

CHAPTER 8

Commemoration and Controversy: Remembering Air Raids and Their Victims Since 1945

Introduction

Most wars in history have led the victors and the vanquished to create memorials to those who were slain in the course of battle. The terrible casualty rates of the First World War gave rise to nationwide projects to remember those who would not grow old. In Britain, the most famous of the memorials is the Cenotaph in Whitehall, London. Those who died during the Second World War fighting for their country were added to the First World War memorials in the cities, towns and villages where they had once lived. As Amy Helen Bell argues, however, the First World War cast long shadows over the interwar period. The promise of a land fit for heroes was tarnished by economic decline, unemployment and increasing

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inequality. Mixed emotions over the Armistice Day commemorations, the tragedy of so many lost lives during the 'war to end all wars' and fear of another war during the later 1930s, meant that memorialisation was never a singular and shared national experience.³⁹¹

Yet the twentieth century marked a decisive shift in commemoration. The First World War produced other commemorative emblems, not to those who died in service, but to civilians and cities hit by air raids. It is rare to see a building named after the device that destroyed the previous building on the site, but along the Farringdon Road in East London the Zeppelin Building proudly announces itself to passers-by (See Fig 1). A hundred years later, on the anniversary of the Zeppelin raids, the London Borough of Hackney placed a brown plaque on the wall of a house in Alkham Road, the site of one of the first bombs to be dropped on London during the First World War.³⁹² All across London, and many other British cities, plaques mark the place where a bomb or an incendiary device caused death and destruction. They are modest, localised sites of memory, or *lieux de memoire*.

Historians of commemoration have drawn a significant distinction between official and 'top down' commemoration events and structures, and those from the 'bottom up', initiated by the social agency of people and groups who are not in government. Across the world many state-led or local-government sponsored memorial fixtures exist to the war dead, and many others reflect the actions of local people, associations of bomb survivors, and non-governmental organisation such as charities, religious initiatives, pacifist groups and veterans organisations. In some important cases, however, both official and public initiatives fused together, hence the distinction between top-down versus social agency approaches can sometimes be misleading.

Memories of war are not confined to those who lived through or endured conflict. As Geoff Eley and Penny Summerfield have

argued, 'remembering' the Second World War does not require direct lived experience of it.³⁹³ Those who were born soon after the war, and who grew up during the 1950s and 1960s were socialised into images of the war and a sense of victory by many triumphalist war films. For those born later still, a significant range of sites, spatial, textual and visual, encourage vicarious experiences of the air raids. As Lucy Noakes and Juliette Pattinson have argued, British cultural memory has been strongly influenced by the victory of 1945.

German cultural memory, by contrast, has been troubled by the Allied bombings. In her study of the Dresden bombings of February 1945, Anne Fuchs focuses upon the 'carriers of memory' of the 'impact narrative' of the bombing of Dresden, namely photography, ruins, fine art, architecture, fiction and film.³⁹⁴ Each of these textual or visual genres may be viewed as presenting Dresden as the most important *lieu de memoire* of German suffering in the Second World War. These sources also remind us that the Second World War was a very visual war, more so than previous major conflicts due to the new popularity of film and photography.

Fuchs' arguments are certainly applicable beyond Dresden. She argues that 'the Holocaust, the bombing of Warsaw, Dresden, Hiroshima and Nagasaki:'

the Vietnam War, and recently perhaps the Iraq War, are signature events that underline the destructive potential of a modernity that divorced technological progress from ethical reflection.³⁹⁵

Some refinements are required to this argument. Comparing the botched and tragic attempt to liberate Iraq from a Ba'athist neo-fascist dictatorship as a 'signature event' alongside the industrialised murder of 6 million Jewish people is fraught with difficult

issues. And as previous chapters have shown, the reactions of Churchill to the Dresden bombing, and of the American pilots who dropped the atomic bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, were not devoid of ethical reflection. Yet Fuchs is broadly correct in her view that bombings on other major cities have carried impact narratives. They acknowledge and recall the impact of air raids mostly as urban phenomena with global significance.

Urban Sites of Commemoration in Post-war Britain

Within the context of fixed war memorials in towns and cities, the remembrance of the air war on Britain has been a largely pragmatic affair, mostly relying upon agencies such as interest groups, local activists and charities for their provenance and construction. In 2010 the journalist Peter Watts asked why London, the city that sustained the longest continuing bombing raids in Europe, had no powerful and meaningful memorial to its Blitz victims.³⁹⁶ The absence of a significant site of active commemoration of the London Blitz was denied to those who have lived through it, and denied a context for subsequent generations to activate historical empathy and imagination. Some years later it is still the case. Within the precincts of St Paul's Cathedral a diminutive circular monument fails to project the scale of the bombing of London, and does little to commemorate the victims of the Blitz and their suffering. The modestly-sized Cenotaph in Whitehall, the memorial to the dead of the First World War, is proof that well-designed memorials do not have to be on a large scale, but a more significant statement commemorating civilian endurance and suffering during the Blitz would make a powerful contribution to the sites of memory in the capital city.

The piecemeal nature of commemoration of air raids in Britain is evident in the random plaques or interpretation boards which adorn the sides of homes and buildings where bombs, or V1 and V2 rockets struck. Yet East London, the first and most heavily battered area of the London Blitz, has been proactive in calling for memorials to those who suffered the air raids. Popular literature has recognised the devastation wrought on East London, and the experiences of women during the Blitz are at the heart of the stories. Sally Worboyces' novel *Over Bethnal Green* (2000) deals with the experiences of a young mother in the East End during the Blitz, while Dee Williams in *Love and War* (2004) explores a young woman and her family's endurance of the Blitz in Rotherhithe in the London Docklands. Worboyces grew up in the East End, and Williams was herself a young girl during wartime London, so the novels contain autobiographical elements. In July 2008 the Hermitage Riverside Memorial Gardens were opened in the Docklands by the Culture Secretary of the Labour government, Hazel Blears. Those in attendance included a local survivor of the bombings and an ex fire warden. Designed by the architect Wendy Taylor CBE, the memorial in the gardens depicts a dove of peace within a marble rectangle set on a stone plinth.³⁹⁷ Hence both the popular novel and sculpture present East London as a site of memory of wartime air raids.

A modest tribute on the ground in the precincts of St Paul's Cathedral is the memorial to Londoners who lost their lives during the Second World War, and to the many thousands of others in the capital city who endured the conflict. It was paid for by the public following an appeal by the *Evening Standard*. The words around the memorial state 'Remember Before God the People of London, 1939-1945' while the spiral inscription on the top states

‘In war resolution, in defeat defiance, in victory magnanimity, in peace goodwill.’ These words were used by Winston Churchill in his preface to his history of the Second World War.³⁹⁸ Dedicated on 1 January 1999, it is rather underwhelming. (See Fig 4)

The heroism of the fire fighters and other members of the emergency services was the subject of some powerful documentary films made during the Second World War, as noted in chapter



Figure 7: National Firefighter's Memorial, St. Paul's Cathedral London (photograph by author, 2017).

three. Just south of the St Paul's Cathedral stands the National Firefighters Memorial, a superior statement to the one in the grounds of St Paul's itself. Commissioned by the Firefighters Memorial Charitable Trust, and opened by the Queen Mother in May 1991, it depicts the kind of action poses seen in documentary war films such as Humphrey Jennings *Fires Were Started* (1943). The monument also lists the names of those killed in the service of their country, as they fought to protect others in London from the conflagrations that engulfed so many buildings and streets. The memorial also hosts the praise from Churchill to the firefighters as 'Heroes with grimy faces', a term revealing the influence of American cinema on British popular culture during the 1930s. The arms pointing towards the cathedral also reference its miraculous survival.³⁹⁹

Situated close to St Paul's Cathedral, it is respectful, heroic, yet unboastful, a significantly better memorial than the floor-bound disk to those killed and injured by the London Blitz. St. Paul's Cathedral is therefore commemorated in both film and by the memorials within and just beyond its precincts. This is one of the most significant sites of memory to the dead of wartime London, and particularly to those killed during the Blitz on the capital city.⁴⁰⁰

Close to the Cenotaph in Whitehall is the Monument to the Women of World War II. Unveiled by Queen Elizabeth II in July 2005, just two days after the London bombings, it was a long overdue statement to the contribution of women not only in military uniform but as civil defenders. Its history again highlights the pragmatic culture of commemoration in Britain: it was the product of voluntary lobbying and fund raising by the Memorial to the Women of World War II charitable trust, and it gained support from the National Memorial Heritage Fund. Dame Vera

Lynn, a popular wartime singer, was among many famous women who supported the memorial, including notably Baroness Betty Boothroyd, the patron of the trust. At the unveiling, Boothroyd dedicated the memorial to ‘all the women who served our country and to the cause of freedom, in uniform and on the home front.’⁴⁰¹ This was an important moment and monument recognising the role of women in wartime, a mostly male-dominated arena of commemoration. Many other memorials to the bravery and sacrifice of people in wartime can be found in London on the website londonremembers.com.

