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PLEASE CITE THE PUBLISHED VERSION

<https://doi.org/10.1177/1750698017720259>

PUBLISHER

SAGE © The Author

VERSION

AM (Accepted Manuscript)

PUBLISHER STATEMENT

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REPOSITORY RECORD

Richardson, John. 2017. "Making Memory Makers: Interpellation, Norm Circles and Holocaust Memorial Day Trust Workshops". Loughborough University. <https://hdl.handle.net/2134/24458>.

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Making memory makers: Interpellation, norm circles and Holocaust Memorial Day Trust workshops

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Abstract

This article examines the rationale for ordinary people's involvement with commemoration. Adopting a critical ethnographic approach, and taking myself and my own interpellation as a symptomatic example, I ask what it is about Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) that calls to people, motivating them to become involved in localised commemorative activities. Since 2005, the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT) has been responsible for organising and promoting HMD commemoration and, as part of this, they organise free workshops across the UK for people interested in organising an activity to mark HMD. The data I analyse in this article is drawn from two sites: participant observation of three workshops organised by the HMDT (October-November 2015); and interviews with both the organisers and participants of these three same workshops. My analysis demonstrates that the workshop is orientated to answering two modal questions, which participants (implicitly) ask of themselves: *should I commemorate HMD*, entailing a deontic modality; and *can I commemorate HMD*, entailing an epistemic modality. I argue that HMD should be regarded as a norm circle which, through its members, possesses a causal power to produce a tendency in others to also commit to endorsing commemoration as a social norm.

Key words

Holocaust Memorial Day, Commemoration, Interpellation, Norm Circles, Ethnography, Critical Discourse Analysis

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Introduction

Commemorations are “ongoing dynamic process[es]” (Olick 2007: 82) through which narratives about the past, about ‘us’ and ‘them’ as well as beliefs and values contained in these stories, are (re)produced. The Holocaust in particular has, since 1989, increasingly become used for the construction of moral boundaries and collective identities (Assmann & Conrad 2010; Levy & Sznajder 2006; Rothberg 2009). Kansteiner (2002: 180) argues that these processes of collective memorializing are informed by three “types of historical factors: the intellectual and cultural traditions that frame all our representations of the past, the memory makers who selectively adopt and manipulate these traditions, and the memory consumers who use, ignore or transform such artefacts according to their own interests”. However, Kansteiner’s account is rather static, paying little attention to either the dialectic relations that exist between ‘tradition’ and the making/consuming of collective memory, nor to the ways that individuals and groups can simultaneously act as both memory makers and memory consumers.

A primary objective of this article is to examine a way that ‘memory makers’ are themselves ‘made’, using the British Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) as a case example. Britain was slow in developing what Pearce (2014) refers to as Holocaust consciousness (see also Kushner 2004, 2013; Pearce 2013). As late as the 1970s, “British scholarship on Nazi antisemitism and the Holocaust was still virtually non-existent [...having] been subsumed for much of the post-war period beneath a carefully nurtured narrative of Second World War heroism and moral superiority” (Pearce 2008: 73). The 1990s brought a series of inter-related developments which, dialectically and cumulatively, marked a turning point for Holocaust consciousness in Britain (Pearce 2014). In 1999, a Bill proposing “a day to learn about and remember the Holocaust” was introduced to the House of Commons by the Labour MP Andrew Dismore, following his visit to Auschwitz organized by the Holocaust Educational Trust. Dismore’s

justification for a British HMD demonstrates the extent to which his proposal reflected a combination of British and international political concerns: a Holocaust remembrance day, he argued, would offer an opportunity to “emphasise the positive values of Britain and of civilisation”, and that “NATO’s reasons for intervention in Kosovo graphically demonstrate the Holocaust still has resonance for today’s world leaders” (quoted in Pearce 2014: 144).

The first British HMD took place January 27 2001, commemorating the day that the Nazi German concentration and extermination camp Auschwitz was liberated by the Red Army. From its inception, the stated aim of the British HMD was pedagogic and didactic, entailing not simply a desire to learn *about* the Holocaust, but also to learn *from* it. Specifically, this entailed a “move from the past to the present, from the particular to the universal. The stories of individuals and families will be used so that the fate of the Jews and other ‘targets’ of Nazi racial-biological politics can be personalized and the catastrophe perceived as a human event” (Cesarani 2000: 63). However, critics of HMD question the particular stories that are used, maintaining that events and processes that destabilize the national self-image of British decency are absent from the official national commemorative ceremony of HMD (Bloxxham 2002). These include 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).

In 2005, responsibility for organising HMD commemoration changed from the British government to the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust (HMDT). The Trust is a charity that promotes and supports HMD and, as part of its desire to make the day central to British social and cultural life, organises free workshops across the UK for people interested in organising an activity to mark HMD. These events are designed to help attendees to gain a better understanding of HMD and how to plan and manage activities meaningful for their audiences. Over 5,590 activities took place across the UK for HMD 2016, in workplaces, schools, universities, local government buildings and civic spaces, an increase from the 3,600 activities that marked HMD 2015.

I attended three HMDT workshops in October and November 2015, in the build up to HMD on 27 January 2016. During the course of the workshops, I found myself being called to in a way that I

hadn't anticipated. Reading through my field notes, there are indications of this at the first workshop, and my position had settled during the second: I felt that I also had to attend an event on HMD; and if there wasn't one already planned at my University, I would organise it myself. The workshops therefore interpellated me (Althusser 1971), calling out to and subjecting me to their discourse. This article analyses the ways that this took place – that is, how these workshops interpellate those in attendance, and the ways this informs their motivation and practice in staging their own commemorative events. My analysis, and in particular my bringing together of the concepts of interpellation and the norm circle, have relevance for memory work in a much wider sense, providing a potential answer to the problem of how collective understandings of the past are inculcated in societies.

