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Evoking values or doing politics? British Politicians' speeches at the national Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration¹

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Abstract

This article analyses the rhetoric of speeches delivered by British politicians at televised national HMD commemorations. Following the recommendation of the Stockholm International Forum, since 2001, Britain has commemorated victims of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides every 27 January. The television broadcasts of the national commemoration both reflect and illuminate the complex processes of (national) histories, individual memory and collective remembrance, and the ways that they mediate and interact with each other in social and historic contexts. In addition to other genres (e.g. music, poetry readings, archival film), a speech is delivered by a prominent politician at each of these ceremonies. I argue that these speeches are examples of epideictic oratory, which provide politicians with the opportunity to communicate an understanding of the Holocaust as a catastrophe and a great affront to *Our values*. My rhetorical analysis focuses on the ways that politicians utilize two artistic means of persuasion: *ethetic* strategies, which place emphasis on their personal character; and *logetic* strategies, which aim to persuade through invoking arguments. I orientate to the ways that poorly selected *ethetic* and *logetic* strategies can disrupt the primary purpose of the epideictic speech: to communicate, and revivify, shared values.

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Keywords

Rhetoric, Persuasion, Epideictic, Values, Commemoration, Holocaust Memorial Day

Introduction

Since 2001, Britain has commemorated the victims of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides on 27 January – the day that Auschwitz-Birkenau was liberated by the Red Army. The decision to initiate a transnational Holocaust Remembrance Day was taken in the Stockholm International Forum in 2000, at the end of which representatives from 46 governments around the world signed a declaration committing to preserve the memory of those who have been murdered in the Holocaust (Allwork 2015).

The national Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) ceremony in Britain is a multi-media and multi-modal epideictic event, featuring a combination of film, music, poetry, candle lighting, and speeches from survivors, celebrities and other public figures (Richardson 2018b). Speeches delivered by politicians at British HMD commemorations draw (and advocate) ‘lessons of the Holocaust’ similar to those invoked in other multi-ethnic ‘bystander’ countries, such as the USA (Marrus 2015): the Holocaust is presented as an example of intentionalist prejudice *in extremis*; the Holocaust was a catastrophe and a great affront to Our values; that We can guard against future atrocities by keeping the prejudice of Others in check; and that detailing the circumstances and consequences of the Holocaust acts to revivify Our commitment to the values that it so clearly transgressed (Richardson 2017, 2018a). However, plural first-person pronouns – ‘we’, ‘us’, and the possessive ‘our’ – are deictic: their meaning is derived from contextual factors of time and place, and so they can be used to present different perspectives and to signal allegiance with mixed and multiple audiences (Billig 1995). When a politician refers to ‘Our values’ whose perspective are they claiming to vocalise (see Billig & Marinho 2017; Petersoo 2007)? Given their function representing (sometimes *leading*) a political party, when does a politician’s speech slide towards something more party political? And finally, in what ways can a claim to embody/express ‘Our values’ (implicitly or explicitly made) be undermined by either the character (*ethos*) of the speaker, or by the speech (*logos*) itself?

This article analyses the rhetoric of speeches delivered by British politicians at televised national HMD commemorations. I orientate to speakers’ *ethetic* and *logetic* manoeuvring, and ways that they can derail (van Eemeren & Houtlosser 2002). Given that the Holocaust has become a fixture of Western culture (Cole 2000; Marrus 2015), and given that politicians in other countries also deliver speeches commemorating victims of genocide (Adamson 2000; Ensink and Sauer 2003), my findings have relevance beyond the British commemorative ceremonies.²

The politics of commemoration

Commemorative practices encapsulate “representations of the past constructed by a particular social group” and “have bearings on relationships of power within society” (Confino 2005, 48). The reconstruction of an image of the past which is in line with the predominant values of the society may lead to the formation of what Serge Moscovici has called hegemonic representations (Moscovici 1988; see also Tileagă 2008, 2009). Levy and Sznajder (2005) examine the various forms that

² See, for example, the Resolution adopted by the General Assembly on the Holocaust Remembrance (A/RES/60/7, 1 November 2005), <http://www.un.org/en/holocaustremembrance/docs/res607.shtml> [accessed 04 September 2017].

collective memory of the Holocaust has taken in West Germany, the USA and Israel, and demonstrate how such 'memories' have been detached from their original context and instead used as a way of focusing abstract questions of good and evil. Accordingly, processes of collective remembering and forgetting are bound up with political, and sometimes ideological, processes.

Commemorative speeches of politicians play a subtle role in the garnering of public consensus, working to consolidate myths about social in-groups and out-groups (particularly nations), and hence contributing to processes of group inclusion and exclusion (Slavičková 2013, 2014; Wodak et al 1999; Wodak and De Cillia 2007). Slavičková (2013, 2014) has analysed the rhetoric of US Presidential Memorial Day speeches, and the ways that they fit within the wider context of American political communication and represent dimensions of the nation's self-image over time. Ensink and Sauer (2003) analyse commemorative speeches by world leaders on the Warsaw Uprising as part of a wide-ranging case study on memory in public discourse and its functionalization in ceremonial contexts. More critically, Billig and Marinho (2017) examine the ways that Portuguese parliamentarians commemorate the 1974 Revolution, with their analysis orientating specifically to "how politicians do their *political* business on an occasion of national commemoration" (p. 5, emphasis added). Similarly, Adamson (2000) examined official speeches of the Representatives of State at the Stockholm International Forum on the Holocaust (26-28 January 2000), arguing that several speakers demonstrated nationalistic tendencies at odds with the ostensible aim of the conference, put moments from the historical past "to use as constituents of national myths" (p.65) and revealed "numerous attitudes and conclusions about selective perceptions of human history" (p.66). Thus "the Turkish speech reduced the conference to an opportunity to display a rather uneasy nationalistic self-righteousness – including quotations of Jewish poetry from the late nineteenth century that praised the Ottoman Empire" (Ibid.). The Bulgarian President Stoyanov, meanwhile, "talked in great detail about 'dignified and courageous' Bulgarian individuals" (p.68) whilst the fact Bulgaria was an ally of the Axis powers between 1941-44 "was transformed into a minor detail" (p.69).