Beyond London, the National Memorial Arboretum in Staffordshire hosts the Civil Defence Memorial Grove, which recognises



Figure 8: Monument to the Women of World War Two. (Photograph Jane Rix / Shutterstock.com).

the sacrifice and work of Civil Defence workers in the Second World War. It also holds a memorial to animals who helped defend Britain.⁴⁰² Across provincial Britain, cities and towns host fixed memorials to the dead of air raids. There are too many to detail here but in Clydebanks for example, the memorial contains the names of the 528 people who were killed by the Luftwaffe on 13–14 March 1941. Commissioned by West Dumbartonshire Council, and designed by a local artist, the memorial was unveiled in 2009, and powerfully creates a sense of lost lives among a living city.⁴⁰³

Art: Representations and Remembering

Leading artists were commissioned by governments during the Second World War to paint images of the Home Front. Others painted spontaneously in the wake of air attacks. Art is both a representation of the air raids and their impact, as well as reinforcing cities and places as *lieux de memoire*. *Guernica* (1937) by Pablo Picasso is one of his finest and possibly his most famous painting. In London, for example, there are many fine paintings on air raids and their aftermath in the Imperial War Museum, while the City of Westminster Archives in Victoria also contains artwork on the London Blitz, including an amateur depiction of St Paul's Cathedral, one of many paintings of the cathedral completed during the war. Many online websites host representations of air raids, for example, *Premonitions of the Blitz, 1940* by Julian Trevelyan and John Piper's *Interior of Coventry Cathedral* following air raid damage are particularly haunting images.⁴⁰⁴ Many local history museums hold amateur paintings of cities during and after air raids. They may not have the impact of Picasso but they are carriers of imagery of the air raids and depict landscapes forever altered by air raids.

Ruins and *lieux de memoire*

Places of worship destroyed by air raids, and left in preserved ruins, are also spaces of contemplation and of memories. Many churches in London and the City of London were laid waste during the Second World War. Not far from the Fire Service Memorial are the ruins of Christchurch Greyfriars Church, for example. The ruins of this place of worship, designed by Sir Christopher Wren, were left by the City of London Corporation and the Church of England as a visual reminder of the Blitz on the City of London. They are beautifully preserved, as the once covered interior is now open to the elements, and hosts an attractive garden.⁴⁰⁵ Although many people eat their lunch there, it is also a place of quiet contemplation about the nature of war.

The shell of the medieval Coventry Cathedral is also an important religious site of commemoration, and this took on global significance when Coventry was twinned with Dresden in 1959. This is discussed further below. These memorials and sites of memory also form some of the places of interest in the guided Blitz walks that are now popular tourist events in London, introducing thousands of people to the palimpsests of bombsites, and to the types of buildings that were built on them during the reconstruction era, or since. Field walks are another carrier of memories, providing informed retrospective impressions of air raids; a number of books and websites are dedicated to them.⁴⁰⁶

Film, Television and Memories of the Blitz

Contemporary documentary films made during the Second World War provide powerful and often moving images of ordinary people and of emergency service workers battling against the air

raids. Among the most famous are the films directed by Humphrey Jennings, one of the leading pioneers of the British documentary film movement between the wars. It was Jennings who directed *London (Britain) Can Take It* at the height of the Blitz in 1940, discussed in chapter three. *Listen to Britain* (1942) is a depiction of life on the Home Front, set to music, while *Fires were Started* (1943) sensitively presented the quiet heroism and the stoicism of the AFS during the worst nights of the air raids. These were not filmed *in situ*, but used 'real people' as opposed to actors to stage realistic enactments of the work of the AFS. Jennings also made the end-of-war film *A Diary for Timothy* (1944–5) which looked forward to the democratic future that would emerge from the horrors of war. To the present-day viewer, wartime documentaries, alongside wartime newsreels, provide vivid, if censored, scenes from everyday life. The British Film Institute (BFI) and the Imperial War Museum (IWM) host many films about the Blitz and other air raids.

Not to be confused with contemporary documentaries are historical documentaries. Providing a rich vein of information and interpretations of air raids and their consequences historical documentaries are a synthesis, a combination, of both secondary interpretations and primary sources. Some are specifically about air raids, others view air raids within the wider context of war. Among the best historical documentaries is the award-winning television series *The World at War*, first broadcast in 1974, and available as a box set. Made for Thames Television, a British commercial channel which broadcast on the ITV network, *The World at War* drew upon interviews and oral testimonies, wartime newsreels, propaganda, documentary films, military films and recordings, photographs, and images of newspaper front pages to accompany the narration by the classical actor Sir Laurence

Olivier. A total of twenty-six episodes were overseen by historical adviser Noble Frankland and written by leading historians such as Neal Ascherson, Courtney Browne, David Elstein and David Wheeler. The Blitz on British cities, the Nazi Blitzkrieg across Europe, the Allied bombing campaign against Germany and the War in the Pacific, culminating in the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, are given balanced treatments, tending not towards pure objectivity or neutrality but a multi-angled narrative from the perspectives of the combatants as well as innocent victims. For example, in the episodes on air raids over Britain and Germany, interviews are held with combatants and civilians from both sides.⁴⁰⁷ The series is therefore also very useful in putting the British Blitz into comparative international context.

On the fiftieth anniversary of the ending of the Second World War, the BBC ran a series of mock news reports on the events of the war, reminding viewers of the differences in tone then and now. While encouraging a powerful sense of nostalgia for those who were alive at the time, for younger viewers it 'placed us inside the grand narrative' of the People's War, of a country that had once been fought alone, endured the air raids and other wartime hardships and battles, and ultimately triumphed over the Nazis.⁴⁰⁸

A further television series, broadly within a historical documentary tradition, was the BBC series *Blitz Cities* (2005). Remembering the air raids and the victims of Birmingham, Cardiff, Liverpool, London and Cardiff, each episode was hosted by a celebrity from the city, and included images and films of the bombings, alongside interviews with people who lived through them. The inclusion of famous people was a clever device to encourage people to watch and share in the experiences of seventy-five years ago. That the Blitz remained a popular subject with both audiences and programme makers was further evidenced in the fine BBC

series *Blitz: The Bombs that Changed Britain* (2017). Drawing upon oral testimonies, contemporary footage and photographs, the series showed the impact that one bomb or raid could have on individuals, families and communities.⁴⁰⁹

Cinema and television fiction features have also dealt with the impact and legacy of air raids. Earlier post-war films that include images of air raids or their aftermath include the 1955 film *The End of the Affair*, in which an illicit love affair is conducted against the austere background of wartime London. Almost fifteen years after its deadly arrival in London the V2 rocket made a post-war appearance in the BBC science fiction series *Quatermass and the Pit*, written by the acclaimed screenwriter and science fiction author Nigel Kneale, and broadcast live to an awestruck television audience in 1958–9. The story was also made into a movie by Hammer Film Productions during the Sixties. As foundations for an extension to a London Underground station were being dug, construction workers unearthed an alien rocket which the government and military officials claimed was an unexploded German V2, but which was really an ancient Martian spaceship. There is a kind of inverted echo in *Quatermass* of the misleading denials about the existence of the V2 issued by the wartime government. During the war, the V2 was seen by some politicians as too menacing for public awareness; now it was a useful foil to cover up the terrible truth about latent Martian menace lurking beneath the streets of London. The concluding scene in which the devil appears over London might have reminded many Londoners of the first appearance of the Luftwaffe.⁴¹⁰

In the BBC television series, *Goodnight Sweetheart*, broadcast from 1993–9, which of course coincided with the fiftieth anniversary of 1945, the Home Front in wartime London was imaginatively recreated within the context of a time-travelling

TV repairman who repeatedly enters wartime London through a time portal. His life is one of infidelity to his late-twentieth-century wife and his wartime spouse, the main humorous theme of the series. But *Goodnight Sweetheart* also gently mocks figures of authority in the police service and the ARP, while depicting the humour but also tensions, irritations and privations of the Home Front. Nonetheless, the sense of nostalgia in *Goodnight Sweetheart* is palpable. Rather than invalidating it, the series can be a useful source for social historians in any comprehensive interpretation of the Blitz. Nostalgia is a powerful emotion. As people age, they often feel they have lost something, while many possess a more nuanced and realistic understanding of the past than Calder gives them credit for. It also cleverly creates and depicts the atmosphere of the Home Front with its plot juxtapositions of 'then' and 'now'.

Chapter three drew attention to *Hope and Glory* (1987), a film about childhood during the Blitz. So too was *The Evacuees*, (1975) a television film for the BBC's *Play for Today* series. Written by Jack Rosenthal, it sensitively deals with the experiences of two Jewish boys evacuated from Manchester during the Blitz. Both *Goodnight Sweetheart* and *The Evacuees* also shows how television drama is a carrier of imagined memory.

Among the least obvious yet most evocative representations of the Blitz are drawn and animated images of the air raids and their effects. The air raids on wartime London make a tantalising appearance in Walt Disney's *Peter Pan 2: Return to Never Land*, a children's animation based on the boy hero of J.M. Barry, when Peter and Wendy are hiding in an air raid shelter. Some of the most emotionally moving depictions, however, are literally drawn from the experiences of the artists themselves. The English artist Raymond Briggs has produced a beautiful autobiographical graphic novel of the lives of his parents, and his childhood, which includes a poign-

ant segment on the Home Front. First published in 1998, *Ethel and Ernest* depicts the evacuation of young Raymond from London to the county of Dorset. It evokes the atmosphere in Britain as war is declared, the voluntarism and good humour of ARP wardens such as his father, the impact of bombs on the terraced houses, the searchlights and the bombers, Anderson shelters, the irritations of rationing, the spectre of the doodlebugs, VE Day celebrations, and the election of the Labour Party to government in 1945.⁴¹¹ In 2016, the BBC and the BFI released *Ethel and Ernest* as an animated film, demonstrating many similarities with the original, but also a couple of subtle but revealing differences that can creep into stories as they transition from one textual format to another. For example, unlike the graphic novel, the opening frames of the film depict a bi-plane flying over London in 1928, an echo of the air-mindedness of the interwar years discussed in chapter two, and a harbinger of the prominence of air raids in the story to come.

