
Living memorials

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American Holocaust museums and the mediations of English

In 1946, when David Boder began making the earliest surviving sound recordings of Holocaust testimony, his decision to preserve survivors' original language was not only a pragmatic response to multilingualism. In Boder's (1947: 2) words, 'For psychological as well as historical reasons, it appears of utmost importance that the impressions still alive in the memory of displaced persons in their sufferings [. . .] be recorded directly not only in their own language but in their own voices.' Boder (1949: xiii–xiv) observed that 'language habits show evidence of trauma,' including 'peculiar verbal structure and the discrepancies in time and place,' and in his own translations, Boder decided to use somewhat nonstandard English to demonstrate these linguistic ruptures. Boder's practice reveals a belief that a witness's language does not simply represent experience, but has itself been implicated in – and indeed, a direct witness to – the trauma that it carries.

This belief in the deeply intertwined relationship between language and experience in testimony has likewise informed decades of Holocaust literature and scholarship. For the Romanian-Jewish poet Paul Celan (1958: 395), in order to testify, the German language had to 'pass through the thousand darkneses of deathbringing speech [. . .] and could come to light again, 'enriched' by all this.' Indeed, German was the testimonial language chosen by 43% of David Boder's interviewees, the most of any language. With access to specific 'Nazi-invented euphemisms and camp jargon,' it is well suited to convey Holocaust experiences with descriptive precision (Matthäus, 2009: 57). The second-most frequent language used by Boder's interviewees, at 20%, was Yiddish. As the 'universal Jewish language' and 'the main disseminator of Holocaust memory' in the immediate postwar period, Yiddish held conversations and rage among members of the Jewish community (Roskies & Diamant, 2012: 95).

Another 28% of Boder's interviewees chose other Eastern European languages, the mother tongues of a multinational and multilingual Jewish community; yet it is surprising that 9% used English (Müller, 2014) – no interviewee's mother tongue, and a language that has not 'passed through' the Holocaust in the way that Celan describes. What does it mean, then, that English is now the *lingua franca* of Holocaust studies (Vasvári & Zepetnek, 2009), the language in which the most Holocaust life writing has been written, and the major language in which it is studied and theorized? Here, I will consider this question by way of one domain of English-language Holocaust education: American English-language Holocaust museums (henceforth AEHM). In fact, the United States, despite its geographical distance from the events of the Holocaust, has more Holocaust museums than Israel, Germany, and Poland combined (Cummings, 2015). Since the dedication of the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (USHMM) in 1993, AEHM have assumed a major role in shaping American national memory about the Holocaust. I here extend historical, narrative, and rhetorical analyses



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of the USHMM (Linenthal, 1995; Hasian Jr., 2004; Rosenfeld, 2011) to consider what particular remembrances are preserved in the language used by seventeen other English-language Holocaust Museums and Centers in the United States.¹

While English-language Holocaust testimony assumes authority in its depiction of the Holocaust, we must not forget that the translation into English is a process of mediation. I thus continue Peter Davies' (2018) efforts to make the effects of Holocaust translation visible by placing the museums' representations of the Holocaust in dialogue with English-language Holocaust testimony across two other domains: the courtroom and the literary memoir. In these domains, we can focalize the trends that emerge when Holocaust testimony is translated into English – trends that often likewise appear in the emphases of AEHM. That is, this approach allows us to see how the use of English foregrounds or makes visible certain interpretations of the Holocaust in particular, including a focus on the 'living memorial' as a site that extends into the future, an emphasis on tolerance and 'combatting' apathy or indifference, and the role of testimony as a 'lesson' or educational tool. Ultimately, I contend that these AEHM present a Holocaust that has been mediated in particular ways, and that the particular implications of English mediation threaten to become invisible to us as English continues to dominate Holocaust discourse globally.