Interpellation

The doctrine of interpellation was proposed by Althusser (1971) as a way “to account for how a subject comes into being after language” (Butler 1995: 6). As Butler (1996: 6) summarises: “The theory of interpellation appears to stage a scene in which a subject is hailed, the subject turns around, and then accepts the terms by which he or she is hailed.” The exemplary – and allegorical – case is that of a police officer calling out ‘*Hey you there*’, to which the subject responds by turning around, implicitly or explicitly answers ‘*Yes?*’ and, in so doing, submits themselves to the Law. For Althusser, ideology is inescapably linked with the subject since it is ideology that hails individuals and so constitutes them *as* subjects (Althusser 1971). As Youdell (2006: 516) puts it, for Althusser, the subject

is constituted by ideology that constitutes the individual as a subject. The subject is hailed as an individual, even as she/he is constituted as a subject. [...] Recognition is central to these processes. The subject recognizes herself/himself as she/he is hailed. [...] It is through this recognition that the subject is ‘recruited’ – subjecthood is freely taken and subjection is freely accepted by the good subject.

Althusser's approach to interpellation has fallen out of favour over the past 20 years or so, and one of reasons for this is his anti-humanism which leaves no space for deliberation or agency: "subjectivity is constituted by the positions which discourse *oblige*s us to take up" (emphasis added, Barker & Jane 2016: 72). As Elder-Vass (2012: 188) puts it, "Althusser's argument is that we are accorded the recognition of being agentic subjects only in order to secure our voluntary acceptance of the role of political subjects." The subject of interpellation, in Althusser's account, is a subject in the sense of being *subjected to* ideology via deterministic and autonomous 'discourse'. "Discourse constructs, defines and produces objects of knowledge in an intelligible way. At the same time it excludes other ways of reasoning as unintelligible" (Barker & Jane 2016: 72). Further, "there is no 'before' subjection when the subject was an individual" (Youdell 2006: 516). As Althusser asserts, "individuals are always-already subjects" (1971: 163).

Althusser also seems to have only imagined the concept of interpellation to relate to hegemonic ideology, and the ways that this subjectifies in society. To draw again on Elder-Vass' (2012) excellent summary, Althusser argues that we "internalise not only the belief that we have control over our own actions but also the belief that we must voluntarily conform to society's expectations – to the extent that we feel shame when we transgress" (p.188). Any belief that we have the capacity to experience, to reflect on these encounters and then make decisions with a degree of autonomy is rendered an illusion by Althusser's account, as is any acknowledgement of positive forms of *affect* (pleasure, fulfilment, serenity, pride) that we may feel when we conform with a social expectation or norm (Ahmed 2004; Milani 2015).

However, Althusser's concept has been adopted and adapted in interesting ways by others. For example, Butler (1995: 7) addresses the apparently circularity in Althusser's theorisation – c.f. how an individual could *be* interpellated, and thus *rendered* a subject, if one was always-already a subject – by asking "How and why does the subject turn"? Whilst this might initially appear to be a straightforward case of cause and effect – 'ideology' hailing; the interpellant 'turning' and so recruited by its subjectivating discourse – in fact the relationship is much more complex. As Butler (1995: 7) argues: "Although there would be no turning around without first having been hailed,

neither would there be a turning around without some readiness to turn”. The explanation, by Butler’s reading of Althusser, is in the existence of a conscience: “Conscience is fundamental to the production and regulation of the citizen-subject, for it is conscience that turns the individual around to make itself available to that subjectivating reprimand” (Butler 1995: 13). She goes as far as to argue that “The doctrine of interpellation appears to presuppose a prior and unelaborated doctrine of conscience” (1995: 8).

However, this leaves a key question unaddressed: how to explain the causal power of interpellation; what generative mechanisms (Bhaskar 1975) explain the ability of interpellation to bring a subject(ivity) into being? Here, the recent work of Elder-Vass (2010, 2011, 2012, 2015) proves incredibly useful, and in particular his theory of norm circles.

Elder-Vass’ Social Ontology

First, Elder-Vass contends that, *contra*-Althusser, conceptual entities such as discourse, ideology and social structure do not possess causal power in and of themselves and “should not be used in explanations unless there is some way of establishing the material basis of any claim that they have causal significance” (Elder-Vass 2012: 20fn). Instead, “*all* social entities are ultimately composed of material parts (primarily people) and that if we are to understand their causal powers we must ultimately demonstrate their rootedness in the material” (2012: 20). *Social entities* he defines as “those entities whose parts include multiple human beings” (p.21), which are bound together and constituted by “the beliefs and dispositions that individuals hold, and in particular on the commitments to each other that these entail” (p.20). Second, and in part consequently, *social structures* are “social entities with causal powers [...which] depend on the people who are their parts and on the interactions between people as the mechanisms that produce their powers” (p. 21). Social structures, drawing on the people who are their parts, have the power to interpellate through (ideological) discourse. And, whilst “there may be many different kinds of social structures”, Elder-

Vass (2012: 15) argues that “culture, language, discourse and knowledge are all produced by different varieties of the same broad type of social structure [...] by *norm circles*.”

Norm Circles

Norm circles are “groups of people who are committed to endorsing and enforcing specific norms” (Elder-Vass 2012: 201-202). More specifically, norm circles are social structures “with people as their parts, and because of the ways in which the members of such groups interact (a mechanism) they have the causal power to produce a tendency in individuals to follow standardised practices” (Elder-Vass 2012: 22-23). Norm circles act “through the individuals who are their members” (p.202), but in ways that are consistent; this consistency entails “a specific normative environment” and, consequently, stakes out the contours of the norm circle to which the individual is member. It is the norm circle that has “the causal power to influence our beliefs about our normative environment”, rather than the norms themselves (Ibid.). Elder-Vass (2012) uses the term circle rather than other concepts (*inter alia* group, community, society, culture) in order “to avoid some of the implications that are perhaps more likely to be read into these other terms”, including the idea that people are not (cannot) be members of overlapping, intersecting circles, or that “all of its members are aware that a group as such exists” (p.23).