Ethel and Ernest also references the momentous events in Japan in August 1945: 'ATOMIC BOMB...HIROSHIMA...100,000 DEAD...' blares the radio. 'Hundred thousand dead from one bomb', repeats Ernest in awe, while Ethel exclaims that 'at least it will put paid to wars'.⁴¹² Briggs also drew and wrote *When the Wind Blows*, a powerful graphic novel about atomic destruction. Made into a film released in 1986, it depicts a nuclear attack on a typical English town.⁴¹³

Air Raid Photography: Creating Images for Memorialisation

Contemporary photographs of air raids, of survivors, victims and of the landscape during and after bombings, were a conscious act of enabling memorialisation during or immediately after the attacks

themselves. During the Blitz on London, the *Picture Post* photographer Bert Hardy captured many black and white images of East Enders. Hardy recorded the images for 'East End at War'. In common with the work of documentary film makers, he took photographs of everyday life: of the AFS battling against walls of flames; of working-class people living in their bombed-out streets or sleeping in the tube stations platforms at night; of shop-workers carrying on despite the bomb damage, and of ARP wardens and local clergymen comforting children. This was documentary photography of the highest order.⁴¹⁴ Any memories or imaginary recreations of the London Blitz would be lacking without sight of such images.

Hardy was aware that he and his newspaper were creating a visual record of the air raids, and of the bravery of civilians, ARP volunteers and fire fighters. His photographs are well-known, but less so are the personal experiences which he endured to take them. He accompanied a fireman into the cellar of a burning warehouse, when the roof collapsed, leading to a frantic struggle to escape. 'I must have gone onto the roof of one of the buildings to get pictures of firemen fighting the fire from the tops of ladders', he recalled, 'but I can't remember anything about it.' In common with the British documentary film movement, Hardy's photographic realism was motivated by the bravery and dignity of 'ordinary' people, and of their resilience in adverse circumstances.⁴¹⁵ An impressive collection of photographic images of the Blitz are held at the Imperial War Museum.

Memoirs, Autobiographies and Oral Testimonies as Carriers of Memory

Remembering exists beyond the built environment, and beyond ceremony and symbolism. Memoirs, autobiographies and oral

testimonies enable us to gain insights into the sensory and emotional experiences of air raids. Drawing upon a wide range of wartime and post-war memoirs for London, Amy Helen Bell draws attention to the predominant subjective characteristics of memory among those who survived the air Blitz. Emphasising the predominance of a British sense of *sangfroid*, a subjectivity of 'taking it' always with a good dose of humour or stoicism, Bell argues that 'the memory of the Blitz:'

helped to create a retrospective vision of civilian collectivity. In this vision, the fortitude of Londoners during the bombing raids assured them of victory, and a new post-war social contract. The British war victory, and subsequent Labour election victory in 1945, consolidated this hindsight vision.⁴¹⁶

Bell does not seek to deflate the achievement of Londoners and of the British more widely in withstanding aerial bombardment. She is more concerned with the nuances of memory, arguing that the traces of fear and loathing, anger at politicians, and grief at the loss of home and family, were also important parts of the story.

Oral testimonies also record eyewitness accounts of air raids, not only from the point of view of those attacked, but also of military personnel. These are some of the carriers of memory of the Blitz and other air raids. There are however both particular problems as well as distinctive advantages when using autobiographies and oral testimonies in historical accounts of air raids. Because memory can be flawed, or selective, oral histories can never be relied upon solely as an accurate or verifiable version of events. Statements need to be checked, contextualised and integrated within a wider apparatus of sources.

Students and anyone wishing to interview people with a living memory of the past can create their own oral histories. Some

useful guides to undertaking oral history and memory work can be found in Rob Perks and Alastair Thomson's (eds) *The Oral History Reader* (2016). Testimonies of such traumatic events as air raids possesses immense value to the student of modern warfare in general, and of the experiences of civilians in violently disrupted circumstances in particular. Such testimonies are not only gained through interviews conducted by historians and respondents. Invitations to write letters to newspaper or magazines, or the use of autobiography, all count as oral history.

The oral historian Joshua Levine, for example, has collected many testimonies, and drew upon autobiographies and memoirs, of those who lived through the Blitz, and most of the best social histories of wartime Britain include oral testimony for the vivid and often emotional manner in which people relate their experiences, experiences which since 1945 have only really been visited again on London by terrorist bombings. Many of the gobbets of testimony in *Forgotten Voices of the Blitz and the Battle for Britain* (2007) or *The Secret History of the Blitz* (2015) are about bereavement, the killing of friends and family, the loss of home and neighbourhood, illicit sexual relations, sweeping away rubble, disposing of the dead, and tending to the wounded. The pain of disrupted lives, the sense of loss, spontaneous pleasures, and the senselessness of many wartime horrors, are still felt many years after the bombings were over. Two important and accessible collections of Second World War testimonies in Britain are held online by the BBC on the People's War website, the subject of some interesting insights by Noakes, while the British Library Sound Archive is available online in addition to further materials in the collection at the British Library site on the Euston Road in London.⁴¹⁷

So the picture was by no means one of uncritical triumphalism when looking back on the air raids. Nonetheless, victory for the

British powerfully influenced the national culture of memory as a shared celebration resonant with varying degrees of celebration. British post-war attitudes to Germany have in turn been powerfully influenced by that.⁴¹⁸ International football matches, notably the World Cup Final of 1966, held in London, became occasions to remember and re-fight the Second World War. Moreover, images of the Germans as militaristic and humourless have pervaded post-war British popular culture.⁴¹⁹ As Summerfield argues, however, different generations, while encouraged to 'remember' the Second World War, often respond in complex ways to predominant wartime narratives.⁴²⁰

But things were different for the citizens of occupied European countries. Their wartime experience was involved with collaboration, genocide, heroic or tragic resistance, and everyday interactions with the enemy. British celebration may be sharply contrasted with the defeated people of Germany, who endured post-war expulsions, mass rape and looting, and the 'occupation' by American, British and Soviet forces. The significance of violent anti-Semitism and of the Holocaust, furthermore, infused German memory with the crimes of participation, and the turpitudes of casual racism or wilful indifference to the plight of Jews. Bell points to the highly-charged *Historikerstreit* in Germany during the 1980s, when leading German historians interrogated the role of the Holocaust in national history and memory.⁴²¹ At one end of the argument, historians argued that the Holocaust was not the fault of most Germans then, and certainly not of younger Germans since. Strangely, in a book about the Blitz, Bell avoids mention of the air raids on German and other European cities within her analysis of their cultures of memory. Since the 1980s, however, German historians and many other commentators have increasingly focused upon the aerial bombardment of German

cities in order to disrupt notions of German guilt. The most blatant interpretations even implicate the Allies in a 'holocaust' against the German people, wherein memories can be recast within the context of German victimhood and suffering.

Commemoration and Remembering Air Raids in Germany

Acts of commemoration and remembrance in Germany have a controversial and contested history. In West Germany, for much of the 1950s, 1960s and 1970s, the defeat in 1945 was reinterpreted as liberation, while the German post-1945 'economic miracle' brought about an increasingly affluent and comfortable society. As we saw in chapter six, reconstruction led to a significant modernisation of the blasted and burned-out areas of German cities. While the memories of the terrible air raids lived on, much of the mnemonic landscape of destruction and despair was concreted over. The legacy of National Socialism and its ignominious defeat also haunted many who had participated in Nazi Germany and its war. In combination these points explain why the memorialisation of the Allied air raids remained problematic.

Following the end of the Second World War, the Cold War divided commemoration as it divided so many other aspects of German life. The Federal Republic of Germany (FRG) adopted an official version that the Nazi regime had caused the war, and a certain level of penitence was required for German actions during the conflict. Communist East Germany, by contrast, the home of Dresden and other heavily bombed cities, framed the devastating air raids of February 1945 as acts of American imperialism, supported by the lickspittle British, who now existed in a state of confrontation with the German Democratic Republic (GDR).

Commemorative insistence on the Anglo-American bombings as a war crime also served the communist regime's presentation of the Soviets as liberators in 1945.⁴²²

A study of 'the Allied war and urban memory' compared the politics of memory in Kassel in West Germany with Magdeburg in the communist zone of occupation. Kassel had been heavily bombed in October 1943 while Magdeburg was attacked in January 1945, a month before the Dresden bombings. Both cities experienced what Jörg Arnold has termed 'catastrophic rupture' of both the landscape but also in the subjective memories of the citizens whose life stories were harshly interrupted by aerial bombardment. As Arnold makes clear, however, these air raids were not experienced in a moral vacuum beloved of revisionist interpretations but 'by members of a brutalised society, whose hegemonic voice was Nazism, the very force that had been responsible for the unleashing of a world conflagration in the first place.'⁴²³ The spectre of 'World Jewry' was blamed for the bombing as opposed to the honest, chivalrous Aryan victims of global treachery, and almost immediately tropes of a much-beloved 'home town' wrecked by the British and Americans arose amongst the corpses and ruins that pervaded the town.⁴²⁴

In Kassel, following the war, the *Gedentag* or 'day of memory' of 22 October was mostly decontextualized and depoliticised by local political and religious leaders. During the 1950s and much of the 1960s they preferred to present the bombings in terms of Christian forgiveness and reciprocity across borders. In Magdeburg, by contrast, as in Dresden, the communist elites used the anniversaries of the air raids to mobilise sentiment not only against Nazism, but increasingly against the Anglo-American imperialist enemies of the Cold War.⁴²⁵