English representations of the Holocaust are by now pervasive. In fact, even the word 'holocaust' itself is an English word, tracing back to the Latin *holocaustum*; it was not until the 1950s that 'holocaust' was used to name the mass murder of Jews under the Nazi regime, events that had hitherto been named by the Hebrew word *shoah*, 'catastrophe' (OED, 2018). Since then, the decades-long relationship between Holocaust testimony and English not only frames a particular story about the Holocaust, but also one about English. In *Sounds of Defiance*, Alan Rosen (2005: xi) identifies deep connections between 'the growing amount of writing on the Holocaust in English [and] the increasing prestige of English as a global language.' This article will consider what both English and Holocaust testimony index as a result of this relationship in the context of AEHM. It has long been understood that language inevitably mediates, and that this mediation poses particular representational challenges around catastrophe and trauma; yet I want to extend these theoretical conversations about linguistic representation *per se* to consider one case of representation in its socio-linguistic particularity:

what happens when English, in particular, mediates the Holocaust, in particular. Of course, English is not only an American language; however, I focus here on American museums due to the United States' role as a global locus of Holocaust museums and Holocaust education. In so doing, I also engage and extend established critical discourses around the 'Americanization of the Holocaust' (Rosenfeld, 1995). This term groups a wide-ranging body of scholarship addressing the role of the Holocaust in American culture: how Americans perceive the Holocaust, how – and by what cultural sources – those perceptions are mediated, and how those perceptions relate to American 'national character' (Flanzbaum, 1999: 4). By focusing on the English language's deep entanglement across this mediation process, I thus situate AEHM alongside several other American sites of Holocaust representation from memoirs to memorials.

As I have suggested, English has a historically marginal relationship to the Holocaust, as the language of neither the victims nor the perpetrators. Yet this marginality is not necessarily neutrality; 'As a main language of the Allies,' Rosen (2005: 13) writes, English 'carried a message of defiant hope' and an association with liberation. We must also remember that English was adopted by many Holocaust survivors who emigrated to English-speaking countries, and while English is not the first language of most survivors, it might be for their children. Many AEHM today emphasize local survivor communities (including those in El Paso, Florida, Houston, LA, and Illinois). The Holocaust Museum & Learning Center of St. Louis (2018) avows, 'Survivors remain the heart of the Museum,' and survivors' descendants participate in many English-language museums' life and leadership. Moreover, several of these museums (including El Paso, Illinois, and LA's Simon Wiesenthal Center) were founded in response to postwar Holocaust denial or neo-Nazi activity, in the face of which local Holocaust survivors, 'despite their desire to leave the past behind [...] could no longer remain silent' (Illinois, 2018). As the Rockland Center for Holocaust Studies (2018) explains, 'Intolerance and hatred are as virulent as they have ever been. Antisemitism is rearing its ugly head around the world ... It is more important than ever to have more people understand and learn the lessons of the Holocaust.' Here, English is truly a language in which survivors and later generations negotiate their relationship to the traumatic past as it continues to haunt and threaten the present.

English, then, is an idiom distinctly related to ‘postwar life’ (Pollin–Galay, 2015: 59) in multiple senses: it is the language of the Allies, who arrived at the Holocaust camps at the end of the war; it is the language of many survivors’ descendants and their postwar emigrant contexts; and it is the language in which Holocaust memory is most often brought to bear on contemporary social concerns. I also suggest that English is a language of ‘secondary witness’: it is ‘one step removed from the lived experience being recounted, but nevertheless plays an essential and generative role in its telling’ (Deane–Cox, 2013: 312). Likewise, AEHM remain in some ways distant from the events they remember and carry an embedded focus on post-Holocaust life. Many European memorials are located at the particular places they memorialize, including concentration camps, ghettos, and sites of Jewish resistance. Conversely, AEHM figure themselves as ‘living memorials’ that are most expressly concerned with the future. Their pedagogy often focuses on opportunities for constructive action, such as ‘empowering people to make positive change in the world’ (Florida HM, 2018), teaching ‘the lessons of the Holocaust to inspire action against bigotry, hatred, and violence’ (Southwest Florida, 2018), or ‘Building a Foundation of Hope’ (Dallas, 2018). In contrast to the evidentiary work of primary witness at many European Holocaust sites, in the American English-language context, commemoration becomes secondary; it becomes pedagogy, rather than evidence. As the Florida Holocaust Museum puts it, ‘All of the suffering and loss is meaningless if we do not understand what took place and act to [ensure] that it will never happen again.’ The ‘what’ and ‘it’ that elude definition reveal the representative void into which English-language Holocaust museums speak. In other words, English’s mediations become most visible at the site of the unrepresentable: what did take place and what do we teach, promote, or combat as a result?

