Introduction

I think it fitting to outline two key contextual issues, dilemmas in fact, regarding the manner in which the museum positions itself that I encountered very early on in the process, as these should help to frame the concerns that arose. First, in preparation for conducting my own research, I read the extensive work on Holocaust memorials by James Young. In his chapter outlining the history of this museum, Young (2000) cited the conceptual brief authored by Rolf Bothe (the then director of the Berlin Museum) and Vera Bendt (the then director of the Jewish department of the Berlin Museum) for the design competition, which Daniel Libeskind later won. "Nothing in Berlin's history ever changed the city more than the persecution, expulsion, and murder of its own Jewish citizens. This change worked inwardly, affecting the very heart of the city" (Young 2000: 161). These lines struck me at the time and have remained with me ever since. Initially, I read this statement matter-of-factly and was astonished. I just did not see this interpretation being shared at all around me, either in conversations or in historical texts. (Surely, I thought, the destruction of Berlin during World War II, or its being forcibly split asunder for decades afterward, would be deemed as, if not more, significant than the loss of its Jews?)

I imagined I would be hard pressed to find more than a handful of Berliners that would honestly sign the statement written by Rolf Bothe and Vera Bendt, let alone a consensus. Coming to see this text as part of a performative public relations campaign, however, allowed me to better cope with, if not resolve, the dilemma. Rather than a statement reflecting a consensus, it is much more a message that the authors wanted to send about Germany through the potential design of this museum. This statement was about projecting an image of Germany. Perhaps the authors personally believed it too, as others might.[1] But whether or not there was a consensus among actual "Germans" seems beside the point. It, nevertheless, remains problematic that the authors claimed the legitimacy to speak on Germany's behalf, as if it were one national monolith. In dealing with such material then, it is even more crucial not to conflate public discourse on memory with actually shared memory (cf. Young 1993: xi).

Next, as my own impression of this museum was very much connected to memory of the Holocaust, the assertion by Ken Gorbey, the then project manager of the exhibition that the Jewish Museum Berlin (JMB) was "not a Holocaust memorial" (Gorbey 2002: 9) also seemed of place. This is made explicit in the museum's mission statement:

> The museum is not a Holocaust memorial. Rather we present a view of German Jewish history that is balanced between, on the one hand, celebration of the ordinary and extraordinary lives of all generations and, on the other, the recognition and explication of the darker side of that history. (Gorbey 2002: 9)

To contextualize this statement, it is helpful to review some aspects in the long and tortured history of this museum's coming into being. Originally proposed as an extension to the existing Berlin Museum, with Heinz Galinski (1912–92), then president of West Berlin's Jewish community, as its champion, the process of making the JMB went through many arduous phases, too involved to report in full here. A few points, however, are worth emphasizing. From its onset, this extension was not conceived as a Holocaust museum. In fact, this topic was hardly reflected at all in original concepts (cf. Ostow 2007: 310; Pieper 2006: 213, 224, 230). It was with the choice of the design proposal by Daniel Libeskind that this changed dramatically (cf. Ostow 2007: 310–11; Pieper 2006: 232). Katrin Pieper points out that:

> With their decision, the jury laid the groundwork for the public assessment of the Libeskind-Bau as a "space memorializing" both the extermination and Jewish life in Berlin, as both a "carrier of historical meaning" and a "Holocaust memorial." (2006: 236)[2]

Indeed this structure was largely read as a Holocaust memorial (cf. Kessler 2001: 97; Ostow 2007: 309). Julius Schoeps, a prominent German-Jewish historian and political scientist, even suggested keeping it as a Holocaust memorial and housing the museum elsewhere (Ostow 2007: 310; Pieper 2006: 243). There followed an acrimonious conflict, which came to a head over plans by the body then in charge of the Berlin Museum, the *Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin* (City Museum Foundation Berlin, a local governmental body staffed by non-Jewish Germans), to relegate the Jewish section to the basement. This horrified members of the Jewish community who then felt compelled to become more actively involved in the process fearing that relegation to the basement—the dark, somber sections of the building—leaving the brighter upper floors to house Berlin German history, might even cause an increase in anti-Semitism (Pieper 2006: 249*ff.*). Clearly then

tensions arose early in the process in connection to a number of factors, which include the very makeup of the building.

