

# 'Never again'?

## Helping Year 9 think about what happened after the Holocaust and learning lessons from genocides

'Never again' is the clarion call of much Holocaust and genocide education. There is a danger, however, that it can become an empty, if pious, wish. How can we help pupils reflect seriously on genocide prevention?

Elisabeth Kelleway, Thomas Spillane and Terry Haydn report teaching strategies that focused students' attention on what came after the Holocaust, on events in Rwanda, on warning signs and steps to genocide and on the nature of genocidal language. They encouraged students to apply their learning about the past to the present – in Chechnya – with beneficial effects on student engagement and understanding.

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### Context of the Project

This article emerged from our involvement in the Institute of Education's Beacon Schools in Holocaust Education programme, which works closely with schools to improve the quality of Holocaust education in the UK. Elisabeth Kelleway and Thomas Spillane took on lead roles to develop the project in the school and to extend it to other schools in the Eastern Region. As part of the project Thomas attended a 'Day One' Continuing Professional Development (CPD) training day run by the Institute of Education (IOE) and held in Norwich and then a five day conference at the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in Washington DC in July 2012. The focus of the conference was the Holocaust and the ways in which it can be related to subsequent genocides and crimes against humanity, in order to develop young people's understanding of these issues. Some of the ideas brought back by Thomas were shared with the history department in September 2012. We had decided to adopt the issue of 'Warning Signs of Genocide' as our focus. It was decided to run a whole day In Service Education and Training (INSET) event in January for the history and religious studies departments. At this event all five members of the history department agreed to deliver a lesson to a selected Year 9 class in the Summer Term as part of our involvement in the IOE Beacon Schools programme. The religious studies department planned to deliver its teaching of genocide concurrently.

As part of the INSET, colleagues accessed some of the excellent resources produced by the IOE, which are available to delegates who have undertaken the CPD training. Thomas was also able to share *A Good Man in Hell*, a DVD issued at the Washington conference. The film focuses on an interview with General Roméo Dallaire about his experiences during the genocide in Rwanda, which was used as the basis for our two lessons on 'Warning Signs of Genocide'. Staff undertook individual research for their lessons using the templates provided on the IOE's website. Thomas and Elisabeth worked together to devise two new lessons on 'Warning Signs of Genocide' to complement the resources.

To develop the delivery of Holocaust education at Hellesdon High School, the history department decided to use the school's training room to film all lessons taught as part of this project. Staff evaluated their lessons individually and as a group in feedback at departmental meetings. The recordings were edited and selected activities were analysed at meetings to look for strengths and where tasks should be refined and adapted to meet the needs of students. This 'lesson study' approach to refining practice was in itself an interesting and useful part of the project.<sup>1</sup>

One of the aims of the IOE's programme was for each Beacon School to develop a network of schools. To this end Hellesdon High School hosted a CPD day run by the IOE in July 2013. Colleagues from 10 schools across the Eastern Region attended. This was also an opportunity for the Hellesdon history department to widen our school's involvement in the project to include our drama and geography departments.