This emphasis on pedagogy is inseparable from theorizations of the modern museum in America. In 1992, one year before the dedication of the USHMM, the American Association of Museums’ Task Force on Museum Education published their first major report. Museums, the report (1992: 9) argues, can ‘no longer confine themselves simply to preservation, scholarship, and exhibition’ but must ‘perform the public service of education,’ especially in order to ‘nurture a humane citizenry.’ The Task Force’s recommendations, which influenced the ‘educational turn’ in museums (Hooper–Greenhill, 2007), also clearly inform the mission

statements and pedagogical collaborations at AEHM. Pedagogical uses of Holocaust testimony are visible in all three models of American Holocaust museum that Stephanie Shosh Rotem (2013: 129–30) identifies: a Jewish-American model that ‘links Holocaust commemoration to the reinforcement and empowerment of Jewish identity’; a universal model that ‘teaches the events of the Holocaust in order to ensure a more moral future’; and a national-American model that teaches ‘American democracy as ‘a solution to the return of a second Holocaust.’ All of these museums – excepting El Paso, the only fully bilingual Holocaust museum in the United States – use English as the system of reference for their pedagogical work. Yet the pedagogical work of museums, Eilean Hooper–Greenhill (2007) clarifies, aims not only at information-transmission, but also at processes of signification that produce meanings, values, and self-identities. Moreover, Shandler’s (2017: 106) analysis of the USC Shoah Foundation’s Visual History Archive observes that several Holocaust survivors consciously framed their memories in relation to American English-language reference points when these become envisioned as ‘the language of one’s imagined future audience,’ a system of signification that will give their testimony ‘some future use’ (p. 169). While museum education can occur extralinguistically through objects or experiences, the meanings and identities that AEHM aim to teach are likewise prepared for an American-English context.

The mediating work of the English translator on Holocaust testimony perhaps began in the courtroom. The Nuremberg trials, a series of international tribunals that prosecuted several Nazi leaders, required a team of interpreters to simultaneously translate not only between the accused and the courts, but also ‘for the benefit of the press and the general audience’ (Bowen & Bowen, 1985: 74). All trial participants wore headphones connected to four possible language channels: Hebrew, English, French, and German. Yet while practically necessary, the trial revealed the fraught status of translated testimony. In the words of British journalist Rebecca West, ‘there was not a person in court who did not understand the literal meaning of every word that was said. Yet there was this welter of misunderstanding, this frustration, this incapacity to demonstrate the Rule of Law anything like as clearly had been hoped’ (Bowen & Bowen, 1985: 76). The trial translators’ early negotiation of a demand for both authenticity and accuracy, as well as meaningful legibility among a globally diverse audience, immediately

foregrounds an important tension in Holocaust translation studies. As Davies (2017: 24) argues, Holocaust studies has often placed ‘value on the voice of the victim above all other possible factors, that often thinks of translation in terms of loss and distance,’ while translation studies ‘understands translation as taking place within a network of influences, constraints and obligations towards many different parties,’ drawing attention to the translated work’s difference rather than its inferiority. Despite its claim to authenticity, the translated autobiographical – and, perhaps, testimonial – ‘I’ is ‘uprooted and recreated in view of the target culture and readership’ (Winters, 2017: 73) – a different text for a different audience, a different context, and perhaps a different purpose.

Fifteen years after Nuremberg, the Eichmann trial was similarly multilingual; Eichmann and his lawyer spoke German, court proceedings were in Hebrew, witnesses testified in a number of languages, and everything was translated for the media (Morris, 1998: 1). Hannah Arendt’s infamous reporting on the trial also helped to establish English as ‘a universal language for addressing the Holocaust’ (Morris, 1998: 96), while the ‘American television viewer was constantly confronted with universal moral pronouncements, for U.S. commentators had no other way to interpret the trial’ (Levy & Sznajder, 2006: 109). The aforementioned pedagogical and moral emphasis of AEHM thus makes an early appearance, as museums similarly work to make the Holocaust legible to their English-speaking audience, and rely on familiar sociolinguistic paradigms to do so. As Arendt knew, the proceedings of the trial are ‘hostage to the language in which they are reported,’ through which they are inevitably mediated (Rosen, 2005: 97). 30 years after the Eichmann trial, ‘an authoritative English version of the entire trial was published, completely retranslated from the original languages’ (Morris, 1998: 5). What happened, then, when English was selected as the shared system of reference?