The field of remembrance and its various genres (*inter alia* speeches, marches, ceremonies and mass commemoration, public funerals, minutes of silence) both reflect and illuminate the complex processes of (national) histories, individual memory and collective remembrance, and the ways that they mediate and interact with each other in social and historic contexts. When 'the past' is recalled as part of a commemorative event, it is mediated by the immediate agenda of (typically institutional) "memory makers" (Kansteiner 2002), articulated to the preoccupations and discourses of the context, and according to the hegemonic narrative of heroes, villains, perpetrators, victims and bystanders. Such hegemonic narratives can, and do, change of course, occasionally in unexpected ways. As Wodak and De Cillia (2007, 339) put it, "historical narratives are constantly discursively and visually (re)constructed, changing and shifting, due to contexts and diverse, often contradicting and conflicting, political interests."

In contrast to individual memory (and individual psychological states, such as trauma), remembrance and commemoration are always aimed at modifying or consolidating existing social relations. As Confino (1997, 1390) argues: "every society sets up images of the past. Yet to make a difference in society, it is not enough for a certain past to be selected. It must steer emotions, motivate people to act, be received; in short, it must become a socio-cultural mode of action." Pearce (2014) suggests that the staging of HMD as a national event was instrumental in sedimenting a shift from commemorating the Holocaust as a specifically Jewish tragedy to an event that could be functionalized in service of broader political concerns: opposing prejudice, the protection of human rights and strengthening civic society. And, whilst "the discourse of the [ceremony] was perpetually

reinforced in each 'set piece', its most explicit articulation came with [Prime Minister] Blair's ceremonial address. Through this speech the meanings of HMD were verbally 'actualised'" (Pearce 2014, 155).

Epideictic rhetoric

Since Aristotle, "Rhetoric may be defined as the faculty of observing in any given case the available means of persuasion" (2007, 1355b 27-28). Aristotle identified three *species* of rhetorical discourse: deliberative/political rhetoric; forensic/legal rhetoric; and epideictic/ceremonial rhetoric. Each of these three species of persuasive discourse have specific rhetorical goals and hence tend to adopt special topics in articulating, and specific means in fulfilling, such goals. Epideictic or ceremonial rhetoric is directed towards proving someone or something worthy of admiration or disapproval. Epideictic rhetoric is concerned with the present, its means are praise and censure and its special topics are honour and dishonour. The three species of rhetoric are heuristics, of course, that seldom occur in everyday argumentation in a pure form (Richardson 2007; Wodak & De Cillia 2007).

Commemoration represents a *blended* rhetorical genre that brings together the *epideictic* and *forensic* species of rhetorical argument, operates through a combination of praise/censure and accusation/defence, and draws on the special topics of (dis)honour and (in)justice. In such discourse, the language of values and praise typical of epideictic rhetoric is blended with narrative accounts of the past and the language of (self)identification, deictically fixed to the here and now (Billig & Marinho 2017; Slavičková 2013, 2014). They "retrive the past for the present" (Wodak & De Cillia 2007, 346), the ideal rhetorical consequence of which is that 'we' associate ourselves with the praised actors and actions of the past and disassociate ourselves from those criticised.

Epideictic rhetoric has, in the past, been depreciated as ceremonial "praise or blame" speeches which simply trade on commonplace knowledge. As such, epideictic tends to be the Aristotelian species of rhetoric that attracts the least critical attention from scholars (though see Billig & Marinho 2017). A great deal of this may be attributable to Aristotle's own failure to "formulate its role in the instilling, preservation, or enhancement of cultural values, even though this was clearly a major function" (Kennedy 2007, 22). Epideictic *does* orientate to praise and blame. However, given that the topics of praise or blame assume the existence of social norms, upon which this praise or blame is based, epideictic also acts to presuppose and evoke common values – and, implicitly, a collective recognition of shared social responsibilities to uphold these values (Hyde 2005). On this point, Duffy (1983, 85) argues that the purpose of epideictic oratory is to "represent, however imperfectly, timeless values distilled from past experiences". Such values are invoked for educative and ethical reasons (Kampf & Katriel 2017; Perelman 1982; Pernot 2015), whilst for Hyde (2005, 11), epideictic acts as "a collective or public form of recognition, a pragmatic and 'moral act' that supplies meaning to life; it facilitates social awareness and understanding to recognize and understand difference." Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 50) go as far as to argue that "epideictic oratory has significance and importance for argumentation because it strengthens the disposition toward action by increasing adherence to the values it lauds." Similarly, Vatnoey (2015, 1) suggests that epideictic "has the potential to strengthen the common values in society, create community, and form the beliefs that determine future decision-making." In short, "epideictic affirms values, and by this affirmation, its aim is to create a conviction and suggest a conduct. The encomium offers listeners models of virtue and encourages their imitation. The subject being praised inspires admiration and emulation" (Pernot 2015, 95).