Comparing the commemorations in Hamburg in pre-unification West Germany and Dresden in East Germany, Claudia Jerzak draws out the different groups and actors that sought to commemorate the suffering and destruction wrought by the allies. These included the governments of West and East Germany, civic associations, and the church.⁴²⁶ In Dresden, the allied bombing was utilised by the communist regime to demonise the Americans as 'imperialist war-mongers' during the Cold War.⁴²⁷ The 'Florence of the Elbe' was viewed by its citizens and many other Germans as an 'innocent city' undeserving of attack, while Hamburg was presented as an open port city long associated with international trade and a liberal political culture. A strong reluctance after the war to acknowledge the approval of National Socialism there during the 1930s permeated early post-war Hamburg.⁴²⁸ Yet in Hamburg the culture of commemoration from the late twentieth century increasingly recognised German complicity in aerial warfare, and also sought to be more inclusive towards minority citizens, particularly Jewish groups who had suffered terribly from the mid-1930s to 1945.⁴²⁹ This may also partly reflect the wider tendency of the West German state to avoid nationalistic memorials to the Second World War after 1945.⁴³⁰

The reunification of Germany in 1990, however, began to erode the East-West distinction in the national memory of air raids. More tellingly, literary works encouraged German anger about hostile air raids in the Second World War, notably *Air Raids and Culture* (1999) by the German-born academic and writer W.G. Sebald, later translated into English as *The Natural History of Destruction*. He was heavily critical of what he saw as the collective amnesia of both the German post-war liberal establishment for their failure to acknowledge the Allied bombings.⁴³¹ During the late 1990s

Sebald also gave a series of public lectures on the same theme, while the left-leaning novelist Günter Grass also deplored the scale and tragedy of the Allied bombings.⁴³² The German cultural historian Annette Seidel Arpaci has made some withering criticisms of Sebald, arguing that he contributed to the dubious concept of the *Bombenholocaust* which gained currency in neo-Nazi and far-right circles in Germany, and with many members of the German public.⁴³³ Sebald wilfully drew upon Holocaust tropes, claiming the Allies were responsible for 'German suffering' which was on a scale compatible with the atrocities committed by the Nazis. Yet his key arguments about a complicit silence within the German elites were erroneous, while the extent of consent from millions of Germans to the Nazi war was under-explored. And in choosing to deploy such terms as 'war of annihilation' and 'cultural invasion' by Americanisation, Sebald was drawing upon familiar rhetorical phrases used by the Nazis against their enemies. His 'universalised notion of trauma', moreover, failed to properly weigh the anti-Semitism in wartime Germany and its terrible consequences.⁴³⁴ The South African social scientist Leo Kuper also argued that the deliberate bombing of the population of Dresden and in other large cities by incendiaries held equivalence with genocide and was an undeniable war crime.⁴³⁵

Equating German suffering caused by air raids with the Holocaust was not a new idea, however. During the 1980s the American historian Earl R. Beck clumsily argued that the Allies 'achieved holocaust' in heavily bombed German cities.⁴³⁶ Beck was writing on the eve of the *Historikerstreit*, the dispute between German historians over the nature and legacy of the Nazi regime in German history, and the place of the Holocaust in the remembrance of the past, and in contemporary German identity. Liberation

from a sense of shame and guilt was a key theme of the debates, leading to a striking media and public debate in West German society over the extent to which late twentieth-century Germany should accept or challenge an apologetic view of history. The *Historikerstreit* was less concerned with the Allied and German bombing campaigns, but it was sharply indicative of the shifting cultural attitudes towards the years 1933–45 in German history, and a growing aspiration towards a less black-and-white interpretation of the recent past.

The controversy over commemoration resonated beyond academic and literary spheres. In 2002 the publication of *The Fire* (*Der Brand*) by the anti-establishment writer Jörg Friedrich fanned the flames of public anger about the mass bombings of 1943–5. Friedrich blamed the Allies for hundreds of thousands of unnecessary deaths and injuries. Serialised by a leading German tabloid, *The Fire* was calculated to stir the emotions, for example lambasting Winston Churchill as ‘the greatest child-slaughterer of all time. He slaughtered 76,000 children.’⁴³⁷ Friedrich’s follow-up offering *Fire Sites* contained gruesome photographs of charred and skeletal bodies in the charnel houses left by area bombing.⁴³⁸ Such visuals were deployed explicitly to evoke anger at the Allied bombing and pity for German victims. As Bill Niven has argued, *The Fire* also ‘represented a radicalisation of GDR anti-Western rhetoric’, contributing to the growing notion in post-1990 Germany that the bombings were a war crime.⁴³⁹

Such sympathetic attempts to reevaluate the historical commemoration of air raids over Germany in the Second World War led to some predictable responses in Britain and the USA. The left-leaning *Guardian* newspaper carried a couple of articles in the wake

of the controversy engendered by the publication of *The Fire* and *Fire Sites* that gave a qualified admission of British and American war crimes. An article in *The Guardian* by the writer Ian Buruma sided with Friedrich claiming 'London in the Blitz was dreadful; Hamburg was worse.'⁴⁴⁰

Similar perspectives were adopted by many German socialists and communists. As Schmitz has further argued, the Left student movement in late twentieth-century and early twenty-first century Germany accepted the view that their grandparents were victims both of Nazism and of Allied atrocities. This 'belated empathy' enabled the German student generations since the 1970s to emphasise victimisation, a seductive and indulgent position that fails to acknowledge wider issues such as complicity.⁴⁴¹ Endurance of mass bombing and the devastation to people and places has furthermore become woven into a narratives that interpret Germany and Germans during the 1940s as a historically mistreated people, bombed blasted and burnt not into democracy but into the genocidal atrocities of mass expulsions and homelessness, and the widespread rape and looting witnessed at the end of the war and in its aftermath.⁴⁴² Both Arnold and Tony Joel agree that the post-1968 student movement in West Germany and Western Europe more widely increasingly influenced the politics of memory culture away from culpability and condemnation of Nazism towards Allied conduct during the war.⁴⁴³

Yet this revisionist tendency struck a powerful chord with the German public. Many increasingly articulated long-held feelings of anger towards the Allied bombing campaigns. Viewing the cumulative consequences of the air raids as a holocaust enabled Germans, even those with a dubious war record themselves, to adopt the pose of victimhood. This leads to the danger that

privileging German suffering may obscure the verifiable causes of the war, and soften the lens when looking back on German genocidal and military atrocities during the Second World War. It also enabled Germans to challenge the notion of collective guilt for the war. As the Israeli historian Gilad Margalit shows, different stages of psychological coping with guilt and bereavement can be identified in both East and West Germany, and in the unified Reich, following the fall of the Berlin Wall. Today, he argues, Germany has difficulty coming to terms with its guilt as a consequence of the growing popularity of cultural sentiments of suffering and victimisation.⁴⁴⁴ Margalit deplores the way in which German victims of air raids are depicted 'in ways borrowed from the Jewish narrative of the Holocaust' and the allocation of similar moral responsibility for war crimes to all political elites, despite their politics and global intentions.⁴⁴⁵ He argues the discourse of German suffering and victimhood was transmitted from one generation to the next, becoming part of German national identity during the early twenty-first century. This may have influenced the recent growth of anti-Americanism and of anti-Semitism in Germany.⁴⁴⁶ Linde Apel is also suspicious of German victimhood, arguing that a key driver of its subjectivity is a desire to exonerate 'ordinary' Germans from the Holocaust and other atrocities.⁴⁴⁷

Friedrich, Sebald and others shared views disseminated by the far-right National People's Party (NPD) in Germany, and neo-Nazi fringe groups. They tried to turn the allied air raids into a 'bombing holocaust', a cynical manoeuvre to 'depict the Germans as hapless victims.'⁴⁴⁸ Leaving wreathes on the graves and memorials of the dead, and making their mostly unwelcome presence felt at commemoration ceremonies, NPD interventions have

inadvertently served to undermine German claims to victimhood and unnecessary persecution. Such interpretations have been fodder for more extreme positions on commemoration. There is also a rather shadowy web presence by a right-wing German outfit calling themselves *justice4germans.com*. One of their offerings on YouTube depicts the bombing of Dresden explicitly as an unnecessary and disproportionate attack, while failing to highlight the German air campaigns against Britain and other European countries. The Nazi Party, who brought the war upon Germany, is not mentioned.

German television also took up the theme of Allied bombing and its legacy for the Fatherland, reaffirming the media as visual and diverse channels for stirring up emotions. In 2006 the German television channel ZDF broadcast an ‘authentic, emotional and moving’ two-part television-movie drama entitled *Dresden*.⁴⁴⁹ Influenced by Friedrich’s *The Fire*, it was hugely popular in Germany. The plot pursued an unlikely romantic affair between a downed British pilot and a German nurse. As Dietmar Süß argues, ‘the British-German history of the air war carries the baggage of cultural memory in both countries’, and he views *Dresden* partly as an attempt at reconciliation between former enemies still conscious of wartime air raids.⁴⁵⁰ While an attempt to show that love could cross the most terrible of divides, the television drama reiterated themes in *The Fire*:

While the movie painstakingly tries to avoid any simplistic reversal of moral positions and attempts to represent *all* perspectives from a point of empathy – German, British and Jewish – it ultimately relies on a distinction between ‘ordinary’ Germans and ‘evil’ Nazis that is redolent of the 1950s. [This] is facilitated by the narrow fo-

cus of the first two hours of the film on the love story between Anna, a nurse working in her father's hospital, and Robert, a British bomber pilot who hides in the hospital cellar after his plane is shot down. The final 40 minutes of high-production-value destruction, horror, suffering and mayhem caused by the bombing is thus visited upon a series of individuals, witnessed mainly through the eyes of the two main characters. This creates a sense of visual immediacy that decontextualizes the suffering, reducing it to a pure spectacle of horror.⁴⁵¹

The horror of air raids, of course, was experienced no matter which country was suffering them, which may be why *Dresden* decontextualized the Allied bombings. The shared experience of bombing became the basis of reconciliation amongst former enemies.