Ruth Morris (1998: 5) reads this choice as pragmatic; it ‘acknowledges the pivotal international role of [English] in the late 20th century’ to make the material available to the widest possible audience. As a global *lingua franca*, English opens communicative possibilities to broadly disseminate Holocaust testimony and research. Davies (2018: 39, 56) likewise emphasizes that translation is ‘a condition for the knowledge about the Holocaust,’ making it ‘comprehensible’ to readers who did not experience it; in this view, ‘Translators into English are doing important ethical work in

passing on knowledge of the past to future generations.’ Since 1945, English has also ‘dominated the discourse of the most trivial mass media and the most respectable academic institutions’ to the extent that ‘views and arguments must be disseminated in English if they are going to attract public attention and stimulate further discussion’ (Kuhiwczak, 2007: 62). Yet in the words of Eric J. Sundquist (2007: 67), if English made the Holocaust ‘witnessable’ to American and global audiences, ‘it still remains an open question what we have been enabled to witness.’ That is, English mediation is not necessarily a bad thing. Yet just as ‘the impact of [the translator’s] agency on the retelling and perpetuation of the original act of witnessing has [often] gone uncharted’ (Deane-Cox, 2013: 311), so too has the impact of English. We might also consider the impact of English analogously to Young’s (1988: 91) analysis of the impact of metaphor, which structurally both leads away from and analogizes an event: ‘to leave Auschwitz outside of metaphor would be to leave it outside of language altogether [. . .] thereby mystifying the Holocaust and accomplishing after the fact precisely what the Nazis had hoped to accomplish.’ And yet, the specific metaphors – and languages – that are chosen do have consequences.

As in the translation of the Eichmann trial, AEHM today ‘invite the collaboration of the community in acts of remembrance. To the extent that the myths or ideals embodied in a nation’s monuments are the people’s own, they are given substance and weight by such reification and will appear natural and true’ (Young, 1988: 198). The consistent emphasis on education across AEHM, then, often frames ‘the lessons of the Holocaust’ in the context of American English’s relationship to its events, and liberty, tolerance, and morally-conscious intervention thus become central to its ostensible meaning for today. Such museums ‘teach the history of the Holocaust in order to combat prejudice and intolerance through education, community outreach, and cultural activities’ (El Paso, 2018). The permanent exhibit at the Dallas Holocaust Education Center (2018), for instance, emphasizes the virtues of Holocaust resistance: it ‘gives visitors a view of the Holocaust by focusing on’ three incidents of wartime heroism that took place over ‘one day during the Holocaust – April 19, 1943,’ and ‘show that the decision to do the right thing – to stand up against the forces of brutality, hatred, and evil – can be made under the worst conditions.’ Likewise, the Michigan Holocaust Memorial Center (2018) chooses

'highlighting and disseminating knowledge of the acts of the righteous and their constructive consequences' to 'enlarge the legion of the righteous' and encourage visitors 'towards constructive social consciousness' (Michigan, 2018). The focus of many AEHM on resisting hatred or indifference thus resonates with English's role as a 'third language'; linguistically, we are cast outside of the victim-and-perpetrator relationship to that of a 'neutral' third-party witness who must choose how to respond.

The implications of this approach extend beyond the museum or the courtroom, and relate to the controversial assertion that Holocaust collective memory has been 'Americanized' by American cultural production, which both made the Holocaust 'available to a distant American audience and, over time, universaliz[ed] its message' (Sundquist, 2007: 66). Pollin-Galay (2015: 90) observes a similar phenomenon in her analysis of two American testimonial archives, wherein she argues that more than Yiddish testimonies, those in English 'foreground questions about the global accessibility of memory, psychic well-being, and truthful self-presentation.' This also appears in the genre of the Holocaust memoir, many of which are most well known in English translation. In his discussion of Primo Levi's memoir – given the Italian title *Se questo è un uomo* (*If This Is a Man*) and the American title *Survival in Auschwitz* – Peter Arnds (2012: 163–174) views English editions positively; he writes that 'Translation implies survival' and 'may reveal dimensions of the original that would remain dormant, buried, if the original were not translated.' Yet we might also consider what ability has been bestowed on English to penetrate these silences. Indeed, Davies (2008: 24) observes that unlike the German translation of Tadeusz Borowski's memoir, the English translation often elides difference to stress universality. At the same time, the English edition's paratexts dismiss the text's literary elements and stress their testimonial authenticity.