Contrary to Althusser’s anti-humanism, Elder-Vass maintains that people are “agentic subjects in the sense that they can make decisions that affect their actions” (2012: 201). Whilst such decisions are constrained and shaped by – indeed, they *index* – a number of individual and social factors, they are not *determined* by these factors. So, when we make decisions, “those decisions are influenced by beliefs and dispositions that are themselves the product of their past experience, including their past social experience [...] the product of an embodied history of relating to the world” (Elder-Vass 2012: 201). Similarly, actions and events are not the result of single causal powers acting upon us in a deterministic way. Causal powers instead “operate as tendencies. Any given causal power has a *tendency* to produce a certain sort of outcome but these tendencies may be frustrated when causal

powers with conflicting tendencies interact with them” (Elder-Vass 2012: 16). Thus, norm circles, like other social structures, can “causally influence individuals without directly and completely determining their behaviour” (Elder-Vass 2011: 153-54).

The theory of norm circles is not static; Elder-Vass (2010) acknowledges that competition exists between different incompatible norms, that new norms can develop in line with new social structures and the power of one norm circle can increase, with attendant implications regarding the pervasiveness with which its norms are endorsed and enforced. Indeed power is an integral feature of the theory, wherein “the power to generate a tendency in individuals to observe a norm is an emergent causal power of the norm circle as a whole” (Elder-Vass 2012: 27; see also Elder-Vass 2015).

Interpellating discourse has a perlocutionary effect upon those it subjectivates; that is, interpellation has a performative power for the norm circle and “for a performative to work [...] it must be perceived as having the authority of a norm circle standing behind it” (Elder-Vass 2012: 202).

It is perhaps for this reason that we see year on year increases in the number of events organised as HMD commemorative events – as the norm circle increases in size, its performative power also increases. An impact study, commissioned by HMDT and carried out by the Centre for Regional Economic and Social Research at Sheffield Hallam University, surveyed hundreds of HMD activity organisers and participants between November 2013 and October 2015, in order to assess “the extent to which HMD impacts on people's knowledge, attitudes and actions” (Eadson et al 2015: 5).¹ The results of the survey suggest that “People who take part in HMD are likely to act in some way following participation, in particular by telling others about HMD [...] and encouraging them to take part in future events. Ninety three per cent of survey respondents took some form of action as a result of attending an HMD event” (Ibid.).² And this impact was not only observable during the periods

¹ Full report available at http://hmd.org.uk/sites/default/files/hmd_impact_study_final_report_november_2015_pdf.pdf [accessed 9 November 2016]

² “Online surveys of HMD participants and organisers carried out in January-February 2014 and 2015 (n=716 in 2014 and 676 in 2015), with follow-up surveys carried out six months after HMD (n=191 in 2014 and 170 in 2015). In the 2015 HMD survey, respondents who took part in HMD 2014 were asked a set of questions about change over the year from HMD 2014 to HMD 2015” (Eadson et al 2015: 8).

immediately before and after HMD; the study “also revealed that HMD has a longer term impact in changing attitudes and behaviours, [...] building knowledge in relation to the Holocaust and genocides, promoting cohesion and tolerance and providing a regular, and enduring, focus for education and remembrance” (Eadson et al 2015: 5).

Method & data

This article is part of 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. My work employs a discourse analytic approach to a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus 1998), drawing in particular on the Discourse-Historical Approach (DHA) to Critical Discourse Analysis (Heer et al 2008; Krzyżanowski 2010, 2011, 2017; Krzyżanowski and Oberhuber 2007; Muntigl et al 2000; Wodak et al 1999; Wodak 1996), in order to make sense of (1) the field of remembrance and its genres (e.g. ceremonies, speeches, stories, testimony, music, minutes of silence, etc.) and (2) the ways that they reflect the complex interplay between collective remembering (Wertsch 2002) and social and historic contexts. In Marcus’ (1998: 79) account, a multi-sited ethnography “moves out from the single sites and local situations of conventional ethnographic research designs to examine the circulation of cultural meanings, objects and identities”. He recommends we ‘follow the person’ through social interactions, ‘follow the thing’ through commodity exchanges, or ‘follow the concept’ as it circulates in symbolic and public culture (see also Marcus 2010). Here, I focus on ‘following’ the concept and practices of commemoration as they are invoked and enacted. Ethnographic analysis within the DHA integrates the linguistic text-discursive analysis characteristic of Critical Discourse Analysis with more contextually focussed and actor-related forms of analysis (for an overview see Krzyżanowski 2017). From this perspective, analysis goes beyond asking ‘what is’, typical of conventional ethnography, to also ask ‘what could be?’, reflecting on the discursive process of choosing between conceptual and political alternatives (see also Thomas 1993).

