, applauds the IWM's "superbly organised" exhibition, but regrets the omission of a section on Righteous Gentiles as "humanity desperately needs good role models. It would be a pity if people came away from exhibitions feeling that everyone was complicit, that there is no alternative to capitulating to evil." He contrasts this approach with Beth Shalom's (10).
 15. Holocaust museums in the USA and western Europe acknowledge the presence of political, social, racial and religious minorities among the victims of Nazism, including the mentally and physically handicapped, Blacks, Roma, gay men, political opponents and Jehovah's Witnesses. During the Cold War, and following the collapse of Communism in eastern Europe, conspicuously less attention has been paid to the fate of Communists and Soviet POWs.
 16. The IWM's exhibition is premised on a belief that an "unimaginable" event is best represented by that which is "hard and literal." For Bardgett, artefacts convey the message "yes, this was unimaginable, but it happened." She argues that in the IWM exhibition "the historical evidence is allowed to speak for itself. We subscribe to the view that the story has little need of embellishment and that the designer's skill will almost certainly lie not in recreating the "sights, sounds and smells" of, for example, the Warsaw Ghetto, but in providing a vehicle for the authentic historical evidence to do its own work of telling the visitor the story" ("Genesis" 32).
 17. The Auschwitz museum displays human hair but is aware of the contentious nature of its decision. Following objections by survivors the USHMM displayed a photograph rather than the hair itself. The IWM follows the USHMM's lead. Some Orthodox Jews have objected to Yad Vashem's use of photographs portraying naked women and/or genitalia.

18. The Tower of Faces was the idea of Yaffa Eliach, one of 29 survivors of Ejszszyski, Lithuania, and consists of a collection of pre-war photographs taken between 1890–1941. Visitors encounter the Tower at two points in the Permanent Exhibition.
19. Another approach is that of the Galicia Jewish Museum in Kraków, displaying the work of photographer Chris Schwarz, which opened to the public on 17 April 2004, in “Traces of Memory – A Photographic Exhibition in Tribute to the Jews of Galicia.” Consisting of photographs taken over twelve years, the exhibition is a “tribute to a vanished world, a powerful acknowledgement of Poland’s Jewish heritage,” offering “a picture of the relics of Jewish life and culture that can still be seen today.” The exhibition is in five sections: (1) Jewish life in ruins; (2) Jewish culture as it once was; (3) The Holocaust: sites of massacre and destruction; (4) How the past is being remembered; (5) The people making memory today (for more detail, see <http://www.galiciajewishmuseum.org>).
20. Oleksy notes that attitudes to Holocaust museums differ across generations: she argues that for survivors, the wartime generation and those born soon after the end of the war, “Auschwitz was, and still is, first of all a cemetery and place of remembrance, and only second a place of education and study” whereas for those born decades later the site is more a place to encounter and study the past (“Education Center” 78–79). However, the museum does not formally present itself as a cemetery, and, if it is a cemetery, it a most unusual one (see note 10).
21. Whilst many Holocaust museums focus on the needs of schools, Annegret Ehmann suggests that the House of the Wannsee Conference is an ideal setting for professionals to examine “administrational structures and traditions.” It therefore runs seminars for “trainees and professionals from varied institutions and public services, for example, from the judicial system, municipal finance, health, and social administration, as well as the military, the police force and the economic, scientific, and cultural worlds” (609–710).

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