A similar appeal to authenticity is made by the English-language paratexts of Elie Wiesel's *Night*, although the English edition differs considerably from Wiesel's first testimonial account written in Yiddish (Wyatt, 2006). *Night* was first published in 1956 as 'the 117th volume in a series of Yiddish memoirs' (Franklin, 2006). The later, and much shorter, French edition *La nuit* is clearly influenced by French existentialism, as the book's emphasis shifts 'from the silence of the world at the Jews' fate to the abstract "night"' (Franklin, 2006). Here, Naomi Seidman (1996: 1)

has famously argued that 'There are two survivors' in *Night*, Yiddish and French, and that the accusatory Jewish survivor is 'supplanted by the survivor haunted by metaphysics and silence.' What remains unsayable, she writes, 'is not what cannot be spoken but what cannot be spoken in French.' These insights carry over into the English edition, the universalizing aesthetics of which closely follow the French version's abstraction. The English language's simultaneous presumption of authenticity and universality, it seems, perpetuates the fantasy 'that English can know and master everything, even the Holocaust' (Rosen, 2005: 174).

Likewise, despite its distance from the events it portrays, AEHM often advertise a direct or 'authentic' experience that elides its own abstracting mediation. Language of experiential authenticity proliferates throughout the museum sites I examined. Rockland Center for Holocaust Studies (2018) is committed to 'educate, examine and explore the lessons of the Holocaust with authenticity, dignity and compassion.' The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center (2018) calls visitors to 'Take history to heart,' which they can now do through the groundbreaking 'interactive, holographic Survivor Stories Experience.' Elsewhere, they claim that visitors 'can experience pre-war European life, ghettos and concentration camps, liberation and resettlement around the world through more than 500 artifacts, documents, photographs, and a German rail car.' The exhibit's signifying objects are here substituted as a kind of direct experience – in a similar way, I argue, that the English signifier elides its own limitations to convey a kind of direct access to, or even ownership of, the events of the Holocaust. This illusion of English's access can be dangerous, as it conceals the distortion, distance, or abstraction of English mediation. Consider, for instance, the Holocaust Museum Houston's (2018) perturbing note that 'The Museum is proud to display a 1942 World War II railcar of the type used to carry millions of Jews to their deaths.' Here, the mythic neutrality of English signification likewise encodes a 'neutral' Holocaust that is truly a de-historicized, abstracted Holocaust. As a result, historical specificity becomes a tool for meaning-making that pursues explanations not only for the Holocaust, but also for American democracy.

The English-language testimony, it seems, 'speaks to us in existential and moral terms, and only secondarily in historical or political ones' – just as Mark Anderson (2007: 3) argues that the

‘child victim’ does, a figure foregrounded in American Holocaust representations from *Night to Schindler’s List* to *The Diary of Anne Frank*. Anne Frank’s *Diary* in particular plays a prominent role in international Holocaust education, sometimes in surprising or even unsettling ways. De Vooght (2017: 115) observes that ‘Translation has played an important role in making Anne Frank the icon of the Holocaust around the world,’ as the play adaptation ‘emphasized features that hugely varied audiences could relate to.’ Yet it does so through an unambiguous ‘message of hope, innocence and belief in the goodness of people’ that, despite its ability to be ‘made applicable to many different contexts,’ in effect ‘obscured the desolation of Holocaust survivors in the Netherlands’ (De Vooght, 2017: 115). Where translation universalizes, it allows a work to be taken up and re-politicized in its new context. For instance, Wilson (2013: 29) writes that the *Diary* is used in North Korea as ‘an allegory to paint [the Americans] as Hitler and the North Koreans as the Jews.’ She relates this potential to David Damrosch’s (2013: 201) argument that world literature can be used ‘in all sorts of ways: as a positive model for the future development of its own tradition; as a negative case of a primitive, or decadent, strand that must be avoided or rooted out at home; or, more neutrally, as an image of radical otherness against which the home tradition can more clearly be defined.’ In the United States, for instance, ‘Anne Frank has become an American icon of optimistic thinking and individual triumph’ (Spector & Jones, 2007: 36). With these three patterns in mind, then, we might ask how else we ‘use’ Holocaust testimonies in English, or impose our own cultural readings that are difficult for us to separate from the text.