Some authors have questioned whether the role that epideictic places in strengthening common values is always a positive thing, given the ways it tends to simultaneously favour hegemonic power.

Condit (1985, 291), for example, argues that epideictic generally emphasises “non-controversiality, universal values, and prominent leaders and speakers.” Olson’s (2013) reading is more critical still. Focusing upon epideictic’s conservative function, her analysis examines the ways that the epideictic dimension of a text “coherently, elaborately, and powerfully promotes and justifies values, beliefs, and practices that maintain status quo power relationships, even when those are not its ostensible lessons” (Olson, 2013, p. 461). Such questions are particularly *apropos* when examining the epideictic rhetoric of political leaders.

Method and data

This article analyses televised speeches delivered by politicians at the official British Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) ceremony. This article is drawn from a wider project aimed at analysing linguistic and semiotic processes employed in the commemoration of HMD, their potential for shaping the understanding of mass audiences and the ways that the commemoration of HMD has changed since 2002. I am particularly interested in the rhetorical use of the past in the construction of political arguments regarding (collective) identity and (shared) values (Forchtner 2016).

Since 2001, the victims of Nazism and four subsequent genocides (Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and Darfur) have been commemorated in Britain on HMD. The International Forum chose 27 January as HMD, marking the day that the Red Army of the USSR liberated the Auschwitz concentration and extermination camp. The first British HMD ceremony, in 2001, was held in Westminster Central Hall and televised live on the BBC to around 1.5 million viewers (see Macdonald 2005; Pearce 2013; Sauer 2012). A capacity audience of 2,000 people were present in the Hall for the 2001 ceremony, including leaders of the three main political parties, cultural figures, 200 Holocaust survivors and representatives of the wider Jewish communities. Since then, the national ceremony has been broadcast four further times: in 2002 on Regional ITV, and on BBC2 in 2005, 2015 and 2016.

Aristotle made a distinction between *non-artistic* means of persuasion (where other texts are called upon and used as part of a rhetorical argument) and *artistic* means of persuasion, which the speaker needs to invent.³ In more detail, he outlines three artistic means of persuasion: “through character [*ēthos*] whenever the speech is spoken in such a way as to make the speaker worthy of credence; for we believe fair-minded people to a greater extent and more quickly (2007, 1356a 4); “through the hearers when they are led to feel emotion [*pathos*] by the speech; for we do not give the same judgment when grieved and rejoicing or when being friendly and hostile” (2007, 1356a 5); and “through the arguments [*logos*] when we show the truth or the apparent truth from whatever is persuasive” (2007, 1356a 6).

The character of the arguer, or an *ethetic* means of persuasion, is very powerful when used correctly.⁴ Aristotle suggests that an argument drawing on ethos may be particularly persuasive when the “arguments on different sides of an issue are equally strong, [and] the listener has no choice but to consider the speakers and decide in favour of the person who appears *wise, virtuous* and *full of goodwill*” (Fortenbaugh 1996, 151, emphases added). Therefore, to present an argument drawing on or relying on ethos, the arguer must be able to present themselves as a certain type of person and the audience must believe that they are this certain type of person. When successful, the

³ See Richardson (2018a) for an examination of the ways that non-artistic and artistic means of persuasion are used in HMD commemoration ceremonies.

⁴ As I first outlined in Richardson (2007), I prefer to use the term ‘ethetic’ instead of ‘ethical’ to avoid terminological confusion; I prefer ‘pathotic’ over ‘pathetic’ and ‘logetic’ over logical for identical reasons.

audience has recognised that practical wisdom [*phronesis*]), virtue [*arête*] and goodwill [*eunoia*] are grounds for trust and therefore supports the arguer that exhibits these qualities (see Hauser 1999).

Logetic strategies, or argumentation schemes (and here I depart with Aristotle and draw on contemporary argumentation theory) constructed and/or delivered by the rhetor are of three types: symptomatic argument (arguing from example); comparative argument; and causal argument (Snoeck Henkemans 2002; van Eemeren and Grootendorst 1992). Taking each in turn: symptomatic arguments are based on relations of typicality, symptoms or concomitance. Often in such arguments, an example is used to illustrate a wider pattern or trend – and such arguments can fail due to hasty generalization. This fallacy is most closely related to non-artistic means of persuasion, when ‘evidence’ produced is not symptomatic of the standpoint. Comparison argumentation is based on a relation of analogy. An arguer defends his/her standpoint by showing that what is stated in the argument is similar to that which is stated in the standpoint “and that on the grounds of this resemblance the standpoint should be accepted” (van Eemeren, Grootendorst & Snoeck Henkemans 2002, 99). Analogous argumentation fails most frequently due to poor grounds for comparison. Finally, with causal argumentation “the acceptability of the premises is transferred to the conclusion by making it understood that there is a relation of causality between the argument and the standpoint” (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992, 97). Causal argumentation can fail for a variety of reasons, including causal oversimplification (also called causal reductionism), and classic *post hoc ergo propter hoc* and slippery slope fallacies.