I am currently working with data from three sites: ethnographic participant observation of three HMDT workshops; interviews with participants and organisers of all these workshops; and an auto-ethnographic account of the HMD event I organised. This article will draw initially on the interview data and then move onto an examination of the structure and content of the workshops I attended. Although interviews, in themselves, do not constitute ethnography, they can be utilized as an instrument of ethnography to “aid researchers in our attempts to describe and understand the unique experiences of others” (Stage & Mattson 2003: 97; see also Mattson & Stage 2003). The interviews were all recorded and transcribed verbatim; the workshops were recorded through note-taking, which got progressively more detailed across the three I attended. In the final workshop I especially attended to the spoken discourse of the presenters. I interviewed 6 people from HMDT: the chief executive, Outreach Officer, two regional support workers and two ‘youth champions’.³ I also interviewed 8 participants who had attended workshops in London, Sheffield and Leicester. I asked workshop participants both “grand-tour” questions, which “provide a verbal description of the significant features of the focus of the study” and “mini-tour” questions, which explore “the details of things” (Stage & Mattson 2003: 98). Specifically, the questions covered three main areas: ‘what brought them to the workshop’ (which then covered their histories of commemoration and how long they had commemorated HMD); their views on commemoration in general; and more specific issues relating to the commemoration of HMD, both in general and in relation to the theme of HMD 2016, ‘Don’t Stand By’. Interviewees from HMDT were asked similar “grand-tour” and “mini-tour” questions, but instead of ‘what brought them to the workshop’ I asked them about their work for HMDT, both in terms of their duties and responsibilities and what they hope to achieve through their work. The interviews ranged from 24 minutes to 50 minutes; together, they total 7hours 58minutes, and average 39 minutes each. In this article, these interviewees are numbered (HMDT1, HMDT2, London1, London2, etc), to anonymize them.

³ The HMDT Youth Champion Programme “empowers young people to take action for Holocaust Memorial Day (HMD) through organising their own events and raising awareness of HMD in their community and among other young people”. It is open to anyone aged 14-24 interested in organising an activity as part of HMD. Quoted from: <http://hmd.org.uk/page/youth-champions> [accessed 9 November 2016]

My analysis below focuses on interpellation, and specifically the way that the Trust initiates what I am referring to as ‘chains of interpellation’, wherein those interpellated then act as interpellators themselves, calling more people to join the norm circle of people committed to the commemoration of HMD.

Interview data

Interpellation

Interpellation calls, simultaneously, to a subject’s conscience and their sense of personal agency; that is, it calls on them to do something in accordance to two modal axes: obligation (to which the subject-as-conscience may think ‘*should* I do this?’) and ability (to which the subject-as-agent may think ‘*can* I do this?’). At a great number of points in my interviews, the interviewees spoke of the ways that HMD calls to people to act or react in particular ways. First, this can be examined in a general sense – the ways that HMD in general calls to people and positions them as subjects. For example:

HMDT, 1: “Holocaust Memorial Day is a very dynamic day [...] It’s absolutely about that dynamism between what happens when you think about the past and reflect on it and think well, what does that mean for me today? What are my responsibilities and what can I do? And it creates that opportunity to do something”

London, 3: “you just think, if it was me what would I do, I don’t know, I genuinely don’t know what I would do. Would I, would I run, would I cower, would I hide, would I face them, I don’t know. And I think that’s [pause] but I think it’s vital that, you know?”

In the first of these extracts, a Trust staff member discusses the ways that HMD asks questions of us – what does it mean? what can I do? In the second, with an interview with an attendee from the London workshop, you see him asking exactly these questions of himself. And although he doesn’t know the answer to these questions it is, in his words, vital that he asks them of himself. In the words of HMDT1, these questions, and the processes through which we pose these questions to ourselves,

create opportunities “to do something”. That is, for this interviewee, HMD is not characterised by (or at least not *solely* by) an inward or contemplative response to the past, but rather it requires her to translate such reflection into material action. Such a view of the overall function of HMD was shared by many of those I interviewed. I asked one of the HMDT Youth Champions what she thought the purpose of HMD was, and she immediately answered:

HMDT, 6: “learning from the past to create a safer and better future, which I guess is the purpose and is a very a noble purpose. There’s no point, almost, in just looking at the past and saying, *this happened, wasn’t it sad?* if we’re not going to do anything about it in our own communities in this country, hate crime and things which I’ve already mentioned, and worldwide.”

It is cliché to say that we need to ‘learn from the Holocaust’ (Forchtner 2016). However, the specific lessons that we are meant to take are very rarely vocalised, aside from a commitment to ‘never again’. Indeed, some authors have questioned the whole idea of taking lessons from the Holocaust – first because, quite simply, “The Holocaust past is one to which a multitude of meanings can be attributed, and one from which a multitude of lessons can be drawn.” (Cole 2000: 173). It can, for example “point to the world’s indifference to the murder of Jews, or to the courage of a few, who stood up to Nazi terror on behalf of Jews. [...] It can suggest how monstrous a few can become, or how readily all of us can, by our silence or inaction, become complicit in monstrous crimes” (Liebman & Don-Yehiya 1983: 142). Second, any ‘lessons’ derived from the Holocaust can quickly “become the vehicles of group needs and interests, some of which have nothing to do with the Holocaust” (Marrus 1991: 112). Such ‘lessons’ are “as much about the moral politics of the present as [they are] the past” (Lawson 2010: 13). Consequently, the ‘lessons’ taken from the Holocaust not only shift and change over time (Marrus 2015), they are also susceptible to instrumentalisation of history in the service of contemporary political projects (Musolff 2017).

In the extract above the lesson that the interviewee takes from the Holocaust is less a moral position regarding the past and more a political lesson for the present: there is “almost” no point in “looking at the past” unless we *do* something “about it” now. Reconstructing this argument, the anaphoric

pronoun “it” in this extract refers back to and replaces “the past”. Therefore, the speaker believes that one way she can ‘do something about [*the past*] is by mobilising against hate crimes in the present. For her then, interpellation by HMD means active opposition to prejudice and persecution in the present, as a way “to make sense of the senseless of the genocide” (Pearce 2014: 43).

Second, in the interview data there are more specific articulations of the interpellating functions of HMD, that related to the theme of HMD in 2016, ‘Don’t Stand By’. Again, to take a couple of extracts from Trust staff members first:

HMDT, 1: “I think that having the theme of Don’t Stand By is absolutely encouraging everybody to think what more can we do today, not to stand by? And that goes for organisations and governments as well as individuals”

HMDT, 3: “Don't Stand By, it really is saying, *Look, you should not stand by. If you do, you are doing wrong* [...] it should be a lot of inward looking and, right, how does my behaviour need to change?”