Indeed, AEHM are perhaps most clearly influenced by the audience for whom they make the Holocaust legible when the Holocaust becomes a ‘tool’ for citizens’ self-knowledge – and in precisely these terms: ‘Using the lessons of the Holocaust as a tool,’ writes the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida (2018), ‘the Center teaches the principles of good citizenship.’ Holocaust Museum Houston (2018) also emphasizes citizenship, using Holocaust education to affirm ‘an individual’s responsibility for the collective actions of society’ and promote ‘responsible individual behavior, cultivating civility.’ Several AEHM also offer legal or law enforcement education programs ‘to investigate the role German police played during the Holocaust and examine the role of law

enforcement in a democracy today’ (Florida HM, 2018), or for ‘exploring the meaning and importance of democracy and law enforcement through the lens of the Holocaust’ (Illinois, 2018). Houston (2018) annually awards a Lyndon B Johnson Moral Courage Award – in 2018, awarded to President George W. Bush, who ‘provided leadership and moral courage to keep Americans safe after the horrific September 11 attacks.’

In each of these cases, as Wilson points out about world literature, the English-language Holocaust becomes a tool of American self-knowledge, operating on the belief that ‘preserving the past helps us protect the future and that a moral and just community grows from understanding the watershed events of human history’ (Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida, 2018). Indeed, in its response to the question ‘Why teach the Holocaust?’ Holocaust Museum Houston (2018) writes that Holocaust education helps students to ‘make essential connections between history and the contemporary moral choices they confront’ – particularly, the knowledge that ‘Abolishing the civil rights of one group can lead to the abolition of those rights for all, so each person must take a stand against evil or eventually risk forfeiting all individual freedom.’ Here, the audience of English speakers is figured as neither the group of victims whose rights have been abolished, nor the ‘evil’ perpetrators, but rather as responsive citizens who must protect the individual freedoms of American democratic life, in relation to which the Holocaust is inexorably understood in English, and to which the lessons of the Holocaust reveal a possible threat. Indeed, Holocaust education in America is mandatory, and Holocaust memorialization is prominent at sites of national identity formation, including D.C.’s National Mall – home to the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum – and Boston’s Freedom Trail – where a Holocaust memorial demonstrates the horrifying antithesis to the freedom America celebrates.

English Holocaust testimony’s universalizing impulse to extend Holocaust ‘lessons’ toward international humanitarian intervention also relates to the affiliation between many AEHM and research on contemporary genocide, and even ‘prejudice’ and ‘bullying.’ Here, we might also consider English’s complicity in contemporary humanitarian work, positioned simultaneously as a useful *lingua franca* and a colonial threat. Buergenthal argues that contemporary international human rights law and criminal law today are the joint legacy of ‘the Holocaust and of US

humanitarian policies' (2004: 20). English holds considerable power in global governance (Baker, 2015: 248), and in the 'emerging international norm' of the 'Responsibility to Protect' doctrine, which is primarily concerned with 'bringing perpetrators of mass atrocities to justice' (Ziegler, 2016: 262). While prominent African statesmen were 'instrumental' in promoting the concept, its 'most ardent advocates [...] tend to be from the major English-speaking liberal democracies' (Ziegler, 2016: 262). Humanitarianism features prominently in many Holocaust museums. For instance, The Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect's (2018) name is chosen to reflect the 'humanitarian spirit of Anne's words and her legacy,' and the Dallas Holocaust Education Center (2018) is also currently fundraising for new museum space, with 'expanded educational and cultural programing' and a new name: 'The Dallas Holocaust and Human Rights Museum.'