The conflicts resulted in an impasse, as the opposing memories of this history (namely the perceptions of the Jewish community versus the German *Stiftung*'s position) could not be reconciled. The *Stiftung Stadtmuseum Berlin* under Rainer Güntzer stood on one side, and the, now actively and publicly involved, Berlin Jewish community, on the other. Acrimony was widely reported in the press: Rainer Güntzer characterized the present-day Jewish opponents to the *Stiftung*'s plans for the museum as unpatriotic and not good Germans. While they fired back accusing him of complete and utter insensitivity to their experience and memory, not to mention of only being interested in dead Jews, while ignoring the needs of the living. The unceremonious firing of the Israeli director of the Jewish Department of the Berlin Museum, Amnon Barzel, by the *Stiftung Stadtmuseum* only further exacerbated the conflict.[3] The deadlock lasted until a political solution could be found from the outside: enter W. Michael Blumenthal, a one-time member of the Berlin Jewish Community, who had fled to Shanghai after the November 1938 Pogrom. He became successful in America in business and politics, serving as secretary of the treasury under President Carter. It was in part his managerial and negotiating skills, coupled with his irreproachable credentials that allowed the process to move forward. He was able to secure the museum exclusively for the Jewish topic, effectively sidelining the *Stiftung Stadtmuseum,* and turning this museum into a national German museum about Jews with federal funding (cf. Ostow 2007: 311; Pieper 2006: 283).

Early on in the exhibition planning, there was a strong optimistic note struck: Ken Gorbey stated, "We want happy visitors!" (Broder 2001: 266) and "We don't want to ignore the concept of perpetration, but to visit a guilt trip upon the German people is not the objective of this museum" (Klein 2001: 3). While W. Michael Blumenthal admitted the difficulty of this optimistic position: "If they would have called me before they built this building, I would have likely tried to negotiate with Daniel Libeskind to build it a bit differently" (Minutes of the Committee of Cultural Affairs, 9th Meeting, 19 June 2000, Parliament of Berlin, 14th legislative period, in Senate Department, VAI, Jewish Museum Concept, p. 15; Pieper 2006: 298 n. 825).[4]

Candid admissions of the disconnect between the architecture and the museum's preferred label: "not a Holocaust museum" were also offered to me in an interview with a member of the education department of the JMB. She conceded that in this building, it was impossible to not be a Holocaust museum, but that in their exhibitions and tours they tried to

alternate the emphases and focus on other topics too (Interview 24 February 2011).

The institution calls itself the JMB. Its director W. Michael Blumenthal refers to it clearly as a "German history museum" (Blumenthal 2001: 1). Authentic artifacts are presented throughout the permanent exhibition and displayed in the underground axes along the walls. However, the *Libeskind-Bau,* with its evocative design, is in many ways a Holocaust memorial. The architect's idea was, as he put it: "very simple: to build the museum around a void that runs through it" (Libeskind 1991: 63). This void is meant to represent "a space empty of Jews," echoing an inner space empty of the love and values that might have saved them (Young 2000: 165). (Here one can see how this concept corresponds to the brief written by Bothe and Bendt.) I would argue then that the JMB should be understood—and is very often experienced—as a memorial museum. Paul Williams list the JMB as one site in his book appropriately entitled *Memorial Museums* (Williams 2007: 20). He recognizes too that such sites are "dedicated to commemorating mass suffering of some kind" (Williams 2007: 8). Thus, a moral and emotional tone is part of their makeup (Bishop Kendzia 2012: 81).