In these extracts we have two different approaches to interpellating the subject: the first speaks of encouraging people in general, as a collective body, to think what more can we do; the second, adopts a far more moralising tone, exhorting you, as an individual, to stand up, and explicitly making the point that if you do not then you are doing wrong. Both, however, are predicated on the idea that the call to not stand by necessitates action on the part of the interpellated listener.

All the attendees I spoke with agreed that ‘Don’t Stand By’ was a challenging theme, a directly political theme, but one that they thought was very well chosen – precisely because of the way it challenges people; it makes a demand of us. As one London participant put it:

London, 3: “if it makes people uncomfortable I think that’s, you know, that’s job done, because it is something that we should clearly, even today, we should be continuing to think about.”

Other participants spoke about the theme in a way that indexed the modal auxiliaries referred to above: should I get involved? Can I get involved? For example:

London, 1: “I think they've chosen a very, very good phrase that actually resonates well with the people who turn away because they don't want to see something awful, and who feel a bit helpless because they're not sure what to do. And it's almost as if they can say, well, there are things we can do. There are ways we can be involved”

The message of the 2016 HMD was unanimously interpreted as a call to improve the lives of persecuted individuals and groups in the present. Hate crime was cited most frequently with regard to this, however the destitution of refugees, particularly those fleeing war in Syria, was also recurrently mentioned as a matter of grave concern that Britain needed to do more to alleviate. The commemorators I interviewed did not think that the British government was doing enough to assist refugees, with several explicitly arguing that the government’s unwelcoming attitude and divisive rhetoric was at odds with ‘the lessons of the Holocaust’, and so contrary to the norm group committed to commemorating HMD.

Invoking the norm circle

When the staff members of the Trust speak about HMD, there is a tendency to use first person plural pronouns – we and us – that you would expect from people working for such a charity. But the interesting thing is that, when you trace the nouns that these pronouns refer to, they frequently index not the Trust, but *the Day itself*. In other words, the respondents often speak in terms of being part of Holocaust Memorial Day, rather than ‘we’ the Trust. In these extracts I underline the salient clauses which reveal these indexical parallels:

HMDT, 4: “what makes us different from say, I don’t know, the trade union anti-racism campaign or something like that, which would be a simple message about reducing hate crime and prejudice and whatever. What makes Holocaust Memorial Day so important is that actually I just feel it’s a really, really powerful indication of what history means and the

contemporary relevance of history. It's just massively important, the experiences of ordinary individuals are not, are not let go by, are not forgotten."

HMDT, 1: "we hope that Holocaust Memorial Day will enable people to question themselves and question their organisations and question what is possible"

HMDT, 2: "What I think we can do as part of the Trust and as part of Holocaust Memorial Day is (pause) again, are we doing enough to mitigate these things that happen to these poor people? Are we just standing by in the face of things?"

In these and other extracts HMD is invoked as a metonym: the people and material practices of the day (and the personal and collective reflection that they provoke) are replaced by the day itself. Clearly a day, a period of 24 hours, cannot in and of itself enable or mitigate or indicate anything. However, HMD as a social structure with people as its parts *could* have this ability. HMD is a norm circle, whose power "to generate a tendency in individuals to observe a norm" (Elder-Vass 2012: 27) – that is, to commemorate the victims of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides on 27 January – is emergent from the collective power of the group itself.

Chains of interpellation

HMDT doesn't just aim to interpellate individuals and motivate them to "be involved" in commemorating HMD; it aims to establish chains of interpellation, where to "be involved" is to interpellate others:

HMDT, 6: "I think it's about encouraging other people, people who are at events [...] encouraging them to almost have that mind-set that they want to do it."

HMDT, 1: "initially the focus was on ensuring civic commemorations and also commemorations within schools. And essentially, creating the idea of a Holocaust Memorial Day across the UK. And it was those two audiences that were the main audiences initially.

Now we're in a position where we have over three thousand six hundred local activities and they are in a hugely diverse range of organisations"

HMDT, 4: "we do a lot of work around the workshop both before and after, but that's only a tiny part of the job. The job is very much around – it's a sort of marketing role in some ways. No, I'd call it an audience development role actually, an engagement role"

The events, the resources and the support provided by HMDT, are all geared towards transforming what Kansteiner would call memory consumers into memory makers – they position people as "agentic subjects in the sense that they can make decisions that affect their actions" (Elder-Vass, 2012: 200). These memory makers decide to interpellate others, just as they were interpellated themselves; they call on others to think, to remember, and to reflect on the meanings of HMD to their present and future lives. Looking at some examples from the interviews:

Sheffield, 1: "When the Holocaust Memorial event was first set up in Barnsley, I worked with [anon] to get schools involved by sponsoring a competition for children to either do artwork or to write poems as part of Holocaust Memorial Day and we gave a prize to a number of winners in different categories."

