

**Kendzia, Victoria Bishop (2017), *Visitors to the House of Memory. Identity and the Political Education at the Jewish Museum Berlin*. Col. "Museum and Collections", 9. New York-Oxford: Berghahn, 174 pp. ISBN: 978-1-78533-639-3. 978-1-78533-640-9 (eBook).**

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Having moved to Germany in 2001 from Canada for familial reasons, Victoria Bishop Kendzia starts thinking about the cultural memory of her new country. Being of Jewish origin herself married to a non-Jewish man and having two children, she approaches the question of cultural memory with analytical curiosity. More specifically Kendzia focuses on how Jewish history is negotiated, and how identities shift in relation to this history both for Jews and non-Jews (Germans, Muslim Germans, ethnic minorities etc). Kendzia herself is not a practicing Jew, and defines herself as someone who grew up detached from the Jewish religion or tradition. She conveys that although her mother was Jewish she never perceived herself or was perceived by others as Jewish. This loose association with a Jewish identity and fluctuation of her own perception of self also becomes another motivation for why she chose to pursue such a study.

She chooses the Jewish Museum in Berlin as her ethnographic site and follows several groups and their experiences in the museum. The museum's potential as both a memorial and a museum is presented itself to have worth as a pedagogical site. It offers a space to understand how this history may reflect on to the next generations in Germany. In doing so there is the impression, shared also by the author, that the museum is a sort of 'Holocaust memorial'. This idea is refuted by the project managers, who strongly assert that its aim is to present a view of German Jewish history that includes all aspects of that history in a balanced manner. Following this assertion Kendzia opens her book with a detailed description of the architecture of the building and what this implies for its content and audience. She addresses the many stake-holders who took part in the decision process and the controversies surrounding where to locate the museum and where to locate the memorial within the building. This is important to note as it reflects on how this decision strongly designs the processes of 'remembering' – should the memorial be in the basement, projecting an even darker image of Jewish history?

The negotiation of 'happy memories' vs. 'bad memories' and where to situate these memories has a profound influence on what feeling is aimed to be triggered. Is the aim to create a guilt trip, or a space where Jewish life is represented with the many values that make them? The reader is very clear from the beginning that there is nothing 'ac-

cidental' in this museum and every creative aspect is a product of intense deliberation that echoes 'the culture of memory in Germany'. Thus in each chapter Kendzia follows a different group in the museum and analytically interrogates their experiences. In doing so, she also includes her own impressions of the design, the content and even the museum staff and their interactions with the different groups.

In the methodological section of her book the author addresses her research objectives and methodological approach. She begins by explaining her conceptual framework. The author effectively argues her choice of using grounded theory as a general framework to her research. This theory prioritizes gathering empirical data before setting a theme or establishing categories and hypothesizes. Kendzia clarifies that it took her several visits to the museum before she drafted her research questions and themes. Her contacts include students from different types of high schools and neighborhoods. The first group is comprised of students who attend the *Gesamtschule* from a lower-middle class area of West Berlin. The second are students from a *Gymnasium* from a similar area of Berlin. The third group of students go to a Gymnasium in an upper middle class area of West Berlin. The fourth group of students attend a Gymnasium located in what was East Berlin. She also followed students from Gymnasiums located in predominantly Turkish populated regions. Finally, there were also students from a Gymnasium and *Gesamtschule* located in the East, from upper-middle class and lower-middle class neighborhoods respectively. The author interacts with the students in and out of the museum; she observes them, their interactions with one another, with the exhibitions, the staff, and what is more with the historical narrative conveyed in the museum.

During these observations she questions the 'performance of guilt'. Is the performance of guilt inherently connected to the idea of Germanness and who is included in the dominant group? Kendzia argues that the subject of guilt is rather dynamic and is intertwined with the question of identity and who is perceived as (authentically) German. The students' perception of such categories are also very dynamic as some are emphatic to the feeling of guilt, others are detached citing other identities (Turkishness, Muslimness), or simply their absence of the times when the holocaust took place. On a personal note, the author adds that sometimes the resistance to the performance of guilt or expected emotions are received negatively by the museum or the teachers. Such a negative reaction hinders moral courage and the sense of freedom according to Kendzia.

While Kendzia analytically examines questions of inclusion and exclusion the book is missing on how these positions fluctuate in contemporary society. She only mentions the (Turkish) Muslim observers and how they relate to the cultural memory pertaining the Jews, and how there is a big question mark when it comes to Muslims and anti-Semitism. There seems to be a suggestion that there are anti-Semitic prejudices among Muslims, however there is little discussion or empiric data concerning such an insinuation. There is also little discussion on how Muslim students reflect on racism/

discrimination/Islamophobia in conversation with the Holocaust history. I mention this because in several places of the book the author explains how Turkish/Germans are still categorically perceived as different from White Germans, and how even the slightest accent in spoken German can cause negative attention in the classroom. There is, in this case, some need of further elaboration on whether the performance of guilt is secluded to the museum space in a highly confrontational context, and its absence when it comes to issues related to daily racism.

On a concluding note, the book is highly insightful in discerning the politics of representation, especially in the case of memory and spaces that embody memory. While the objects or artifacts of museums have been subject to many studies, the study of the museum itself as a structure is highly relevant in this field. Kendzia studies the museum rather than the objects. She studies the architecture, the managers, the staff, the audience and the dynamic interaction between these different components. She does not study the historical information exhibited in the museum, but the ways and which the narratives of that history is constructed. There is a conscious choice made in the way the museum is put together, a choice that is part of the dominant discourse, and a choice that evokes the proper emotions and memories. This choice carefully decides what is represented, in what part of the museum and even *when* the audience should see it. What makes this book ethnographically compelling is that the audience reception and reaction is also voiced and interrogated.