Reconciliation and Commemoration Since the Second World War

In 1992 Queen Elizabeth, the Queen Mother, unveiled a fairly modest statue of Sir Arthur Harris outside the RAF Church of St Clement Danes in Central London. It was commissioned by the Bomber Command Association (BCA) in recognition of his achievements and the bravery and sacrifice of those who served under him. As Joel wryly observes, St Clement Danes still bears the scars of damage from wartime air skirmishes.⁴⁵² The intention of the BCA had been to commemorate the RAF, rather than glorify the death and destruction wrought upon Germany. But protestors who saw the bombing of Dresden as a war crime gathered to disrupt the proceedings, to the extent the Queen Mother was struggling to be heard (See Fig 6).⁴⁵³

In October of the same year, 1992, Queen Elizabeth II and her husband Prince Philip, the Duke of Edinburgh, paid the first state visit to newly unified Germany, attending a reconciliation service in the *Kreuzkirche* in Dresden. The Mayor of Dresden Herbert Wagner campaigned against the statue in 1992, arguing it had no place in the Europe of the 1990s, and that the bombing of Dresden had been militarily unjustifiable.⁴⁵⁴ Three years later, during an event commemorating the sixtieth anniversary of the Allied bombing of Kassel, a heckler called out to the British ambassador, 'Ambassador, when are you going to pull down the statue to Bomber Harris'? He then went on to shout about the absence of any permanent fixture to the memory of Herman Goering.⁴⁵⁵ Unlike the fascist leader Goering, however, Harris was fighting for democracy. Nonetheless, the event at Kassel was one of many episodes in the 'media tumult' that surrounded the statue to Bomber Harris.⁴⁵⁶ The protests, and also the notion of Germans as victims, attracted international attention. *The New York Times*, for example, viewed Dresden as symbolic of unjustifiable mass destruction.⁴⁵⁷ Surviving members of Bomber Command who had bravely flown over Germany, including Dresden, were upset at what they perceived as a lack of appreciation for the risks they and their dead comrades had taken.⁴⁵⁸

Yet attitudes began to soften. In June 2012 the memorial to Bomber Command was unveiled by Queen Elizabeth. This was another long overdue recognition of the bravery and sacrifice demonstrated by the aircrew who flew night raids over Germany during the Second World War. Surviving members of Bomber Command and relatives of those who were killed celebrated the memorial, and although there was some concern in Germany at the memorial, an acceptance that Britain deserved to honour its war dead prevailed, indicating further reconciliation between



Figure 9: The Bomber Command Memorial, Green Park London. In addition to the 55573 air crew killed, the memorial also commemorates ‘those of all nations who lost their lives in the bombing of 1939–1945’. Hence it reflects the globalisation of memorialisation (photograph by author, 2018).

former enemies. It received less condemnation than the statue to Arthur Harris.⁴⁵⁹

During the war, even as beautiful old churches were reduced to ruins by air raids, many British Christian leaders had expressed

concerns about the Allied bombing of German cities. Once the war was over, Christian principles of forgiveness and reconciliation would surface sooner or later, to greater or lesser degrees, in Britain and across Europe. Religion was thus a driver of reconciliation. The ruins of the *Frauenkirche* in Dresden served a strongly similar purpose to the shell of the old cathedral in Coventry. And in 1959 Coventry was twinned with Dresden. During the 1960s, Christians in both Coventry and Dresden worked for reconciliation between Britain and Germany. Young Germans helped to build an International Centre for Reconciliation in the ruins of the old cathedral in Coventry, while young British believers assisted with repairs to the *Frauenkirche*.⁴⁶⁰ Local and national governments in the GDR however increasingly positioned the bombing of Dresden as one of many acts of American imperialist aggression that led to the Cold War. Every 13 February, 'the day of remembrance or commemoration' was an occasion not simply to remember and mourn the 25,000 victims of the Dresden bombing, but to stage demonstrations against the West. Every tenth anniversary was particularly charged with passion and anger towards the Allied bombings as an expression of hatred toward capitalism, but as Joel shows, the first post-Cold War day of memory in 1995, when Germany was no longer divided, posed hugely significant questions for national identity. The process of accommodating different political positions within Germany towards the Allied bombings while inviting once adversarial opponents to the commemorations was fraught with potential problems.

In 1995, on the fiftieth anniversary of the ending of the Second World War, a service of Thanksgiving, Reconciliation and Hope was held at St Paul's Cathedral, a symbolic act that came with commemorative memorabilia such as postal stamps depicting the cathedral surrounded by anti-aircraft searchlights.⁴⁶¹ Both

St Paul's and Coventry cathedrals are Anglican places of worship, one razed to the ground by bombing, the other miraculously surviving. Despite the impossibility of knowing God's will in the outcome of the war, the increasingly liberal establishment within the Church of England would come to suggest moral equivalence between British and Nazi complicity in air warfare. In 2009 the Bishop of Coventry, the Right Reverend David Cocksworth, apologised for the bombing of Dresden in February 1945. Speaking at the newly rebuilt *Frauenkirche*, he deplored the violence visited upon both Coventry and Dresden, praised the two cities for their forgiveness, and looked forward to a future of hope and cooperation, and of course, peace.⁴⁶² A further act of reconciliation and commemoration, modest yet moving, is the dedication by Frederick Taylor of his book on the bombing of Coventry to his dear departed friend, a teenage survivor of the 1945 raids on Dresden.⁴⁶³

In a passage that neatly links German memories of air raids to those in Japan, Joel argues that Dresden became 'a highly visible memory politics asset' for international peace campaigners. Its destruction served 'as a warning and an obligation to pursue and promote world peace' and to prevent an atomic 'Euroshima'.⁴⁶⁴

Memorialisation and Commemoration in Japan

A complex welter of emotions, dominated by anger, grief and the physical and mental wounds from the atomic bombings emerged to dominate memorialisation of the air raids in post-war Japan. Yet tendencies for cultural self-condemnation and guilt were moderated by cultural and political pressures.⁴⁶⁵

The attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki created consecutive phases of the grieving process for the many thousands who were

directly bereaved and deprived of their homes. The initial post-war response to the attacks was rage, enabling the Japanese to view themselves as the victims of a terrible war deed. The humiliation of resounding defeat led to widespread revulsion towards the bombings but that anger had to be tortuously negotiated with the prevalence of denial about atrocities committed by Japanese forces against unarmed civilians and uniformed combatants.⁴⁶⁶ Hence places of commemoration, beautifully designed, and accompanied by thoughtful interpretation and information, where reflection can be situated within a human response rather than one conditioned by nationalistic attributions of blame, can be such places to come to terms with the horror of aerial warfare. The Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park (HMPP) is the most famous site of memory in Japan. And together, Hiroshima and Nagasaki are the most powerful *lieux de memoire* in the world.

The visitor to the city of Hiroshima today cannot really avoid the reminders of those terrible events in August 1945. The Industrial Promotional Hall, which was situated beneath the hypocentre of the Atom Bomb, is now a poignantly preserved ruin labelled the 'Peace Dome'. A number of plaques mark the places where civilians were incinerated. The Peace Dome is an essential but by no means the only symbolic and experiential space, connected as it is to the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park in 1955. The opening of the HMPP on the tenth anniversary of the atomic bombings was an official or 'top-down' project. Designed by the leading Japanese architect Kenzo Tange, 'it was a simple concept':

The centrepiece was a long pavilion raised on Corbusian pilotis and set across the axis which connected the Memorial Monument, a saddle-like structure based on the Haniwa funerary house of the 3rd to 6th century AD, with the torn and melted Gembaku, or Atomic Dome.⁴⁶⁷



Figure 10: Peace Dome, Hiroshima (Photograph, Shutterstock.com).

The Pavilion was a fusion of both modern architecture with influences from Le Corbusier, and traditional motifs drawn from Japanese culture.⁴⁶⁸ In a sense it encapsulates the modern-traditionalist tension in many other reconstruction projects, yet resolves them, unlike many other major undertakings. The HMPP has been the major national and international focus of remembrance of the victims of atomic bombing in Japan, drawing hundreds of thousands of visitors every year.

Yet the emotional experience intended by interpretation boards, and the information and images offered at the Peace Park, has increasingly been questioned. It may sound strange to argue that a beautiful and moving memorial to those killed and affected by nuclear bombing and its aftereffects could be criticised, but the sensory and emotional experiences at the heart of the HMPP have been attacked by critics as manipulation, exercises in stimulating American and Western guilt, de-contextualised from the bitter context of war in which the bombs were dropped.⁴⁶⁹

Ending all wars, as well as remembering victims of the atomic bombings, and in preventing another atomic cataclysm, merged to become combined intentions of the *hibakusha*. As Pierre Nora

has argued, for sites of memory to even exist 'there must be a will to remember'.⁴⁷⁰ The *hibakusha* themselves became increasingly proactive in creating an apparatus of commemoration and memorialisation to those who had perished. Susan Southard argues in a chapter entitled 'Against Forgetting' that the *hibakusha* of Nagasaki were motivated by an overwhelming desire to tell their stories in order that the world might learn from their terrible ordeal and decommission the global arsenal of nuclear weapons. Rage at the violence and pain done to them was certainly a powerful driving force, but so too was a strong sentiment of 'reconciliation not revenge.' The bomb-affected survivors of Nagasaki formed organisations to deliver their message across Japan and to the world. As a way of reclaiming their history, they also fought for the repatriation from the United States of captured Japanese footage of Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the immediate wake of the bombings. This was broadcast on Japanese television in 1968 but censored by the government to remove images of suffering.⁴⁷¹