Figure 1: Gregory H. Stanton's eight stages of genocide<sup>2</sup>

<b>Stage 1</b>	<b>CLASSIFICATION:</b> All cultures have categories to distinguish people into 'us and them' by ethnicity, race, religion, or nationality.
<b>Stage 2</b>	<b>SYMBOLISATION:</b> We give names or other symbols to the classifications. We name people 'Jews' or 'Gypsies', or distinguish them by colours or dress; and apply the symbols to members of groups.
<b>Stage 3</b>	<b>DEHUMANISATION:</b> One group denies the humanity of the other group. Members of it are equated with animals, vermin, insects or diseases. Dehumanisation overcomes the normal human revulsion against murder.
<b>Stage 4</b>	<b>ORGANISATION:</b> Genocide is always organized, usually by the state, often using militias to provide deniability of state responsibility (e.g. the Janjaweed in Darfur.) Sometimes organization is informal (e.g. Hindu mobs led by local RSS militants) or decentralised (e.g. terrorist groups).
<b>Stage 5</b>	<b>POLARISATION:</b> Extremists drive the groups apart. Hate groups broadcast polarising propaganda. Laws may forbid intermarriage or social interaction. Extremist terrorism targets moderates, intimidating and silencing the centre.
<b>Stage 6</b>	<b>PREPARATION:</b> Victims are identified and separated out because of their ethnic or religious identity. Death lists are drawn up. Members of victim groups are forced to wear identifying symbols. Their property is expropriated. They are often segregated into ghettos, deported into concentration camps, or confined to a famine-struck region and starved.
<b>Stage 7</b>	<b>EXTERMINATION</b> begins, and quickly becomes the mass killing legally called 'genocide.' It is 'extermination' to the killers because they do not believe their victims to be fully human. When it is sponsored by the state, the armed forces often work with militias to do the killing.
<b>Stage 8</b>	<b>DENIAL</b> is the eighth stage that always follows a genocide. It is among the surest indicators of further genocidal massacres. The perpetrators of genocide dig up the mass graves, burn the bodies, try to cover up the evidence and intimidate the witnesses. They deny that they committed any crimes, and often blame what happened on the victims.

The work of the IOE Beacon Schools programme in the UK and the USHMM's work on connecting the Holocaust to other genocides reflects continuing concern to improve the quality and effectiveness of Holocaust education, in part because of evidence to suggest that this is still a problematic issue in history education, and also in view of the challenges presented by the growing distance between the Holocaust and the present.<sup>3</sup> With reference to Holocaust education in Germany, Rathenow has pointed out that:

*The question of how the Holocaust should be taught is asked again and again partly because of its growing distance from the present. Holocaust education is running out of eyewitnesses from the Nazi era. Victims and culprits, helpers and supporters, accomplices and contemporaries are dying out. So, we have no direct link to the past. There is also, unfortunately, a growing emphasis on methods that trivialise the subject matter, such as ticking boxes on clipboards.<sup>4</sup>*

Rose Tremain points to the danger that with history 'people think it's all safely in the past' and as a result 'are dismissive of it, and think it doesn't matter.'<sup>5</sup> It is possible – although, of course, ill-advised – to teach the Holocaust as an unproblematic and straightforward event and, at its worst, it can be reduced to a simplistic narrative in which a wicked

man called Hitler, who lived in Germany a long time ago, built concentration camps where the Jews were rounded up and gassed before he eventually lost the Second World War and killed himself, after which many of those responsible for helping him were brought to trial and punished.

## Never again?

Given constraints on curriculum time, there are hard choices to make in determining what should be covered in teaching the Holocaust and other important events in history.<sup>6</sup> It is not just a question of considering what content to include and what parameters to set in terms of the chronology and time-span of the focus of the lessons. How far (if at all) should we trace antisemitism back before Hitler's access to power, and consider what happened *after* the liberation of the camps and the fall from power of Hitler and the Nazis? There are also the challenges of deciding which questions are worth asking about the Holocaust, and of deciding which learning outcomes to aim to achieve. Our involvement in the USHMM seminar, and the IOE's programme led us to believe that in spite of the pressures on curriculum time, we should try to devote at least some attention to what happened *after* the Holocaust.