This article focuses on speeches delivered at HMD national commemorations by politicians; in a companion piece, I analyse the epideictic rhetoric of non-political speakers (Richardson 2018a). In each HMD national commemoration, a single politician has delivered a speech whose rhetorical task – as with all epideictic rhetoric – is “not just to strengthen listeners in their affinities and aspirations, but also to explain and justify the latter. The orator enlightens the community about its own sentiments [and] provides a rational foundation for its traditional practices” (Pernot 2015, 99). The importance of the event is indicated by the status of the politicians who spoke at the televised ceremonies: Prime Ministers spoke at the prestigious 60th and 70th anniversaries in 2005 (Tony Blair) and 2015 (David Cameron); in 2002, the Home Secretary David Blunkett spoke on behalf of the Government; and in 2016 it was Greg Clarke, Secretary for Communities and Local Government.⁵ My analysis of these four politicians’ speeches, below, focuses on their ethetic and logetic strategies. I orientate to the ways that poorly selected ethetic and logetic strategies can disrupt the primary purpose of the epideictic speech: to communicate, and so revivify, shared values.

Ethos: embodying values

Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 51) argue that, through epideictic rhetoric, speakers are trying “to establish a sense of communion centred around particular values recognised by the audience”. A common approach taken by speakers to connect with their audience is to emphasise how pleased and humbled they are to address them. Accordingly, in his 2016 HMD speech, Greg Clarke (HM Secretary for Communities and Local Government) repeatedly stressed how privileged he felt to be speaking at such a worthy ceremony:

It is an honour to be speaking here this evening, on this most sombre and important of days.

⁵ The Holocaust Memorial Day Trust is funded directly by this Ministry in HM Government, at time of writing named the Ministry for Housing, Communities and Local Government.

It's not only my privilege to represent Her Majesty's government. The government wishes, of course, to pay its respects to those whom we honour this evening [...] But it is also my privilege and responsibility to speak as a citizen

Through this opening, Clarke not only attempts to present himself as morally upright, he also makes an implicit case for his audience members to view the government in a similar way. The adverb "of course" marks it as unsurprising that the government "pay its respects", yet it is not so taken for granted that it went without him mentioning it specifically. Tony Blair used a similar rhetorical trope in his 2005 HMD speech, as I now discuss.

Blair is acknowledged to be a skilled orator who, when he was Prime Minister, frequently managed "to strike a personal note ('I feel') yet speak collectively on behalf of the audience" (Montgomery 1999, 8). However, in the case of his 2005 speech – delivered to an audience in the Hall that included 600 Holocaust survivors – Blair faced what one could term a *phronetic* quandary: *phronesis* is, after all, practical wisdom, derived from experience and not simply knowledge of specific facts. But the Holocaust is frequently portrayed as shrouded in epistemic impenetrability – exemplified by Elie Wiesel's famous declaration: "Only those who were there will ever know, and those who were there can never tell." So, how to signal that one is knowledgeable about such a topic, that one had not experienced? Blair's solution was particularly accomplished. First, the opening of his speech simultaneously deferred to survivors' understanding of the importance of Holocaust commemoration, and functioned as a *precis* account of the illocutionary act of 'paying tribute':

For many here today, the Holocaust survivors, there is no need to state this day's significance. We know that you will have many bitter memories, many recollections of personal tragedy. You will recall people you knew, family and friends who died. And who now, across the years, come back to you, and make your grief fresh and vivid. We pay tribute to you.

Thus, despite his declaration that "there is no need to state this day's significance" to Holocaust survivors, in the three sentences that immediately follow, he does precisely that: it is significant to them, he suggests, because they recollect "many bitter memories", of both "personal tragedy" and "family and friends who died", and so on this day (more than others) their grief is "fresh and vivid". The opening therefore represents a version of the rhetorical trope *paralipsis*, where a speaker talks about something by either declaring it superfluous, or denying they are going to talk about it. Conventionally, *paralipsis* is utilized to undermine an opponent (often in an *ad hominem* way) – a protagonist will call into question the antagonist's reputation while, at the same time, claiming that this is not what they're doing.⁶ In this case, Blair uses it to bolster his own rhetorical standing: not only does he know these things about the survivors' suffering and grief, he also understands that these survivors don't need reminding of this (even whilst he reminds them).

So, if Blair considered it unnecessary to make a case for HMD's significance to the survivors present in the audience, to whom is the rest of his speech addressed? Blair states that he wants

to address some words to my generation that was born, and grew up, well after the war ended. And to the generations still younger, some of whom may even wonder what it is we commemorate and why. What significance has it for us?

The remainder of the speech is therefore structured as an extended *apostrophe*. Apostrophe is "the 'turning away' from the normal audience [...] and the addressing of another, second audience"

⁶ For example: "I could bring up my opponent's conviction for fraud, but I'm not going to"

(Lausberg 1998, 338). For example, in funeral oration it is not unusual for a speaker to present an apostrophe to the deceased. Here, Blair uses this trope in order to explicitly provide both the historical and normative cases for 'why we remember', whilst claiming he is not directing this information towards the audience present in the room.

Blair also (arguably) accedes to audience demand in another portion of his speech. All major speeches by government politicians are now recorded on the Gov.uk website. However, comparing the published version of Blair's speech with the version spoken on the night reveals one variance, highlighted below in bold:

[Verbatim version] 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. But it happened, **inflicted by human beings on other human beings, and in the lifetime of my father.**

[Published version] 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. But 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.**⁷

The singularity of the Holocaust is a significant issue in historiography, and comparing (or equating) the Holocaust with other genocides remains a sensitive subject, particularly for survivors. The British HMD commemorates the victims of the Holocaust, of Nazi persecution (*inter alia* Communists, Homosexuals, Jehovah's Witnesses, Roma, Sinti and Slavs), and the victims of four subsequent genocides (Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda, Darfur). However, the historic narratives and contextualisation offered in the national ceremonies tend to gloss over any similarities between these genocides – other than that they are all considered genocides because they have been treated as such by the International Criminal Court – and never offer any direct comparison (Richardson 2018a).