For one elderly and ill man in Nagasaki, bereavement was not simply about the loss of family and friends, although his emotional pain was palpable. He was also grieving for the loss of his familiar landscape, for the homes and the community with which he was intimately associated until *Fat Man* wiped them away. He attempted to reclaim their lives from 'the darkness of history; by remapping the community in which he had lived. Initiating a 'restoration project' that drew upon survivor memories to recreate the pre-August 1945 layout of the settlements in his valley, cemeteries were searched for names of those killed by the bomb; people put names to homes, and homes to streets; they recalled where shops and public buildings were, and drew maps of remembered landscapes: 'one house, shop, and ration station at a time':

they filled in a comprehensive map of Matsuyama-machi, rendering back into historical existence the immediate hypocentre area and nearly all of the people who had lived and worked there.⁴⁷²

Such commemorative work is an imaginative example of *hibakusha* agency. There are also fascinating unconscious similarities to the mind-mapping urban research undertaken by Kevin Lynch. In his seminal work *The Image of the City* (1960), Lynch defined five elements that influenced individual perceptions of their surroundings in the city they lived in. These were *paths*, for example, streets, roads, canals; *edges*, such as walls, streets, shorelines or spaces where people felt their community ended; *districts* which people entered into and out of during their everyday life; *nodes*, such as the town and city centres, where local people migrated to for regular or commonplace interactions; and external *landmarks* that served as common points of reference for all, such as mountains and hills, or even the sun.⁴⁷³

Southard is disappointed that *hibakusha* testimonies have been mostly marginalised from the American war story, and points to the commemoration of the atom bomb raids at the Smithsonian's National Air and Space Museum (NASM) in Washington DC as proof. During the late 1980s curators at the NASM began planning for an exhibition on the *Enola Gay* as a historically important military artefact. This led to lobbying from the Japanese who wished to include the consequences of the bombs on the *hibakusha*, and thence to a conundrum for the NASM curators who felt compelled to recognise the bravery of the pilots. It proved impossible to achieve the acquired balance to satisfy both American and Japanese audiences, so a pared down exhibit of the *Enola Gay* was presented to the public in 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the atomic bombings.

Disappointment felt by the *hibakusha* was supported by some Americans who wanted the full story of the atomic bombs to be told in the exhibition. Other Americans, however, pointed to Pearl Harbor and the cruelty of Japanese hand-to-hand combat against civilians, to justify the exhibition, and through that, the bombings.⁴⁷⁴

Ultimately, sadly, the *hibakusha* have not accomplished their mission to rid the world of nuclear weapons. And while they have succeeded in helping to keep alive the flickering flames of anti-nuclear and anti-war movements, a significant irony permeates their actions: the concept of Mutually Assured Destruction, and images and memories of the hell on earth that the *hibakusha* suffered, have served together in an unlikely alliance to prevent nuclear catastrophe.

Nonetheless, the simple fact that the message of the *hibakusha* was being heard around the world evidences what Zwigenberg terms 'a global memory culture', a truly international effort to promote memories of suffering to ensure that humanity never again imposes such suffering upon itself.⁴⁷⁵ As the Japanese-American cultural historian Yuki Miyamoto argues, reconciliation drove the attempts to internationalise the *hibakusha* experience, to ensure that nuclear catastrophe would never happen again.⁴⁷⁶ This is one theme amongst many in the NHK channel programmes about the *hibakusha*. NHK is the leading national public broadcasting channel of Japan, with a worldwide distribution via satellite television and the internet. One of its many programmes focused upon US journalist Henry Hersey's early post-war book *Hiroshima* (1946), which told the stories of survivors of the bomb. Both regret and reconciliation coursed through the programmes. As a satellite television channel, NHK has also helped to create a global memory culture.⁴⁷⁷

Hence, the bomb survivors were not acting alone. Although they had formed collective self-help groups in both Hiroshima and Nagasaki in the aftermath of the Second World War, their worldwide dissemination of commemoration and reconciliation messages was aided by some hugely influential organisations, including leading religious institutions, the Japanese government, and the United Nations and the World Health Organization, among the largest NGOs in the post-war world. The cause of the *hibakusha* was also taken up by pacifist movement such as the World Federalist Association (WFA) and the Campaign for Nuclear Disarmament (CND).⁴⁷⁸ Formed in Britain in 1957, the CND became a well-known pressure group in Western Europe, marching against nuclear research establishments and using the media to promote its cause.⁴⁷⁹ CND personnel have included many pacifists who have visited Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and propagated the cause of the *hibakusha*. Here is another reminder that sharp distinctions between state-led or top-down initiatives, and social-agency or bottom-upwards movements, are not always helpful. Equally importantly, it demonstrates how different agencies and organisations can adapt a message of reconciliation for their own agendas.

The moral relativism of commemoration, that views all bombing raids and their victims as essentially state crimes, regardless of the nature of the state, and without due recognition of historical context, has increasingly attached itself to the commemoration of the Hiroshima-Nagasaki survivors. One unwitting expression of such relativism was the explicit connection between the atomic bombings and the memorialisation of Auschwitz, evidenced in the Hiroshima-Auschwitz Peace March during the early 1960s, as Cold War tensions rose sharply. This emanated from a genuine if sometimes naïve desire by four Japanese peace campaigners to



Figure 11: Hibakusha Memorial Tree, 1967, Tavistock Square, London, another symbol of the global presence of hibakusha memorialisation in a world city (photograph by author, 2017).

unite the different sites of commemoration that stemmed from the tragedies of the Second World War.⁴⁸⁰ Yet the equation of the atomic bombings with the deliberate industrialised incineration, gassing and torture of 6 million Jewish people by the Nazi regime was by no means convincing. And of course, both Germany and Japan were former Axis partners.

The politics of the *hibakusha* were by no means monopolised by the Left, and indeed the atomic bombings have also contributed

to a strong sense of victimhood coursing through Japanese memory culture. This is evident, for example, in the commemoration of the war dead, be they civilians or soldiers, cobblers or kamikaze pilots, at the Yasakuni Shrine in Tokyo. A place of worship for followers of the Shinto religion, the shrine is also a space for a 'dialogue with the dead' rather than the apportionment of blame.⁴⁸¹ The Buddhist and Christian religions have tended to frame the atomic bombings in terms of forgiveness and reconciliation, but some in the Japanese Roman Catholic Church appropriated the atomic bombings as a message of punishment from God for sins committed on Earth. Equally troubling to the secular mind was the notion that bombings played a part in some Divine Plan for the ending of the war.⁴⁸² In the Japanese fiction feature film *Matouquin Nocturne* (2007), the Fountain of Miracles at Lourdes, a sacred Catholic space, is abstractly juxtaposed with the searing apparition of light of the Nagasaki bombing. If spiritual transcendence towards the afterlife is the message, no atheist will be convinced.

An international symposium held in Tokyo in the summer of 1978 self-consciously drew upon the language of the *Communist Manifesto*, linking it with apocalyptic images of urban destruction in the call for an international decommissioning of nuclear weapons:

Women and men, young people and children of the world, unite! You have nothing to lose but the chains that bind you to the increasing armaments and war. Unless you break these chains, we may lose our jobs, our homes, our schools, our playgrounds, our culture, our civilisations, our world.⁴⁸³

Supported by UNESCO and the WHO, the symposium comprised pacifists and academics from many different countries, as

well as the victims of the bombings. It issued a powerful declaration that '*hibakusha* should be made an international word and find its way into every language of the world.'⁴⁸⁴

For Miyamoto, as for Southard, the efforts of the *hibakusha* are still being ignored in the USA, where the discourse of the atomic bombings as 'necessary' has predominated.⁴⁸⁵ She argues that a wider failure to really listen to the voices of the *hibakusha* partly explains the disconnection between a nuclear arms-free world and the culture of memory. While this is mostly true, it is not the complete picture. The website *miningawareness.com* contains testimonies and actions by Japanese-American *hibakusha* who have tried to tell their story to the USA in recent years.⁴⁸⁶

Film and 'Remembering' the Atomic Bombings in Japan

In the episodes on Japan in the television series *The World at War*, fascinating newsreel and propaganda footage depicts everyday life on the Home Front, provides glimpses into the Air Raid Precautions. The episodes on Japan contain interviews with leading members of the Japanese wartime government, and with *hibakusha*; talking heads of General Curtis LeMay and the pilots who dropped the bombs on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and documentary, military and newsreel film of the conventional as well as atomic bombings of Japan.⁴⁸⁷

Beyond historical documentaries, some of the most powerful representations and carriers of memory of the atomic bombings have been Japanese movies. They tell stories of the *hibakusha* within a fictional frame, or use metaphor to remind their viewers and the world of the horrific nature and consequences of the attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki. Looking at cinema, moreover,

enables historians to explore 'popular culture responses' to the atomic bombings and their victims within the prevailing 'political, social, psychological and cultural milieu' during the post-war decades.⁴⁸⁸

During the American occupation and until 1952, Japanese films made about the events in August 1945 tended to treat them as a 'tragedy', while in the West there was gathering criticism of them as an 'atrocity'.⁴⁸⁹ Films such as *The Bells of Nagasaki* (1950), *I'll Never Forget the Song of Nagasaki* (1952) and *Children of Hiroshima* (1952) reflected a sense of wistful realism: this is not how we would wish it to be, but how it is.⁴⁹⁰ *The Bells of Nagasaki* tells of the fate of the 10,000 Catholic *hibakusha* partly through the allegorical suffering of Christ, and the resurrection after the catastrophe.⁴⁹¹

Once the Americans left, Japanese film directors became a little more critical of their nuclear legacy. In the science fiction film *Godzilla* (1954), a sleeping prehistoric monster is awoken from millions of years of slumber under the seabed by American atomic testing in the Pacific. Just like the bombs that fell on Hiroshima and Nagasaki, the monster wreaks havoc on the environment, killing people indiscriminately, and devastating the Japanese metropolis. *Godzilla* was initially distributed by an American company, and edited to remove its anti-American and anti-nuclear messages. The version released by the BFI in 2005, however, is the original film, with the often crude anti-American sentiments re-introduced.⁴⁹² The aforementioned *Children of Hiroshima* was directed by Shindo Kineto, whose concern for the atomic bomb survivors was also evident in the ironically-titled *Lucky Dragon Number 5* (1958). This also dealt with the effects of radioactive contamination from American atomic testing, but

this time on a Japanese fishing boat, its fishermen and their haul. He also dealt with the theme of radiation-induced impotence in male *hibakusha* in *Lost Sex* (1966).