The phrase 'Never again,' has become associated with the Holocaust, expressing the fervently held belief of survivors

Figure 2: Barbara Harff's risk indicators for genocide<sup>7</sup>

## A genocide becomes probable in contexts where the following factors are present:

- **prior genocides and politicides:** a dichotomous indicator of whether a genocide or politicide has occurred in the country since 1945;
- **political upheaval:** the magnitude of political upheaval (ethnic and revolutionary wars plus regime crises) in the country during the previous 15 years, excluding the magnitude of prior genocides (in more recent versions of the model, this has been updated to 'degree of state-led discrimination', as being a more significant factor);
- **ethnic character** of the ruling elite: a dichotomous indicator of whether the ruling elite represents a minority communal group, such as the Tigrean-dominated regime of Ethiopia;
- **ideological character of the ruling elite:** a belief system that identifies some overriding purpose or principle that justifies efforts to restrict, persecute, or eliminate certain categories of people;
- **type of regime:** autocratic regimes are more likely to engage in severe repression of oppositional groups;
- degree of **trade openness** (export + imports as % of GDP): openness to trade indicates state and elite willingness to maintain the rule of law and fair practices in the economic sphere. Risks are highest in countries with the lowest openness scores.

that people should know about the Holocaust and know that it was wrong, and that this knowledge should help prevent similar events happening in future.<sup>8</sup> One question which might be asked about the Holocaust is the extent to which the hopes of the survivors have been realised or confounded by subsequent events. We decided to make this question the focus of a two-lesson enquiry.

## Influences on our approach to the lessons

Our work was influenced in part by the work of James Waller, who had delivered two of the sessions at the USHMM seminar.<sup>9</sup> Working in the field of history and social

psychology, Waller argues that of the 'big questions' relating to the Holocaust, and other twentieth-century genocides, 'the most urgent is how ordinary people commit genocide and mass killing.'<sup>10</sup>

Estimating that at least 60 million people have been victims of genocide and mass killing over the past century and citing acts of 'near-complete annihilation' committed against the Herero, the Armenians and the Jews, and mass killings in Indonesia, Burundi, Cambodia, East Timor, Rwanda and the former Yugoslavia, Waller argues that although there may be other obstacles, groups who want to carry out mass killings 'are never hindered by a lack of willing executioners' and that 'this is the one constant on which they can depend.'<sup>11</sup> Waller warns of the complacency and lack of understanding which might result from what he terms 'the mad Nazi' thesis: the idea that the Holocaust was a product of 'a few evil and psychopathic people' (see also Edwards and O' Dowd's report on a UK history class's apparent sense of ease with the 'Hitler was a nutter' school of thought).<sup>12</sup> By deploying survivor testimony from the Rwandan genocide, Waller provides a clear explanation of the ways in which conformity to peer pressure, diffusion of responsibility, and de-individuation of victims helped perpetrators to initiate, sustain and cope with involvement in genocide and mass killing. This leads to the uncomfortable conclusion that 'people tend to do evil because of where they are rather than who they are', with the caveat that among the many people who were in some way involved in genocides were 'some who refused to kill, and some who stopped killing.'<sup>13</sup> Waller's work seemed to offer the opportunity to disturb some of the simplistic assumptions and misconceptions which some students hold about the Holocaust.<sup>14</sup>

Another key influence on our work was our increased awareness of recent international efforts to prevent genocides. The USHMM seminar developed our awareness of recent initiatives in the area of risk assessment and prevention, in relation to genocides and mass killings. These included Gregory Stanton's 'eight stages of genocide' model (Figure 1), and Barbara Harff's risk assessment model for 'genocide and politicide' (Figure 2).

Stanton, president of the organisation 'Genocide Watch', argues that genocides tend to develop in eight stages that are predictable but not inexorable. At each stage, preventive action can avert the escalation towards genocide, although the process is not necessarily linear, 'Logically later stages must be preceded by earlier stages... But all stages continue to operate throughout the process.'<sup>15</sup>

Harff's genocide risk assessment model emerged in response to President Bill Clinton's policy initiative on genocide early warning and prevention launched in 1998. Harff was invited 'to design and carry out a study that would... establish a workable and theoretically sound data-based system for risk assessment and early warning of genocidal violence.'<sup>16</sup> Figure 2 presents a summary of the seven (differentially weighted) factors which Harff claims provide insights into the likelihood of states becoming susceptible to genocide and mass killing.<sup>17</sup>

In light of Stanton and Harff's work, we refined our focus in order to address the extent to which genocides both during

and after the Second World War conformed to their models of ‘warning signs’.