The published version of Blair's speech doesn't simply liken the Holocaust to subsequent genocides, it explicitly equates them: the Holocaust "was *repeated* in Cambodia and Rwanda [...] And *again*, in the Balkans". Whilst all were unquestionable genocidal conflicts, to suggest they were instances of 'history repeating itself' is clumsy and reductive and, if spoken at the national ceremony, would have reflected badly on Blair. His *ethetic* strategy would have misfired, indexing a lack of understanding or, at minimum, a lack of sensitivity to the audience. Blair avoids this, omitting the parallelism in his delivered speech, and leaving only that it occurred "in the lifetime of my father". This "personal note" (Montgomery 1999, 8) of Blair's is particularly effective. First, it entails his and our *temporal* proximity to the catastrophe – but that could also have been achieved through other vague scales of time ('in the lifetime of the generation before me', for example). Its real rhetorical achievement is it connotes a *familial* proximity to the catastrophe – that is, it draws together the Holocaust and Blair's family, inducing us to contemplate what his father was doing and what he knew of the Holocaust whilst it was taking place, and in turn allowing us to draw parallel considerations of our own family.

⁷ Tony Blair, 'PM's Speech on the Holocaust, 28 January 2005' retrieved from www.number-10.gov.uk/output/Page7446.asp on 6 October 2005 – with thanks to Jaime Ashworth for this version of the speech.

Figure 1: Blair, and familial proximity to the *Shoah*

The phrase is given extra poignancy by how it is spoken – Blair looks down and delivers the phrase quickly, with a drop in intonation, almost *sotte voce*. He then pauses for 4 seconds, the longest pause during the speech. This delivery makes it sound as if it was only conceived and uttered in the moment, and that Blair is suddenly overcome with emotion, be-lying its premeditated design.

Not every *ethetic* manoeuvre is effective. On occasion, a speaker's rhetorical manoeuvring can be weakened because, through what they say, they reveal themselves to lack sufficient practical wisdom, virtue and/or goodwill to the audience. Personal characteristics, such as knowledge and virtue, are merits on a sliding scale. Accordingly, rhetorical failings can also vary from the comparatively minor (for example, they possess only synoptic knowledge of the Holocaust: lack of knowledge; or a speaker may reveal political opportunism: lack of virtue) to the more significant (e.g. where they reveal a fundamental incompatibility with the values of the norm circle). In his 2015 speech, David Cameron argued:

It is time for Britain as a nation to stand together and say: we will remember. To say we will not allow any excuses for antisemitism in our country. [...] That is why today, with the full support of the deputy prime minister and the leader of the opposition I'm accepting the recommendations of the Holocaust Commission. Britain will have a proper national memorial to the Holocaust in central London. We will have a world class learning centre that teaches every generation to fight hatred, prejudice and intolerance in all its forms.

Here, Cameron uses the occasion of his Holocaust commemoration speech as an opportunity to make a policy announcement. Indeed, the clause "That is why", which introduces the announcement, entails that all of his preceding speech should be read as a build up to, and justification for, this announcement. Although his stated opposition to antisemitism is a bedrock normative value of the commemorating norm circle – and despite his attempt to share ownership of the policy announcement with the deputy prime minister (the Liberal Democrat Leader, Nick Clegg)

and the leader of the opposition (the Labour Leader, Ed Miliband) – his declaration “I’m accepting the recommendations” looks as if he is attempting to claim the inauguration of this “world class learning centre” as a personal achievement and so a reason to admire him. Such grandstanding is rather unseemly and contrary to the conventions of an epideictic address, which should generate approval for a speaker through the form of their speech, rather than being a matter addressed explicitly in a topic or argument of the speech. This rhetorical misfire unsettles Cameron’s speech, undermining his *ethetic* manoeuvre.

More significantly, in his 2002 speech, David Blunkett declared:

for evil to prevail, we simply need the good to remain silent. And the lesson of today is to accept our duty, our responsibility, our humanity, in offering a welcome home, a safe haven to those fleeing death and persecution. Today, we pledge to act.

The first sentence of the extract above is a version of the ‘bystander cliché’ frequently expressed at Holocaust commemorative events (Bergen 2013) and as such is comparatively banal; the remainder of the quote is more significant. Firstly, when Blunkett refers to “our duty” (etc.), what is the group presupposed and indexed by this second person possessive? Condit (1985, 289) argues that epideictic rhetoric expresses “the need to share community” and, as such, “a focus on partial interests is anathema”. If we are to take this reading of epideictic as a truism, it might mean that we interpret Blunkett’s plural possessives in an inclusive way: that “our” duty, responsibility and humanity he refers to are *all* of ours, including himself, the people listening in the Hall and those listening at home.