The theme of ‘remembering’, at the heart of commemoration, forms the meta-narrative of the French film *Hiroshima Mon Amour* (1959). Written by Marguerite Duras and directed by Alain Resnais, who also made a film about the Holocaust, a multi-layered story focuses upon an affair during the late 1950s between a French actress in Hiroshima and a married Japanese architect whose family were killed in August 1945. She is acting in an anti-war film, but their relationship is troubled by memories of their haunted pasts – she had been in love with a German soldier during the war – and images and flashbacks of the bombings. *Hiroshima Mon Amour* plays with the intensity and fragility of romantic attachment, the imminence of forgetting, and tragedy as possessing both a personal and global dimension. At one point the French actress declares ‘I’m forgetting you already’ as their relationship comes to its end. In another scene, the Museum in the Hiroshima Memorial Peace Park becomes a site of contested memory between the two lovers.

A key moment in the filmic representation and commemoration of the bomb-affected people was *Black Rain* (*Kuroi Ame*, 1967) originally a novel by Ibuse Masuji within the canon of *gembaku bungaku*, or ‘atomic bomb literature’.⁴⁹³ Subsequently adapted into film by the renowned director Shohei Imamura, *Black Rain* (1989) depicts horrifying images of the death and injuries caused by the bomb. The title refers both to the filthy torrent of radioactive rain that falls upon the desolated landscape of Hiroshima and its victims during the fallout, and to the erosion of the lives affected by radiation sickness in the following decades. Set in the 1950s,

a beautiful young woman who had moved to Nagasaki prior to the bombing finds she has leukaemia. Her beauty declines as her health deteriorates.⁴⁹⁴ A key theme in both novel and film include the often difficult relationship between non-sufferers and the female *hibakusha*: some detested their own victimhood, while many unaffected people viewed the bomb victims as pathetic or shameful, and turned their eyes away from their appearance.

Possibly better known to Western audiences is the film *Rhapsody in August* (1994) an American-Japanese production starring Richard Gere. Directed by Akira Kurosawa, starring a mainly Japanese cast, and released on the eve of the fiftieth anniversary of the bombings, the film was attacked by some movie critics, for example such as Leslie Halliwell, whose blunt unenthusiastic summary hardly does justice to the profundity of the issues:

A grandmother, prompted by her grandchildren and a visit from her Japanese-American nephew, recalls the death of her husband when the atomic bomb was dropped on Nagasaki.

*A small-scale but ponderous plea for an understanding of the past.*⁴⁹⁵

Its subject matter is directly within the canon of memorialisation, however. The film can also be interpreted as a genuine even cathartic attempt at reconciliation between Japan and the USA around the central figure of a female bomb survivor. The lead actor Richard Gere apologises to the grandmother for the tragedy inflicted upon her by the bomb. The grandmother also unwittingly represents the gendered nature of interpretations of the suffering caused by the bombings. In *Black Rain*, *Rhapsody in August*, *Women in the Mirror* (2002) and in the television series

Yumechiyo's Diary (1985) a popular Japanese television melodrama from the 1980s, women are at the centre of narratives of sorrow. In *Yumechiyo's Diary*, for example, the central character is both a geisha and an atom bomb survivor, a beautiful woman whose life, in common with the young woman in *Black Rain*, ends prematurely as a consequence of irradiation. On one reading, such films remind both Japanese and international film audiences of the human stories, the seemingly-endless suffering of the heroic women survivors. But in another interpretation, the feminist cultural critic Mayo Todeschini argues that the declining beauty of Yumechiyo is insensitively handled, almost a mocking essay on the ephemerality of youth and female good looks. Hence within the context of atomic bomb memory culture, *Black Rain* and *Yumechiyo's Diary* expose the often difficult relationship of vulnerable female *hibakusha* to the more conservative patriarchal cultural forces in Japanese society.⁴⁹⁶

Filmmakers rarely consulted the survivors when making their movies.⁴⁹⁷ This was not the case with the work of Kenji Nakazawa. Like Raymond Briggs he lived through the Second World War as a little boy, but in Hiroshima. Nakazawa authored the graphic novel series *Barefoot Gen* (*Hadashi no Gen*) first serialised during the 1970s republished thereafter, and later made into an anime film and a television series. Nakazawa was about a kilometre from the epicentre of the explosion. Protected from the searing blast by a concrete wall, he was not incinerated to death or torched into agonies as were so many of his school friends.⁴⁹⁸ His illustrations are in the Japanese manga tradition, narrating stories over many frames, and relying heavily upon symbolism. The burning morning sun is a recurring motif, a comment on the flag of Japan, the Land of the Rising Sun, ruled over by a divinely ordained

Emperor. The sun is also a metaphor for the atomic conflagration, while the strong wheat underfoot, growing back after the devastation, symbolise survival and renewal.⁴⁹⁹ That the bomb that detonated over Hiroshima was called *Little Boy* and that Nakazawa was a little boy is no coincidence.

Nakazawa's father objected to the war and was attacked locally as a traitor before his death in August 1945. Nakazawa agreed with his father that 'Japan had been stupid and reckless to start the war'.⁵⁰⁰ Such autobiographical details partly explain the hostile responses to *Barefoot Gen*. As in Germany, Japan possesses no victorious myth of the Blitz which allows for a heroic and patriotic narrative of civilian behaviour during either the conventional or the atomic bombings. The martial code of Japan, however, and powerful sentiments of militaristic nationalism, led to criticisms that Nakazawa was a traitor, dishonouring the dead and shaming the history of the Japanese military. *Barefoot Gen* was removed from the shelves of school libraries in 2013.⁵⁰¹

Barefoot Gen is not the only manga about the effects of the A-bomb on children. A more recent and intensely powerful anime representation of life before the atomic bombings, *In This Corner of the World* (2016), is a beautiful anime film 'remembering' how life was before the cataclysm, and how people coped with destruction and loss. Again, the centre figure was a young woman, Suzu, who moves to be with her husband's family in the port city of Kure, Hiroshima. In common with *Barefoot Gen*, the ominous sight of bombers in the beautiful blue skies prefigures the tragedy to come. The film depicts the Japanese Home Front, including rationing, making-do-and-mending with fabric, air raid alerts and actual raids. The thriving city and the devastation that follows are symbolically contrasted in the central image, drawn by Suzu, of the Industrial Promotional Hall, now the Peace

Dome, before and after the attack. The emotional narratives create a colourful, romantic and tragic imaginal representation of loss and survival, and a return to the themes of transient youthful beauty.

Remembering the Victims of Conventional Bombing in Japan

The focus on the nuclear attacks has tended to obscure the history and remembrance of the conventional bombings suffered by Japanese cities and their civilians in 1944 and 1945. Yet conventional bombing killed many more people due to its sustained and intensive nature, and the firestorms it created.⁵⁰² For those who were not there, wartime photography enables imaginal memories of the conventional bombings of Japan and its consequences. At the instruction of the Chief of Police for the Metropolitan Police Department, and at great risk to himself, the police photographer Ishikawa Koyo ranged around the city during the Great Tokyo Air Raid in March 1945. His testimony bears strong similarities with survivors in many different countries, including vivid details of speeding fire trucks, wailing sirens, streams of people trying to run from the fires, charred corpses of women and children, and the gallant efforts of fire fighters. Koyo was caught up in a collapsing building:

As the blizzard of sparks and embers blew down over me, I wondered how long I could last. I was prepared for death. But to die there like that without a struggle was just intolerable. [I] told myself I must not die. In that deadly whirlwind of flames, my police colleagues were still making desperate efforts to save as many people as they could, under this fierce attack by the barbaric enemy.

In the sky above, as if they were mocking us, the B-29s were still flying serenely through the black smoke at such low altitude that it seemed you could hold out your hand and touch them. [In] my fury at being unable to grab them and throw them to the ground, I yelled 'You bastards! But no sound came from my mouth.'⁵⁰³

In common with Bert Hardy in London, he was not going to let his fear get the better of him. The social historian Arthur Marwick



Figure 12: Anti-war sculpture in the plaza of the Tokyo Metropolitan Government Building, designed by Kenzo Tange. The inscription reads 'An appeal for peace by the citizens of Tokyo' (photograph by author, 2017).

has written of the unwitting testimony of documents and contemporary accounts of the past.⁵⁰⁴ Here the unwitting testimony is that sense of defiance, but he also reveals something of the indefatigable spirit of the Japanese that so frustrated the Allies. His testimony can also be viewed as complementary to the photographs he took, bringing some of them to life many years later.