London, 1: "I am a full-time teacher. I'm the head of RE in my school, a secondary school. And I've been head of RE in five different schools now over the years. And wherever I've been I've always encouraged the commemoration and leading up to it the lessons that help us understand a little more, not just in RE because I – you know, I link it across to other parts of the curriculum"

HMDT, 1: "this year we have just recently announced a youth board where youth champions will – we've selected a different youth champion for each region of the UK who will be working with our support workers so they can encourage young people within their region to do work in HMD [...] there are huge numbers of young people impacted by HMD and we know that they're inspired by what they learn"

And, more specifically in relation to HMD 2016, this teacher had the following to say about the specific affordances of the theme ‘Don’t Stand By’, and how useful this was in engaging – and interpellating – his pupils:

London, 3: “it’s turned ever so slightly from just looking back to remembering, but also looking forward and what can we do from this point forward. [...] I like the theme from that point of view, because I can then take that and say, right this what happened, this is why it happened, you as individuals have the choice, have the – you have the power, you have the choice in life to be one of two things, you can be a good person or a not so good person and you have to decide”

In the story the teacher recounts in this final extract, he clearly presupposes his pupils to be agentic subjects: they “have the power”, they “have the choice”, to be good or not so good. The precise acts that they can choose to do (or not to do) are not detailed. And whilst he may have had something comparatively banal in mind, like the prevention of bullying, elsewhere in the interview he spoke of a specific lesson he delivers for his pupils which suggests otherwise. He said that he asks his class of fourteen to sixteen year olds to consider “a photograph of the local people standing and looking at like a mass grave”; this image really “hits home [...] because then they realise it’s ordinary people who, you know, were just going about their daily lives and then sort of a mile down the road there was these horrible things happening to other people” (London3). This teacher therefore transforms the didactic narrative that conventionally runs through Holocaust education, with well-defined categories of heroes and villains, into something a great deal more compromised and hence disruptive: that, in the context of ordinary towns, ordinary people acquiesced whilst other ordinary people committed acts of unbridled criminality, killing their Jewish neighbours. Such a lesson, essentially humanising and (for want of a better word) normalising the perpetrators, not only calls on the students to critically consider how catastrophes like the Holocaust can arise, it also confronts them with the unsettling idea that political violence doesn’t always come goose-stepping into town wearing military uniform; it is as easily perpetrated by your neighbours, your friends and your family.

The Workshop as interpellating mechanism

As stated in the methods section above, I attended three workshops as a participant observer. I should point out that I am aware that these workshops are not the only, and perhaps not the primary, way that people are interpellated by HMD. For most of the participants I interviewed this wasn't the first HMD that they had commemorated. So I can't look at what took place in the workshops in 2015 and link this in a straightforward way to the interpellation of the participants I interviewed. However, when it comes to me, I can make that link, because it was my attendance at the workshops that changed my motivation. So, to take myself as a symptomatic case – I knew, of course, about HMD before attending the workshop; I believe in the central message, to ensure that the Holocaust is not forgotten, denied or trivialised; I also subscribe to the norm to oppose prejudice and discrimination in all its forms. However, it was only when interpellated by the norm circle – the group of people both delivering and attending the workshops – that I felt bound to act.

All three of the workshops I attended were structured the same way – they all followed a powerpoint presentation, and break out tasks, that had been written by the Outreach officer. Though the three workshops differed stylistically, because they were delivered by three different people and in very different settings (the Jewish Museum in London, the Chamber Room of a Local Government building and a University teaching room), the semantic and interactive aspects of the workshops were essentially the same. Each workshop was delivered by a minimum of two representatives from HMDT, one of whom had the role of being primary speaker, and the other(s) acting in a supporting role. The quotations in this article are taken from the workshop in Leicester.

The basic structure of the first half was as follows: first there were *Introductions*, where we went around room, we each said who we were, who we worked for, and what we were there for (or what we hoped to get from the event). The workshops were attended by people drawn from a wide variety of professions: teachers, prison workers, librarians, University chaplains, and civil servants (particularly equality officers) from local and regional governments. There were also people representing faith communities, and the occasional person simply representing themselves, interested in organising an event in their community.

After introductions, the main speaker of the workshop provided a kind of an *Abstract* of what the event will cover and what it will achieve, in the sense of how it will change ‘you the attendees’:

“hopefully by the end of this you’ll feel inspired to organise your own Holocaust Memorial Day 2016 activity. You will know about the resources and support on offer and understand how you as activity organisers can help us improve the bigger picture of raising awareness and impact across the UK, as well being committed to spreading the message on Don’t Stand By.”

There is a marked difference in the modality of the first and second sentences in the above extract. In the first, the speaker states that, at the end of the workshop, “*hopefully* [...] you will feel inspired”. This entails a desire for this aim to be fulfilled, tinged with a sense of doubt whether it will be for everyone. This doubt is absent in the second sentence. Here, as well as being structured as a (rhetorically powerful) list of three, the clauses indicate very high epistemic modality here: by the end of the day “you *will* know”, you will understand, and will be “committed to spreading the message”. These aims were borne out in my reaction: I felt a degree of inspiration to organise a successful event but, regardless, a definite sense of that I (now) had a duty to “raising awareness and [...] spreading the message” of HMD.

The presentation then continued with a section summarising *Past events in the region*. The content was tailored to the region covered in each of the three workshops, but in each there was an emphasis on ‘simple’ – the event you organise doesn’t have to be on a large scale:

“one of the councillors led the lighting of candles, and it was as simple as that. They just reflected for a few minutes, they came together, reflected and then lit the candles.”

“Another simple way to commemorate, within Northampton, is that, obviously the lighting of candles [...] it doesn’t have to be something that’s all singing, all dancing, it can be very simple.”

“once again very simple, very significant this. I mean the laying of stones”

“the final one, this is a very simple one. In Brigg [...] a group of people get together each year and they basically just go outside at dusk and they have a ceremony. And it is quite moving, and it is just a simple ceremony”

The repeated stress on the simplicity of commemorative events from the previous year might look like a verbal tick on the part of this presenter. However, as I discuss below, it resonates with the overall message of the workshop. Essentially, emphasising the small scale of local events, and their correspondingly low demand on organisers, is vital for interpellating people, like myself, who were only familiar with the large-scale mass mediated national commemoration, characterised by huge audiences, celebrity speeches and high-production values.