## The lessons

Two lessons which focused on the idea of ‘warning signs’ of genocide were developed and piloted with pupils. The lessons were filmed in the school’s ‘lesson study’ classroom, so that they could subsequently be analysed and evaluated by all members of the department.

Our underlying substantive goal was to help pupils to understand that in spite of the hopes of the survivors of the Holocaust that such things should never happen again, mass killings and crimes against humanity on a major scale did in fact take place after the Holocaust, and that the problem of mass killings and crimes against humanity was not ‘all in the past’, and is, or should be, a current concern.

### Lesson 1, Warning signs: ‘Genocide is a cheese sandwich’

Following the INSET day the department spent some time working on the warning signs of genocide. Elisabeth decided to focus on ‘dangerous words’, in this instance: laundry, cleansing and culture. We wanted to introduce pupils to the idea that the meaning of particular words can assume different significance when used in different contexts, and that the use of language played a part in genocides. As one example of this, in *Becoming Evil*, Waller notes the way that Rwandan radio broadcasts consistently described Tutsis as ‘cockroaches’, in much the same way that Jews were commonly compared to ‘rats’ or ‘vermin’ in Nazi Germany. The title of the lesson was taken from an interview with General Roméo Dallaire featured in the DVD *A Good Man in Hell*. A transcript of part of the interview was provided for pupils (Figure 3), and the pupils watched a section of the interview from the DVD.

‘Genocide is a cheese sandwich’ was on the board when students entered the classroom. This prompted some perplexed comments – as we intended it would.

Next, students were given the words ‘laundry’, ‘cleansing’ and ‘culture’ and asked to write a definition and draw a picture for each. They produced drawings of things like washing machines and facial cleansers. ‘Culture’ proved more difficult for students to define but they thought about art and music and a way of life.

Once the students had fed back their ideas we used images to consider how words can be used with a different purpose in a different context. Starting with ‘laundry’ we focused on the painting ‘Human Laundry, Belsen’ by Doris Zinkeisen (Figure 4). This painting, which is part of the Imperial War Museum’s collection, was painted in 1945 by former society painter Doris Zinkeisen who was a war artist who visited Belsen after it was liberated.<sup>18</sup> We thought about why Zinkeisen gave the painting its title and used a letter written by her at the time to shed more light on her experience.<sup>19</sup> We contrasted the use of the word ‘laundry’ with the students’

Figure 3: Extract from the DVD, *A Good Man in Hell*, and commentary by Jerry Fowler, Director of USHMM’s Committee on Conscience

General Roméo Dallaire:

‘Genocide, genocide, genocide. Cheese sandwich, cheese sandwich, cheese sandwich. Who gives a shit? Crimes against humanity? Where is humanity? Who is humanity? You? Me? Did you see a crime committed against you? Hey, just a million Rwandans.’

‘Did you ever hear about the Genocide Convention?’ (General Roméo Dallaire asks journalist Philip Gourevitch) who says that he has. ‘That convention is good for wrapping a cheese sandwich.’

Later in the DVD, Jerry Fowler, Director of USHMM’s Committee on Conscience, asks: ‘I think the question we all have to ask ourselves is whether we want to live in a world where that man is right or where that man is wrong. Right or wrong?’

original ideas and drawings. We were aware of the possible dangers of ‘shocking’ pupils with upsetting images, but felt that the exploration of language that Zinkeisen’s work made possible offered a way into getting pupils to think of the meaning of some ‘everyday words’ in the context of the Holocaust and subsequent genocides.

In keeping with the overarching aim of getting pupils to think about ‘warning signs’ of genocide, links were then made to the Rwandan genocide and the ways in which language was used to engender hatred for outsider groups, using resources and materials from the USHMM website.<sup>20</sup> We considered ‘cleansing’ and how it was used to such dangerous effect as part of the ‘ethnic cleansing’ in Bosnia. Students studied a sequence of events which took place during the Bosnian crisis and tried to identify when the language used to describe the situation became dangerous.