The terrible suffering and loss caused by the conventional bombing of Japanese cities became increasingly acknowledged since the late 1960s. Over twenty years after the Great Tokyo Air Raid of 1945, painful and vivid memories of the raids were increasingly articulated. In June 1967, construction workers unearthed a group of human skeletons in a Tokyo subway station. Once publicised, the sad story behind the skeletons was revealed by a man who recalled losing most of his family during the air raid. Some twenty-two years later, they were found huddled together in what was left of the air raid shelter in which they sought safety. This was the beginning of the end of the 'public amnesia' about the fire bombings in Japan during 1945. However, it took until 1970 for the 'critical turning point in public awareness of the firebombing of Tokyo to emerge. That year saw the carpet-bombing of civilians in Vietnam, and continuing student protests in the streets of Japan against the US-Japan Security Treaty signed after the Second World War. In a letter published in the *Asahi Shinbun* newspaper on 10 March 1970, the twenty-fifth anniversary of the Great Tokyo Air Raid, a victim described his 'harrowing experience of escaping from the inferno as the incendiary bombs rained down around him':

Should not those of us who experienced the raids, at least on this day, just for one day, speak of what war is really like? And shouldn't we also think about the bombs indiscriminately falling on Vietnam?⁵⁰⁵

The author of the letter was Saotome Katsumoto, a pacifist and critic of the United States. In common with the German Left and extreme Right, anti-Americanism was a key theme in Japanese commemoration and remembering. So many accounts of the raid were sent to the newspaper offices that Katsumoto and a group of academics established the Society for Recording the Tokyo Air Raids in 1970. The testimonies have been collated into a number of collections by Katsumoto, and a significant sample of them was republished on the seventieth anniversary of the Tokyo Raid by the *Asia-Pacific Journal* in March 2015.⁵⁰⁶ Subsequently, Japanese-American oral historians have explored the experiences of survivors of both atomic and conventional weapons in Japan.⁵⁰⁷

Anime movies also represent victims of conventional bombing raids. The Studio Ghibli film *Grave of the Fireflies* (1988) is a deeply emotional animation about the struggle to survive malnutrition, homelessness and ill-health of a young boy and his sister; a struggle which the young girl (it is so often a girl) loses in an intensely moving scene. Fireflies, of course, live fleeting, forgotten lives.

The Applied Globalisation of Victimhood Narratives

Both Germany and Japan, the major aggressors against democracies during the Second World War, have suffused their national cultures of commemoration with a sense of victimhood that has diluted national blame for martial malpractice and even national consent for fascism. As Healy and Tumarkin argue, cultures of victimhood can provide 'both identity and considerable power from their sense of a shared traumatic past'.⁵⁰⁸ The victims of Allied bombing raids on Germany from 1943–5, and the *hibakusha* of

Hiroshima and Nagasaki are obvious examples of groups who have fought to promote an identity based upon shared suffering, and to confront cultural amnesia.

Such positioning has led to considerable ethical compromises and a pernicious relativism when the *hibakusha* and German victims of bombing are compared with the dead of other conflicts during the late twentieth and early twenty-first centuries. For example, in an insightful and critical essay on the German Peace Movement, Andreas Huyssen argues that extensive pacifist sentiment in post-1990 Germany allowed for a selective interpretation of the Nazi regime and the German war to emphasise German suffering as a consequence of Allied air raids.⁵⁰⁹ This in turn allowed for a spurious identification with the victims of the Iraq War from 2003, and its accompanying anti-Americanism on the German Left.

The Israel-Palestine conflict has led many Arab and anti-American critics of the Jewish state to liken those killed by Israeli air raids and other military occupations as innocent victims of an unjust and imperialistic aggressor. The victimization narrative thus transferred to the Arab-Israeli conflict. As Zwigenberg argues, for example, during the Lebanese Civil War from 1975–90 Israel was held responsible for massacres it did not commit. Following his visit to the Hiroshima Peace Memorial in 1983 the Tunisian Ambassador likened the suffering of the Lebanese people to the Japanese in 1945, while the Syrian ambassador, ‘conveniently forgetting his own government’s massacre of 10,000 civilians in Hama’ stated that ‘the slaughter of non-combatants is what brings Hiroshima and Israel’s genocide in Lebanon together.’⁵¹⁰ Ran Zwigenberg notes the attempts by Palestinian leaders and other dignitaries from Middle Eastern countries to equate the Israeli attacks on the Gaza Strip in Palestine not only with the American bombing of Japan but with

the Holocaust.⁵¹¹ Yet the scale of suffering, calculated mass murder and torture involved in German genocide bears little comparison. It is also noteworthy that the Israeli Air Force issues warnings to Palestinians, known as ‘roof knocking’, when an air raid is imminent.⁵¹² The Nazis made no such gestures to the victims of air raids.

The use of the noun ‘genocide’ raises hugely important issues, because if the atomic bombings of Japan and the Israeli air raids on the Gaza Strip are indeed genocides, then the Allied bombings of Germany can also be defined as genocidal. At first sight, the United Nations Convention on Genocide, passed in December 1948, would appear to support such claims:

Article II

In the present Convention, genocide means any of the following acts committed with intent to destroy, in whole or in part, a national, ethnical racial or religious group, as such:

- a) Killing members of the group;
- b) Causing serious bodily or mental harm to members of the group;
- c) Deliberately inflicting on the group conditions of life calculated to bring about its physical destruction in whole or in part;
- d) Imposing measures intending to prevent births within the group;
- e) Forcibly transferring children of the group to another group.⁵¹³

As Chalk and Jonassohn pointedly argue, however, ‘the UN definition is of little use to scholars’ for many reasons, not least because of a wider failure to differentiate between violence intended to eradicate a group as opposed to brutality directed against the group. Moreover, the UN Convention ‘intentionally excluded the

deliberate annihilation of political groups and social classes from its definition of genocide.⁵¹⁴ Chalk and Jonassohn offer an alternative definition:

Genocide is a form of one-sided mass killing in which a state or other authority intends to destroy a group, as that group and membership in it are defined by the perpetrator.⁵¹⁵

This definition allows for the fact there is no reciprocity between victim and perpetrator. This means, furthermore, that casualties of aerial warfare are not victims of genocide, because of the control that belligerent states have over their own territory and its population. In a total war, civilians can be regarded as combatants if their governments control their cities, a principle true for most aerial bombings (with exceptions such as Guernica in 1937 and Aleppo from 2015–17).⁵¹⁶ Given that the Germans and Japanese attacked the Allies, and vice versa, and that civilians were active participants in total warfare, commemorations to the *hibakusha* and to the German war dead cannot be accurately described as memorials to victims of a genocidal programme of bombing. Reciprocity to greater or lesser degrees was possible. The Armenians in the First World War, and Jews, Roma and gays in the Second World War, had no way of fighting back against an ideological and state-sponsored process of extermination directed at their group. They are examples of genocide. Allied air raids from 1940–5 are not.

Coda: Air Raids and Cultures of Memory: Some Wider Conclusions Post 9/11

Total war as both catalyst and context for retrospection gave rise to global similarities of experience that transcended national

borders, but also to local and national variations in how the war was remembered. Sites of commemoration were also intertwined with a wider multi-dimensional culture of memory that involved people's memoirs of the war, autobiographies and diaries, film and television, and the growing use of oral history from the 1970s. Commemoration was a personal and public act, local, national and international. This can be further understood within the context of a twenty-first century atrocity.

The terrorist air attacks in September 2001 led to a passionate national debate about the nature of commemoration of the victims. Nearly 3,000 people were killed at the World Trade Centre, and at the Pentagon in North Virginia. The dead reflected a diverse range of American middle-class society. At least 270 Jewish people and thirty American Muslims also died. Many fire fighters and paramedics lost their lives, and foreigners were also killed. The attacks were almost immediately compared with the Blitz on London, despite huge differences in the scale, duration and casualty rates of the events. The fortitude of New Yorkers was compared with that of Londoners during the Second World War, and the Republican Mayor, Rudy Giuliani, likened himself to Winston Churchill.⁵¹⁷

The United States has a grand monumental commemorative tradition, evident in the haunting and powerful symbols in Washington DC to the dead of the major wars in which it has fought. The National World War II Memorial was constructed in the aftermath of 9/11, and dedicated by President George W. Bush in 2004. One literary critic has argued that the memorial reinforces 'a singularly heroic reading of the American past and a unilateral approach to world history' which celebrates the imposition of American values on other countries.⁵¹⁸ It also follows

that 'this message' can be identified in American foreign policy since the events in September 2001.⁵¹⁹ Interpreting the American contribution to the Second World War within an attempt to impose American 'ideals and ideologies,' however, does not fully acknowledge the US and Allied war against German, Italian and Japanese fascism, violent ideologies pursuing brutal transnational dictatorships.

Various writers have contended that the use of the term 'Ground Zero' for the site of the Twin Towers borrows from the term used for devastation wrought at Hiroshima and Nagasaki, viewed unequivocally as an American atrocity.⁵²⁰ Suggesting that the adoption of the label 'Ground Zero' might be a cynical attempt to convert the image of the USA from aggressor to victim, nothing is offered in the way of either historical context or debate about the causes, nature and consequences of the atomic bombings in drawing the Japanese war to an end.

The attack on New York also raised the spectre of the Holocaust for many American Jews, as another fascist ideology, this time associated with extremist Islamism rather than Nazism, targeted a city heavily populated by Jewish Americans. It must have been incredibly difficult for Jewish citizens of New York to disassociate the attacks on the Twin Towers from anti-Semitism, an evil at the heart of both Islamism and Nazism. This partly explains the controversy over the calls for a Muslim prayer room to be included in an Islamic Centre near the site of Ground Zero. As Zwigenberg argues, 'many pundits claimed that building a mosque so close to the site would be an affront to the memory of 9/11' while others viewed this as a victory for tolerance and American democracy.⁵²¹ The issue polarised opinion across the USA, but the debate was nuanced. Many American Christians and Jews were unhappy

at the othering of Muslims and at the nascent or overt Islamophobia in many religious protests against the Islamic Centre.⁵²² At the time of writing, however, the mosque project had been deemed a failure. Both alleged corruption and inadequate funding were blamed. Apartments alongside a museum were proposed instead.⁵²³

The controversy in New York highlighted some of the key themes in commemoration and memorialisation: bereavement, catharsis and the drive for recognition of the dead; a synthesis of both private and public grief in memorial events; powerful emotions of anger and revenge towards the enemy; and the desire for reconciliation and forgiveness. These were defining characteristics in the global culture of commemoration since 1945.