Such tensions and contradictions surrounding the museum's role accompanied the fieldwork throughout. My work is both ethnographic and auto-ethnographic, deliberately so. My aim is not only to share the insights gained, but also to introduce the readers to the museum and the visitors, as I experienced them over time. Auto-ethnography is crucial to mine the personal experiences throughout the process to render this text "meaningful, accessible, and evocative" (Ellis et al. 2011).[5] I have, therefore maintained some, at times, chronological narrative elements to accomplish this to enable the reader to view, and possibly identify with, my positioning throughout.

The book is organized as follows: Chapter 1 outlines the research question and the multifaceted methodology as they developed over time. With this, I hope to achieve a transparency and reflexivity that should help the reader to judge my findings appropriately. Chapter 2 outlines the key conceptual frameworks that inform the work. It discusses prevailing understandings of memory and political education as they pertain to this research, questioning the value of the idea of a shared memory in favor of performative models like remembrance (Jay Winter) and "past presencing" (Sharon Macdonald) as more useful tools. Indeed the visitors are performing with and for each other, the museum staff, and myself. This perspective is crucial to adequately analyze the situations that arose in their variety and complexity. This framework goes on to link remembrance to political

education, more generally, and then focus on the situation in Germany and the JMB specifically, asking how and for whom political education is envisioned. This leads to an appreciation of the culture of memory in Germany as a product of a dominant discourse, in which certain young visitors operate masterfully, while others do not. Some visitors are clearly insiders and know the rules. Chapter 3 then accompanies these insiders in the museum and in the classroom. They experienced the museum largely as a Holocaust memorial space. Here expressions of guilt and dismay loom large, but so do pride, and very carefully considered utterances, implicit coercive expectations, and Holocaust fatigue. Chapter 4 introduces those visitors who perceived the museum far more as a tourist site, without expressing anything like guilt or the like. The conflicts and confusion this entailed in situ are telling: they expose assumptions of how Germans are supposed to remember, and recall that this country has a legacy of a divided nation with clear consequences in the present. In Chapter 5, we meet a school group from *Neukölln*—a part of Berlin with a majority population of Turkish background. The group was willing and eager to participate in this study. I had been told that many Muslim students, for example, have refused to visit the JMB since they equate it with "pro-Israel propaganda," and others have certainly experienced this (cf. Feldman and Peleikis 2014: 50). It did not present a problem in my case, however. We explore how their day out at the museum and the conflicts it produced point to a troubling fixed understanding of who belongs inside the culture of memory and who does not. This raises difficult questions regarding the possibilities of integration—that is finding a sense of belonging that allows for difference (as opposed to assimilation, which calls for the erasure of difference). Finally, the conclusion ties the important threads of the fieldwork together, interrogating the constellations of coercion, political correctness, dominance, and marginalization. It then aims to open up questions about the future of remembrance and belonging in the museum and beyond.

Notes

1. Also worth thinking about is the implied audience of this brief. Might it not also be the case that as often with artistic endeavor, and I would include museum exhibitions in this: "the perceived public audience is none other than [the creators] themselves" (Young 1993: 9).
2. All translations from German are, unless otherwise stated, my own. I apologize in advance for any errors as they are fully my own.
   Die Jury legte mit ihrem Urteil die Grundlage für die öffentliche Bewertung des Libeskind-Baus als "Erinnerungsort" an die Vernichtung wie auch an

jüdisches Leben in Berlin, als "Bedeutungsträger" von Geschichte sowie als "Holocaust-Mahnmal"

3. There was a virtual media storm at the time. For one informative illustration, see Hoffmann-Axthelm 1997.

4. "Wenn Sie mich gerufen hätten, bevor Sie dieses Gebäude gebaut hätten, dann hätte ich eventuell versucht, mit Daniel Libeskind zu verhandeln und es ein bisschen anders zu bauen." (Wortprotokoll des Ausschusses für Kulturelle Angelegenheiten, 9. Sitzung, 19. Juni 2000, Abgeordnetenhaus von Berlin, 14. Wahlperiode, in: Senatsverwaltung für Kultur, VAI, Jüdisches Museum Museumskonzept, S. 15.)

5. These insights were first published in Bishop Kendzia (2014).