But Blunkett was not simply ‘one of us’; he was a *politician*, and so also spoke at the ceremony *as* a politician – how could he not (cf Billig & Marinho 2017)? More specifically, he spoke as the Home Secretary of the government and, as part of discharging that role, he was nominally responsible for the government’s policies on immigration, refugees and asylum. Speaking in that *political* role, the declaration that “Today, we pledge to act” is startlingly mendacious. The clear implication of the declarative is that “we” will act in accordance with “the lesson of today [HMD]” summarised in the sentence before. In other words:

*we pledge to act in accordance with our duty, our responsibility and our humanity:

we pledge to offer a welcome home, a safe haven, to those fleeing death and persecution*

However, this is not what the Home Office with Blunkett as Secretary of State, or the rest of the Blair government did, either before Blunkett’s 2002 HMD speech or after it. 2002 marked a time of sustained vilification of refugees and asylum seekers in British politics, and increasingly restrictive, increasingly unwelcoming measures that the Blair government implemented to *deter* people “fleeing death and persecution” from seeking refuge in Britain. For example, during the 2001 General Election, Jack Straw (the Home Secretary before Blunkett) argued for “a limit on the number of [asylum] applicants, however genuine” – an announcement that was immediately criticised by the Refugee Council for breaching the United Nations convention on refugees.⁸ In September 2001, Blunkett announced the latest of several packages “of security measures for our ports and continuing my work on our review of asylum policy”.⁹ The Blair government had already replaced cash benefits with vouchers, in order to stop the British welfare state acting as a “magnet” for

⁸ Ahmed, K. & Burke, J. (2001) Hard new Straw line on asylum, *The Observer*, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/may/20/uk.election20018>, accessed 11.09.2017

⁹ Blunkett, D. (2001) Give me time to get asylum right, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/sep/09/uk.immigration>, accessed 11.09.2017

refugees; once vouchers had been discredited, since they were proven to stigmatise refugees, in October 2001 the government announced that asylum seekers and refugees would instead be “held in detention centres” during the “phased withdrawal” of the voucher system.¹⁰ In November 2001, the government's emergency anti-terrorism laws were criticized by the UN high commissioner for refugees because of their restriction on the right to claim asylum.¹¹ Soon after Blunkett's speech, in February 2002, the government white paper *Secure Borders, Safe Haven* introduced the concept of “managed migration”, an idea that went far beyond the scope of the Immigration and Asylum Act (1999). The government was now seeking to explicitly “discourage asylum seekers from coming to Britain by removing access to support for destitute asylum seekers who did not claim asylum immediately upon arrival”.¹² In September 2002, during the debates surrounding the Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act (2002), Blunkett declared that refugees from Kosovo and Afghanistan “should get back home and recreate their countries that we freed from tyranny [...] I have no sympathy whatsoever with young people in their 20s who do not get back home and rebuild their country and their families”.¹³

During 2001-2002, the British government most certainly did “act” but not in a way motivated by our common humanity, or in the way implied by Blunkett's speech: they acted to keep desperate refugees out on Britain (Schuster & Solomos 2004). Given the public visibility of these debates on the ‘tolerability’ of refugees, in the months immediately preceding Blunkett's HMD speech, it is very likely that the audience would be aware of his professed opposition to asylum seekers. His political record flatly contradicts the claims in his speech – his mendacity entails that he lacks virtue, meaning his *ethetic* manoeuvre fails.

Logos: expressing values

Aristotle suggested that epideictic speeches “take up actions that are agreed upon, so that what remains is to clothe the actions in greatness and beauty” (*Rhetoric*, 1.1368a26). Likewise, Pernot (2015, 87) argues that “epideictic speech, by very definition, concerns acknowledged facts, which need only to be qualified”. That said, as mentioned above, epideictic rhetoric also needs to provide a rational foundation for a community's values and practices (Pernot 2015). In the case of HMD, orators (politicians and others) offer frequent justifications why it is important ‘to remember’. However, we should not assume that conventionality, and banal/traditional practices, are synonymous with political neutrality. Perelman and Olbrechts-Tyteca (1969, 49), for example, maintain “that epideictic oratory forms a central part of the art of persuasion, and the lack of understanding shown toward it results from a false conception of the effects of argumentation.” More specifically, Slavičková (2013, 377) argues that the hybridity of commemorative speeches “enables ideological messages and presuppositions to be concealed more easily in a rather ambiguous structure. Epideixis is politically expedient because of its innocuousness, while the poignancy of commemorative rituals is reassuring and distracting.” Her analysis revealed common

¹⁰ Ahmed, K. & Bright, M. (2001) Blunkett to scrap refugee vouchers, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/oct/28/immigration.politicalnews>, accessed 11.09.2017

¹¹ Travis, A. (2001) Blunkett to face rough ride over terror law, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2001/nov/19/humanrights.september11>, accessed 11.09.2017

¹² *Guardian* (2009) Nationality, Immigration and Asylum Act 2002 <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/libertycentral/2009/jan/15/nationality-immigration-asylum-act>, accessed 11.09.2017

¹³ Tempest, M. (2002) Blunkett: refugees should rebuild their own countries, *Guardian*, <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2002/sep/18/immigrationpolicy.immigration>, accessed 11.09.2017

micro-level rhetorical strategies in epideictic discourse, including “foregrounded pronoun use (the historical ‘we’), the hortatory universal present tense (we pray, we promise, we remember), debt and burden metaphors (paid the ultimate price) [...] abstract nouns (such as peace, honour, sacrifice, freedom) and archaic or formal forms such as the fallen, hallowed ground” (Slavičková 2013, 377).