Finally we looked at ‘culture’ or ‘Kultur’ using a photograph taken by Elisabeth’s grandfather who as a Royal Engineer went to Belsen after it was liberated (Figure 5). The sign featured in the photograph was erected outside the camp and reported that ‘10,000 unburied dead were found here. Another 13,000 have since died. All of them victims of the German New Order in Europe and an example of Nazi Kultur’. This provided a starting point to discuss what Nazi ‘Kultur’ meant and how it compared to the previous ideas of the class. We examined the word in the context of the Holocaust to assess how something which the class had



Figure 4: Doris Zinkeisen, 'Human Laundry', Belsen, 1945, oil on canvas © Imperial War Museum (ART LD 5468)



understood to be about music and art could actually be implicated in mass murder.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, many of the pupils were unaware of the basic events of the Rwandan genocide, although previous lessons had shown that most of them had some prior knowledge of the Holocaust. The last part of the lesson explored their views on why the Rwandan genocide was less well known than the Holocaust, given that it was much more recent.

To draw the lesson together we considered how seemingly innocent words such as 'cleansing' and 'culture' could disguise something much more sinister. Students considered Jerry Fowler's statement (Figure 3) and thought about what could be done to make people care more about genocide than they do about a cheese sandwich. In the context of the phrase 'Never again' there was also some reinforcement of the point that genocides, mass killings and crimes against humanity have occurred since the Nazis' fall from power.

## Lesson Two: Rwanda, Bosnia and Stanton's model of 'stages' of genocide

The lesson started with the students working in groups looking at the Rwandan and Bosnian genocides. Gregory Stanton's idea of 'stages of genocide' was suggested to pupils, to consider in the context of these genocides. For each stage, there were cards for what happened in Rwanda and what happened in Bosnia. The students had to look at both genocides and decide on a title for each stage. The outcome of this was surprisingly close to the language used by Stanton for his descriptors of each stage. As a result of this activity students were beginning to understand that for there to be genocide a country is likely to go through 'stages', rather than genocide emerging suddenly and 'out of nowhere', and questions such as 'Does this mean that we can predict genocide at a really early stage then?' showed that they were starting to engage with the subject content.

Figure 5: A photograph taken outside Belsen by G. Nicholls in 1945



The next activity had four different parts. First, the idea was to compare the Rwandan genocide and the Bosnian genocide and to complete a table based on the eight stages, documenting a summary of what happened at each stage in both genocides. This was to test out their original or developing ideas that genocide follows a certain pattern. Second they were asked to write their thoughts individually about what intervention could happen, what effect they think this would have and at what stage other nations should intervene. This provided some interesting answers which ranged from 'sending the army over to sort them out' to 'send aid and medical supplies to the injured and build a safe haven for those at risk'. The general consensus was that intervention should occur at stage seven, 'extermination'. There were also feelings though that the situation should be monitored from stage four and the perpetrators should be 'educated'. The next task was to read a 'case study' of Chechnya and to fill in a worksheet based on what has happened there that could be considered to go into Stanton's eight stages of genocide model. Finally, the students were asked to give their opinions about what stage they believed Chechnya to be in and whether there was a reason for us to worry. These final two tasks helped to consolidate their knowledge of the stages of genocide, but it also enabled them to demonstrate their understanding and apply it to a different context.

This final part of the lesson had involved revealing the titles that Stanton used, and seeing how close they were

to the students' own models. Then we searched the [www.genocidewatch.org](http://www.genocidewatch.org) website to discover which nations were at risk and what stages they were at. The students were very keen to see if they had assessed the situation in Chechnya properly and displayed a sense of pride that they had used their own ideas and stages to correctly identify Chechnya being at stage five, 'Polarisation'. The class responded that they felt as if they had done some good because they understood more and believed that they could educate others.