The English-language discipline of Holocaust studies may thus participate in giving momentum to claims for English's neutrality and for its unique abilities to do humanitarian work. Invoked here is English's universalizing impulse towards the universal, the general, which covertly carries with it particular conditions for the international norm. The implications of this *lingua franca*, which extends its reach and elides difference all at once, for human rights dialogue can be seen in the Rockland Center for Holocaust Studies' (2018) museum plan:

We can achieve enhanced relevance and impact by interpreting the Holocaust as a human story.

Victims, bystanders, perpetrators and rescuers were all human beings. The new exhibit and associated museum programs will raise ethical questions, praise rescuers as models of behavior and help people find sources of strength, hope, resilience, identity and renewal. We will view the Holocaust as more than just a historical event. By exploring the parallel experiences of other ethnic, racial and religious groups it enables us to broadcast a universal message of understanding and mutual respect for all peoples and to embrace and celebrate each other's diversity.

We might notice a stark difference between this universalized humanistic approach of AEHM, and the approach in 'countries of perpetrators and victims,' where Pingel (2014: 82) argues 'the inter-relatedness of the Holocaust and the respective national narrative has often posed the most crucial issue.' Without historically and culturally

particular resources to focalize the Holocaust in relation to its audience, the English-language humanistic lessons emphasize individual moral character rather than ideology or cultural and political systems.

In some ways, we might regard English translation as a form of bridge-building, wherein its usefulness as a *lingua franca* allows important opportunities for ongoing or future life – here, of Holocaust testimony. Not only does it provide a venue for survivors and their descendants to continue to be heard by large and diverse audiences, but it also continues to consider the ongoing legacy of the Holocaust by drawing historical and contemporary connections to 'continued manifestations of prejudice and discrimination' (Anne Frank Center, 2018). Likewise, the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center's (2018) bridge-building efforts connect 'the lessons of the Holocaust with other genocides around the world' – many of which occurred in entirely different linguistic and cultural contexts from the Holocaust. The mediating work of English, in other words, allows for new dialogues to be staged and thus new insights to be developed. AEHM will often include other instances of genocide, racism, or prejudice; the Education Center of Florida (2018) features a civil rights exhibit, the Florida Holocaust Museum (2018) has an upcoming exhibit on Japanese-American incarceration, and the Holocaust Museum and Learning Center in St. Louis (2018) has 'added exhibits about more recent hate-fueled tragedies, including genocide in Rwanda, murders by a self-proclaimed white supremacist in Kansas City and aggression towards members of the LGBTQ community.'

Some AEHM do focus primarily on Jewish history, including the Holocaust Center of Jewish Family and Children's Services (2018) and the Museum of Jewish Heritage: New York (2018). The latter's mission statement of 'educating diverse visitors about Jewish life before, during, and after the Holocaust' and using testimony 'to illuminate Jewish history and experience' may actually facilitate, in Norma Rosen's (1992: 51) words, a form not of universalizing through English, but of 'Judaizing' it. She writes, 'Universalism implies a weakening of the specific Jewish experience by broadening it to include what all people experience of suffering. If a novel' – or, we might here say, a museum – says 'that the Holocaust experience is so intense that it radiates out to affect non-Jews who then experience it through the imagination, then that is not universalizing, not a generalizing, a spreading and thinning-out of the Jewish trauma,

it is the opposite: a bringing of the non-Jew into Jewish experience.’ One way to imagine this possibility for the English-language Holocaust museum can be seen in the Museum of Jewish Heritage: New York’s (2018) relational self-positioning: ‘Across the water, Lady Liberty lifts her lamp and Ellis Island marks the gateway through which millions flowed into this country seeking refuge. The Museum’s meaningful location inspires its mission.’ Here, the museum sees itself with a particular role – its exhibits are quite expressly focused on the contextual Holocaust and ongoing anti-Semitism – that gains extended meanings as an inevitable result of its American context.