Pernot (2015) maintains that three tropes and figures are particularly associated with epideictic: apostrophe, which I dealt with above; hyperbole; and comparison (arguments from analogy). These rhetorical figures and tropes “are not just ornaments applied after an argument is constructed [...] they themselves have the argumentative function of strengthening or weakening presence, that is, the salience of an idea or topic” (Perelman & Olbrechts-Tyteca 1969, 207). For example, Greg Clarke utilizes both hyperbole and comparison (in the form of metaphor, here a condensed analogy) in the following extract from his 2016 speech:

The soil of hatred is fertilised by indifference to wickedness. That starts with tolerating small acts of hatred, such as casual stereotyping; only if everyday evil remains unchecked can wickedness take root, and grow, into the acts which blight humanity.

The extract advances a rhetorical understanding of racial hatred through a biological metaphor: “wickedness” takes “root” in the “soil of hatred” and, if “fertilised by indifference”, grows into “acts which blight humanity”. The use of hyperbolic nouns – hatred, wickedness, evil – combine with the metaphor to present a strong moral case for action: we should not be indifferent; we should restrict the growth of hatred; we should (to adopt the analogy) *dig up* wickedness, before it can “take root”. The simplicity of the rhetorical position is that it takes a highly intentionalist position regarding the Holocaust, as a case of “wickedness” and “hatred”. But the genocides that HMD commemorates, including the Holocaust, only occurred in the context of war; prejudice was a *necessary* but *insufficient* feature of these genocides. This means that opposition to all forms of warfare could, equally, be taken as a key ‘lesson’ of the Holocaust, rather than opposition to prejudice. However, such arguments are absent from the official HMD commemoration.

As stated above, Blair uses *apostrophe* to introduce his historical and normative cases for ‘why we remember’. He presents three reasons for Holocaust remembrance, which, interestingly, appear to accord with the concerns of the ‘Israeli School’ of Holocaust Studies (Bauer 2002, 2010; Michman 2003), which “emphasizes the Jews as a living collective and views antisemitism as an existential datum of European culture” (Michman 2008, 64). Summarising his first two points, Blair argued: Holocaust commemoration “reminds us of suffering beyond imagination” committed as “an act of deliberate, calculated evil”; and it lets us “remember some of the extraordinary acts of courage by Jewish people and others, during the Holocaust. [...] that kept the spirit of human progress alive, even in the uttermost darkness. And helps, even now, to give us the faith to go forward.” The agency of this act of “evil” is deleted (elsewhere Blair said it was “inflicted by human beings on other human beings”). This could be viewed as a calculated absence, adopted so contemporary inhabitants of perpetrator nations are not publicly shamed, or the wartime record of Allies, including Britain and America, is not brought into question. Also absent in this account is any sense of the contextual, and incremental, factors that both enabled and obstructed the genocide of Europe’s Jews. Instead, he assumed another arch-instrumentalist account, with the Holocaust reduced to an abstract, pseudo-religious, discourse of good and evil (Levy and Sznajder 2005). Such a discourse is echoed in his second standpoint, with “spirit” and “faith” clearly drawn from a religious style register.

These first two standpoints clearly illustrate the normative dimensions of Blair’s epideictic – poring scorn on the “evil”, and venerating courageous “Jewish people and others” – but it is his third

standpoint that reveals the role that Holocaust commemoration is assumed to play in contemporary civic society:

But thirdly, today teaches us a lesson of remembrance. We must never forget the Holocaust victims, and we must never dishonour their memory, by allowing the ugly poison of racial prejudice and hatred to hold sway again.

To argue “We must never forget” presupposes a great deal – not least a remembering/forgetting subject and the existence of knowledge that this subject is remembering/forgetting. But this portion of the speech is ostensibly directed towards those in the audience, “some of whom”, Blair states, “may even wonder what it is we commemorate and why”. Logically, such individuals could not submit to the directive to “never forget”, given that they apparently don’t possess this presupposed knowledge; in turn, this inconsistency implies that Blair is in fact knowingly directing his speech towards survivors, and others already cognizant of the ‘what and why’ of the Holocaust, despite his combination of *paralipsis* and *apostrophe*.

As with *ethos*, not every *logetic* manoeuvre is reasonable. A speaker’s rhetorical manoeuvring can fail because their standpoints are not defended by means of appropriate argument schemes that are applied correctly (van Eemeren & Grootendorst 1992). Sometimes these failures entail fallacious manoeuvres (e.g. fallacies of equivocation), or can result in a speaker advancing arguments at odds with the values of the norm circle. For example, David Cameron opened his 2015 speech, with the following anecdotal introduction:

Two years ago, on a family visit to Berlin, I sat in the shadow of the Memorial to the Murdered Jews of Europe, and tried to explain to my children the horror of what had happened in the Holocaust.

With this opening – the opposite of Blair’s stated *ethetic* position, which avers to the audience’s greater understanding – Cameron presents himself as someone simultaneously knowledgeable about the Holocaust and yet who struggles to communicate “the horror of what had happened” to his children. He thereby characterises himself as doubly knowledgeable: he knows what happened, and knows that he is insufficiently able to communicate the true horror of what happened. Following this, he provides the example of Jack Kagan – someone who *is* capable of communicating the Holocaust to children:

In the museum there is the story of Jack Kagan, one of Britain’s many inspirational Holocaust survivors. Jack’s sister, mother, grandmother and father were all taken from him and murdered by the Nazis. Jack tried to escape, he got frostbite, and he had his toes amputated. But he would not be beaten. After almost five months of tunnelling, he dug his way out of that camp, and made it to the forest where he joined the Bielski brothers and in an extraordinary resistance that saved twelve hundred lives.