Next, the workshop presenter delivered a section on *What we do*, explaining that the Trust takes a legalistic definition of genocide and commemorates *as* genocide any case where individuals “have been perpetrated, convicted or indicted by an international criminal tribunal”. Necessarily this means that all pre-WWII acts committed with intent to destroy a (national, racial, ethnic, religious) people are excluded from commemoration. However six genocides are included within this definition, which the presenter listed as the Holocaust, Nazi persecution (“the persecution and murder of a range of different groups of people across occupied Europe. This included gypsies, Slavs, black people, disabled people, homosexuals and political opponents”), Cambodia, Bosnia, Rwanda and the on-going genocide in Darfur. This list was introduced in a way that, again, included those present at the workshop within the interpellated norm circle: these six genocides “are genocides that *we* commemorate” (emphasis added). Here, “we” is being used in simultaneously inclusive and exclusive ways. If the speaker had meant “we” in only an exclusive way (that is, ‘we, the Trust’), then it would have been more apposite to have stated that these ‘are genocides that HMDT/the Trust commemorates’. However she did not choose to state this, entailing that the “we” invoked was not exclusively HMDT but rather inclusive of the whole group – the norm circle – of people who commemorate on 27 January (including the Trust). The people in the room hearing this first person plural pronoun were therefore implicitly included within this commemorating “we” group.

Following a break out task – where we were given decontextualized images and quotes and asked if we could identify which of the six commemorated genocides they related to – the workshops then introduced the theme for HMD 2016:

“our theme for 2016 is Don’t Stand By. The Holocaust and subsequent genocides took place because local populations allowed insidious persecution to take root. Whilst some actively supported or facilitated state policies on persecution, the vast majority stood by silently [...] so hopefully after this workshop you’ll find it a bit easier to not be silent and not stand by”

This is a clear call to act, which links the past and the present and draws on two familiar lessons of Holocaust commemoration: a lesson about bystanders (‘all it takes for evil to triumph is for good people to do nothing’) and a lesson about guarding against history repeating itself (‘never again’⁴).

Since Marrus (1987), and especially Hilberg (1992), Holocaust historiography has been premised on a heuristic triumvirate of perpetrator, bystander and victim groups and, increasingly, the complex and contingent ways that they overlap. Of these, the historiography of bystanders is the least developed, acting as “a somewhat loosely defined catchall” for those who are neither victims nor perpetrators (Bloxxham & Kushner 2005: 177). Despite this, the category of the bystander looms large in contemporary moral accounts of the Holocaust, and the lessons derived from them. Kushner (2000: 60) argues that this “moral concern [...] comes out of the rather complacent assumption that few of us will become perpetrators, and an equal optimism that we will not become victims”. Accordingly, the bystander functions as a projection of ‘us’ in the past – what would (could) we have done if we were there/then? In the extract above, the speaker collapses perpetrator and bystander, suggesting that “it was the ‘bystanders’, those who remained ‘silent’ and ‘did nothing’ in the face of Nazi evil, who enabled, even caused, the murder of millions of Jews” (Bergen 2012: 159). To an extent, such

⁴ The HMDT makes an explicit point in its workshops that it finds the phrase ‘never again’ unhelpful and eschews its use in campaign materials. However it is still present in a large number of texts available on its website, written by supporters and fellow HMD commemorators. Here, amongst other events and places, ‘never again’ is invoked in connection to Rwanda, where “Lord McConnell discusses the importance of remembrance, rebuilding and how we must all act to ensure such an atrocity never occurs again” (<http://hmd.org.uk/news/lord-mcconnell-remember-rwanda-and-never-forget-our-responsibility-protect>), Srebrenica (<http://hmd.org.uk/resources/stories/srebrenica-poto%C4%8Dari-memorial-centre-and-cemetery-victims-1995-genocide>), and genocide in general (see <http://hmd.org.uk/resources/poetry/never-again-rachel-redhead>) [all accessed 7 November 2016]

condemnation is folded into in the very concept of ‘bystander’, given its pejorative overtones (Marrus 1987) – in accusatory accounts, in particular, bystanders are those who could have (*should* have) intervened to help victims and/or stop perpetrators. There is, according, a pressing need to acknowledge “the distinction between radically different kinds of bystander” (Cesarani & Levine 2000: 3), and to “understand why they reacted and responded the way that they did [...] by exploring the possibilities of choice that were available” to them (Bloxham & Kushner 2005: 189).

The bystander narrative is then blended with the second lesson (‘never again’) and, through this blending, listeners are offered a way to guard against history repeating itself. The bystanders in the presenter’s narrative “stood by silently”; this, first, draws an equivalence between ‘standing by’ and ‘silence’; and, second, implies that a way to *not* stand by in the face of contemporary crimes against humanity is to *speak out*. Though undoubtedly true, this also resonates with the message that ‘learning the lessons’ of the Holocaust doesn’t require massive actions on the part of the norm circle – attendees who feel powerless to stop the mass killing in Darfur or Syria, who don’t know how to help refugees displaced by war, are given a way to help ensure history doesn’t repeat itself: speaking about it.

However, as Bergen (2012) has forcefully argued, whilst such familiar (one could argue cliché) lessons are “compelling for educators and activists of all kinds”, in fact, “scholarship reveals the narrative implied by the bystanders slogan to be misleading. The Holocaust did not happen because ‘good’ men and women did nothing, but because people of all kinds under particular circumstances did ‘bad’ things” (p.159). By drawing critical attention away from perpetrators, and instead emphasising silent/unresponsive bystanders, Bergen (2012: 160) argues that commemoration “neglects the questions most important to historians of the Holocaust: Who carried out the attacks on Jews and other targets, on their property, their communities, their dignity, their lives?”

To be clear, both Bergen (2012) and I believe the call “to not be silent and not stand by” is admirable because it urges us to speak out against injustice (p.162). However it is also premised on a simplified version of the Holocaust – a historical narrative that over-inflates bystanders’ ability to halt the killing, that collapses years of persecution and extermination into a moments of individual (bystander)

agency, and which shifts critical attention away from vexed questions regarding perpetrators, not least “the combination of the horrific deeds of the killers and *their* humanity” (Ibid.).