The final thing was to explain the homework. The students were asked to devise an art-work, a poem, a sculpture, or a song, in commemoration of the victims of genocide, which would raise awareness of post-Holocaust mass killings and crimes against humanity, which could be displayed digitally in our 'virtual museum' or physically in one of the classrooms or display cupboards. The idea behind this was that students felt empowered as a result of their knowledge and understanding of the Holocaust and other genocides and believed that if they could educate others through their remembrance piece then it would help to reduce apathy and move people to action. The idea of 'agency' – that pupils understand that, to at least some degree, people contribute to the making of history – is something that we felt our students ought to understand. In the context of the 'Never again?' question, we also wanted them to understand that the issue of genocide did not disappear from history with the death of Hitler.



## Conclusions

Of course, it is important that pupils should gain a sound grasp of the main events involved in the Holocaust between 1933 and 1945, but in the same way that tracing back the antecedents of antisemitism before Hitler came to power can avoid the dangers of suggesting simple answers to complex history, so tracing the history of genocide, mass killings and crimes against humanity *after* the Holocaust can help pupils to understand that many of the issues and problems which gave rise to the Holocaust are still relevant to world affairs and social policy today.<sup>21</sup> Salmons warns of the danger of trivialising the Holocaust by using it as a rhetorical device in campaigns ranging from anti-abortion to vegetarianism; but he has also argued that, through careful comparison with other crimes against humanity, the study of the Holocaust may help us to discern warning signs that contribute to education for genocide prevention.<sup>22</sup> Some of the factors which contributed to the escalating persecution of the Jews between 1933 and 1941 – for example, eugenic theory, and the demonisation of ‘outsider groups’ – can be found in contemporary societies. One way of persuading pupils that the questions posed by the Holocaust are relevant to their lives in the twenty-first century is to reflect on whether there are some ‘symptoms’ of contemporary society and culture which indicate that we may be in some respects ‘in stage I’ of Stanton’s classification of the stages to genocide. It would be interesting, for example, to find out how many pupils leave school understanding the phrase, ‘Playing the race card’? As former Secretary of State for Education, Sir Keith Joseph argued, one of the main objectives for the study of history in schools is ‘to enable pupils to gain some understanding of human activity in the past *and its implications for the present*’<sup>23</sup> (our italics). The benefits arising from our involvement in the IOE’s Beacon Schools in Holocaust Education programme have been significant. It has made us reappraise the way we teach the Holocaust and we found the excellent resources produced by IOE extremely helpful and powerful. Students have responded very positively to the activities which we tried out and we feel that it has made them think about the Holocaust and its legacies in a more meaningful way. The materials which enable pupils to study the role of some of the individuals involved in genocides have had a particularly powerful impact.<sup>24</sup> The pedagogical guidance and educational principles provided in the IOE’s materials and INSET were also invaluable.<sup>25</sup> The prospect of working together with a network of schools to develop and refine activities further is an exciting one.

We believe that most history teachers feel a sense of responsibility when they teach the Holocaust: responsibility to their subject, to the gravity of the topic and to the memory of its victims. Our involvement in the USHMM seminar and IOE’s Beacon Schools initiative, and the lessons which we piloted as a result of our participation, have led us to feel that if we fail to convince pupils that some of the questions and issues which gave rise to the Holocaust are questions and issues which are still relevant to ‘the challenges of our times’, and that the Holocaust was not just something that happened about 50 years ago which has nothing much to do with them, then we will have failed to do justice to the Holocaust, and to its victims. Peter Morgan makes the point that although we are far from reaching a professional

consensus on exactly what students should learn from the study of the Holocaust, deepening and broadening our students’ historical engagement with the Holocaust is an aim which would command the support of most history teachers.<sup>26</sup> Getting our students to consider the question of ‘Never again?’ can be one way in which we can do this.

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