Like so many of our incredible Holocaust survivors, Jack had been going into schools to share his testimony, reliving the most harrowing moments of humanity, so that we should never forget. For years, our Holocaust survivors have seen *this* as *their* duty to *us*. Now, *we* must do *our* duty to *them*. [...] We will not allow any form of prejudice destroy the multifaith, multiethnic democracy that we are so proud to call our home. We will teach every generation the British values of respect and tolerance that we hold dear.

Here, then, Jack Kagan functions as a doubly symptomatic argument: he is simultaneously representative of “many inspirational Holocaust survivors” and, having settled and flourished in

Britain after WWII, he indexes Britain's "multifaith, multi-ethnic" democratic credentials. There should be no question that Jack Kagan was an extraordinary man. He survived a forced labour camp, and was the last of the Bielski Jewish partisans living in the UK. In January 2016, Kagan was named in the Queen's New Year Honours List, receiving a British Empire Medal (BEM)¹⁴; he died in December 2016, aged 87. However, Cameron's use of Kagan in this speech echoes the findings of Adamson (2000), and specifically the way that speakers can functionalise the historical past "as constituents of national myths" (p.65). Kagan grew up in the town of Novogrudok, in modern day Belarus, and came to Britain in 1946.¹⁵ He was therefore not British when he survived the Holocaust, but Cameron describes him in such a way as to imply that he was – the narrative of his suffering during the war is vague and incomplete, with the anaphoric phrase "that camp" left dangling and pointing back to nothing, since no camp had been identified by Cameron.

This portion of Cameron's speech is peppered with the kinds of hyperbole one would expect of an epideictic address, particularly amplifying through quantity and superlativity: "many" features twice, and stress is placed on "an *extraordinary* resistance", "our *incredible* Holocaust survivors" and "the *most harrowing* moments of humanity". However, the sense is that a principal aim of Cameron's speech is national self-praise and that Kagan, as only "one of Britain's *many* inspirational Holocaust survivors", is instrumentalised as part of that rhetorical agenda. Britain is characterised as a place that welcomed "many" Holocaust survivors, gave them a home, and treated them with "respect and tolerance". They became part of 'Us' and, in so doing, help constitute "the multifaith, multiethnic democracy that *we are so proud* to call our home". Indeed, respect and tolerance are labelled "*British values*", rather than the more inclusive '*Our values*'.

Absent in this account are events and processes that destabilize the national self-image of British decency, including a number of different international contexts in which "the British state and elements of identifiably British populations have been involved directly and indirectly in genocide" (Shaw, 2011, 2417). The British 'proud tradition of taking in refugees', ritually invoked by politicians like Cameron, is in fact "a myth. And one of the cornerstones of the myth is the remarkably persistent claim that this country did all it could to aid Jews trying to escape from Nazi persecution" (London 2000, 18). The standpoint and narrative that Cameron presents conforms exactly with the "self-contradictory experience" predicted by Stone (2000, 57), prior to the first HMD ceremony: of politicians flagging the moral superiority of 'Our Nation' and yet, simultaneously, warning of the dangers of chauvinistic nationalism.

Conclusion

This article analysed the rhetoric of speeches delivered by politicians, at Britain's national Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration. The national ceremony commemorating HMD has been broadcast four times since the first HMD in 2001. These programmes function as complex, multi-modal texts, recounting the injustice of genocide in order to revivify shared social values. I argued that speeches at the ceremony should be treated as epideictic oratory, whose function is "to re-affirm and recreate afresh the consensus around prevailing values. [...] It insinuates a moment of communion, in which a community, or a microcommunity, presents itself with a show of its own unity" (Pernot 2015, 98). Detailing the circumstances and consequences of the Holocaust in these national commemorations

¹⁴ That year, Agnes Grunwald-Spier and Susan Pollack were made Members of the Order of the British Empire (MBE) for services to Holocaust Education. Lily Ebert, Chaim Ferster, Jack Kagan, Freddie Knoller, Rudi Oppenheimer, Ivor Perl, Renee Salt and Zigi Shipper received the British Empire Medal (BEM).

¹⁵ Mr Kagan was later naturalized as British.

aims to revivify Our commitment to social values that genocide so clearly transgresses (Richardson 2018a, 2018b). These values include the belief that the Holocaust was a catastrophe, to grieve the loss of innocent life, and that we must remember these victims, in order to honour them, to celebrate specific acts of laudable conduct and to revivify our commitment to the shared values of the norm circle (Elder-Vass 2012, 2015). Pearce (2014) argues that Britain's Holocaust Memorial Day represents a consummate Blair-ite invented tradition. For that reason, it should be unsurprising that Tony Blair found it easier to embody the values of the day better than other politicians.

Like all rhetoric, successful epideictic speeches rest upon the speakers' effective marshalling of the means of persuasion. Aristotle identified three artistic means of persuasion: *ethos*, via stressing the knowledge, virtue and goodwill of the speaker; *pathos*, through moving the audience in and out of different emotional states; and *logos*, through appropriate argument schemes that are applied correctly. Each of these means of persuasion can fail, resulting in either poor or fallacious argumentation. Specific claims to be motivated by, or in communion with, shared values can also derail – perhaps particularly in the case of politicians, given that their political record is a matter of public record. If what they have done (especially in the recent past) openly contradicts what they claim, this can render the speaker untrustworthy, and so their argument fails on *ethetic* grounds.

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