The workshop then presented two life stories, in the form of two short films – the first with a Jewish Holocaust survivor called Ivor Perl, the second from Carl Wilkens, an American who stayed in the Rwandan capital in 1994 to help shield Tutsis from being murdered by Hutu extremists.⁵ In both of these films, there is emphasis on ‘the power of one’ – on individual action, in a way that speaks to (i.e. interpellates) those listening to the short films:

Ivor Perl: All I can do is talk about the experience of what happened and to tell, to tell whoever wants to listen what happens to people who follow their dreams. And it’s like somebody said, do you know what, even if there’s only one person who has heard the life of me or somebody else’s story and makes a difference, I mean, that alone would be worth to have spoken about it

Carl Wilkens: We look at the people who are right up front and we talk about, about upstanders, or you know, resisting against these horrible things, but there’s like a multitude of people behind them who are making it possible for them to do it. And for each of us to understand our role and to appreciate those roles you know

‘It doesn’t matter if the majority don’t make a difference’, the films suggest, ‘one person making a difference makes *this* [me speaking] worth it’. Could that one person be *you*? Bergen (2012) points out that the persuasive power of this rhetorical manoeuvre, emphasising ‘the power of one’, “in public discussions of the Holocaust” is especially compelling in the way it “transforms suffering into a source of inspiration, and speaks to the desire, especially among young people, to have an impact on the world” (p.162). Further, the life stories make the point (especially in the Wilkens life story) that we all have our roles – not only those ‘on the frontline’, placing themselves in danger by upstanding directly in the face of repressive violence, but also people raising awareness. The actions of Wilkens,

⁵ Ivor Perl’s short film, produced by Gemma Green, is available on the HMDT website <http://hmd.org.uk/resources/films/gemma-green-hopes-film-about-holocaust-survivor-ivor-perl>; the life story of Carl and Teresa Wilkens is also available here <http://hmd.org.uk/resources/stories/hmd-2016-carl-and-teresa-wilkens> [both accessed 7 November 2016]

physically protecting people from genocidal violence, are therefore functionalised in the service of the interpellating norm circle. And this isn't just my reading – in the discussion immediately after watching the 'Wilkens life story' film, a workshop attendee said:

“we've got people who are starving, they're being abused, they're being killed, you know, all sorts and I thought, but what can I do? [...] because I thought I'm only one person. But you see, he was only one person.”

To draw this together: the workshops presuppose two modal questions: *should I get involved in commemorating HMD?*; and, *can I get involved in commemorating HMD?* Both of these modal questions on the part of the attendees are then answered during the course of the workshop, through a combination of: a simplified Holocaust narrative, frequently characteristic of public commemoration (Bergen 2012; Rupnow 2012; Stone 2012); examples of small and relatively undemanding commemorative activities from the previous year; the employment of role models as exemplars of positive (Carl Wilkens) and negative (Holocaust bystanders) moral conduct; and a stress on the impact that individual actions can have. In so doing, the workshops enact the following modal questions:

‘Should I commemorate HMD?’

Yes, keeping silent sides with the oppressor

Yes, even one person commemorating makes a difference

‘Can I commemorate HMD?’

Yes, it is not onerous; it can be simple

Yes, we will support you with planning advice and materials

In the manner of a rhetorical *prolepsis*, the workshop presentation and the supporting materials that the presentation points us towards (through the repeat suggestions to consult the resources available on the HMDT website), look to answer these questions almost before we ask them of ourselves; the workshop anticipates self-doubt (and, perhaps, inertia) as the reasons why ‘you’ have not yet joined the ‘we’, the norm circle dedicated to commemoration of HMD. The modal questions regarding our obligation and ability to get involved, and the rhetorical ‘answers’ from the Trust, are presented in concert; the reasons for our non-involvement in HMD are acknowledged as a way of negating and so bypassing them.

Conclusion

This article has presented and analysed ethnographic data collected as part of a wider project aimed at analysing British Holocaust Memorial Day commemoration. Since 2002, and particularly since the Holocaust Memorial Day Trust took responsibility for organising HMD in 2005, there has been a meteoric rise in the number of people organising and attending events as part of HMD. I am interested in how we can account for such a rise, and the mechanics underwriting this increase – in other words, what motivates people to get involved, and what forms does this involvement take. Drawing on the work of Elder-Vass, I argue that HMD can be treated as a norm circle – that is, a group of people who are dedicated to endorsing and enforcing a particular norm. The interview data I analysed in this article demonstrate the ways that activity organisers were called to join this norm circle and, once part of this group – the ‘we’ who commemorate on January 27 – go on to interpellate others, in their workplaces, schools and through civic commemorative activities.

The HMDT employs a range of rhetorical and marketing techniques to publicise not only their activities but also how ordinary people can also get involved in HMD. The training workshops are one such mechanism, which are explicitly intended to inspire those in attendance to organise an event themselves. However I argue that the performative power of these workshops comes less from their rhetorical content and more from the way that they interactively channel the causal power of norm

circle. Norms in and of themselves do not have the ability to influence our beliefs or our actions; rather this causal power is an index of the norm circle, with people as its parts, whose power has a tendency to interpellate more members (like me) to join the norm circle. Elder-Vass' concept of the norm circle therefore has great potential in explaining personal and collective motivation to commemorate. In short, it may provide an answer to the problems posed by Kansteiner (2002) regarding mediation/communication, reception and the understanding that specific social groups have of the past.

Acknowledgement

This research was funded by a Leverhulme Trust Research Fellowship. I gratefully acknowledge this support. I'd also like to thank Michael Billig, Dave Elder-Vass and two anonymous reviewers for their very helpful comments on earlier drafts of this article.

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