Yet the inverse of what Norma Rosen suggests is also possible, and the English-language museum – like English translation, as we saw in the case of the literary memoir – can also be universalizing in the sense of emptying the events of their particularity. That is, if AEHM become too loosely universal, they can effectively lose sight of singularity; if everything is focalized, nothing is. Universality is promised in the humanitarian context of the Anne Frank Center (2018), which offers ‘a universal message that spans geographic and political borders,’ or the Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center (2018) which ‘teach[es] universal lessons that combat hatred, prejudice and indifference.’ It is true, as the Holocaust and Intolerance Museum of New Mexico (2018) writes, that ‘[t]hroughout history, people have been victimized due to race, color, religion, gender, national origin, ethnicity, social status, political ideology, sexual orientation, or mental or physical infirmities,’ and that this is not limited to one particular context. Yet it has also proven true, as Young mused in 1988, that ‘[g]iven American egalitarian ideals,’ an American Holocaust museum may not be able to resist becoming ‘a generic museum of all holocausts’ (188–9). Yet the danger of English universalizing is starkest when inclusion becomes a form of equalizing that loses nuance and scale, as is risked at the Holocaust and Intolerance Museum of New Mexico (2018) which states its purpose as to ‘teach about other genocides and forms of bullying that have affected people around the world. We are not limited to one religion, culture, geographic area, or time.’ Likewise, several Holocaust museums run successful anti-bullying programs – in itself an important social service. Yet Rosenfeld (2011: 35) warns about the ‘consequences of adopting a language of extremity as an expressive code for more or less everyday experience,’ a kind of linguistic ‘appropriation’ that renders real historical suffering ‘little more than

rhetorical gestures.’ Accordingly, we might question the leveling of the ‘lessons of the Holocaust’ to anti-bullying pedagogy, such as when the Holocaust Memorial Resource and Education Center of Florida (2018) writes of its UpStanders bullying prevention program: ‘students witness bullying through stories of Holocaust Rescuers.’

In early 2018, a comprehensive national study of Holocaust knowledge and awareness in the United States found that while 80% of US adults agree that ‘it is important to keep teaching about the Holocaust so it does not happen again’ (Claims, 2018: 6), only 24% say that ‘Lessons about the Holocaust are completely historically accurate,’ with a majority (52%) saying lessons ‘could be better.’ Indeed, this is borne out in the survey results: 45% of U.S. adults could not name even one concentration camp or ghetto, and a full 11% (22% of Millennials) ‘haven’t heard or are not sure if they have heard of the Holocaust’ (Claims, 2018: 2–3). Where Holocaust education is equated with the humanitarian ‘lessons’ that appear through its English-language mediation, the particularities of remembrance fade from view. As I have sought to demonstrate, English mediation across domains of Holocaust testimony threatens to universalize the Holocaust in terms that are legible to English-language audiences, who are themselves figured as neutral third parties to be primed through education for humanitarian work and the protection of American democratic freedoms. Where the bridge-building possibilities of English as a global *lingua franca* can, in fact, open up possibilities for constructive dialogue and meaningful social action, English-speaking agents also run the risk of colonizing the Holocaust narrative as a tool for their own purposes and self-making. We cannot assume that English signification reaches and understands the Holocaust and its ‘meaning’; rather, we must be attentive to the way that it inevitably mediates the Holocaust, lest we occlude its historical realities in the name of learning from them.

Note

1 Based on the list of US Holocaust museums and centers maintained by the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum (DC), these are: The Anne Frank Center for Mutual Respect (NY); The Holocaust Memorial Resource & Education Center of Florida (FL); The Dallas Holocaust Museum Center for Education and Intolerance (TX); The El Paso Holocaust Museum and Study Center (TX); The Florida Holocaust Museum (FL); The Holocaust & Intolerance Museum of New Mexico (NM), The

Holocaust Memorial Center: Zekelman Family Campus (MI); The Holocaust Museum & Education Center of Southwest Florida (FL); The Holocaust Museum Houston (TX); The Illinois Holocaust Museum & Education Center (IL); The Jewish Family and Children's Services Holocaust Center (CA); The Holocaust Museum & Learning Center (MO); Los Angeles Museum of the Holocaust (CA); The Museum of Jewish Heritage (NY); The Holocaust Museum & Center for Tolerance and Education (NY); The Simon Wiesenthal Center and Museum of Tolerance (CA); and The Virginia Holocaust Museum (VA). Throughout this article, I will quote from representative examples, but my argument has been derived from an analysis of the mission statements, descriptions, and programming found across all seventeen museums' websites.

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