

A Vanished Site: The *Freedom Memorial* at Checkpoint Charlie and the Discourse about Cold War Legacies in Contemporary Berlin

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On November 9, 2009, Germany's capital re-erected the Berlin Wall. For the twentieth anniversary of the fall of the Wall, the city of Berlin fashioned an artificial wall made out of 1,000 over-sized dominos ("Fest der Freiheit"). The initiated 1.5-kilometer 'domino effect' symbolized the peaceful mass movement of the late 1980s that eventually resulted not only in Germany's reunification, but also in the partial removal of the Wall itself. Even though this artistic recreation of the Wall was certainly playful, it did not escape the historically charged meaning the Wall still conveys. During the Cold War period, the actual Berlin Wall not only contained a "strange kind of magic" in its function as concrete political barrier between East and West Germany, but also carried special weight as a symbol (Ladd, *Ghosts* 8). It stood for the culmination of growing East / West tensions between the two superpowers, the United States and the Soviet Union; it stood for the division of the world into two ideological hemispheres and for the cruelty with which families, friends, and neighbors were torn apart for decades. Shortly after November 9, 1989, the Berlin Wall was gradually demolished and only scattered remnants were left remaining. Its physical absence as a structural whole did not efface the memory thereof. Quite to the contrary, the absence continues to inspire attempts like the 'domino wall' to commemorate all that the Berlin Wall historically, politically and socially could and still can mean.

Five years earlier, for the fifteenth anniversary of the fall of the Wall, Alexandra Hildebrandt, director of the Checkpoint Charlie Museum and head of the *Working Group 13 August*, erected a privately funded and far more polemical installation: The *Freedom Memorial* (*Freiheitsmahnmal*) at the infamous Checkpoint Charlie. In order to situate this memorial within the tradition of memorializing the Cold War era, the Wall and its victims in Berlin, it is necessary to examine Hildebrandt's site in relation to the city's official commemoration. First, this essay maps out the city's key sites dedicated to the commemoration of the Wall to contrast these official locations with the *Freedom Memorial* and to seek out reasons for the controversial demolition roughly one year after its creation. Second, a thorough analysis of the site – its

genesis, locality and material symbolic – will show that it confronted German officials and the public with the legacy of Cold War division, the communist dictatorship of the former GDR and the problem of appropriate commemorative practices finding shape in memorial images and spaces. Thus, the analysis of both the iconography of the *Freedom Memorial* and the various discursive nodes that came to the forefront in the public debate bespeak a manifold array of commemorative politics.

A critical evaluation of the *Freedom Memorial* is complicated by the difficulty to classify this privately and unofficially implemented ‘memorial’ at Checkpoint Charlie. Neither initiated by state officials nor based on a broad public consensus, the site confused a more or less common *modus operandi* of commemorative practice that brings a memorial site into being. In Germany, public art competitions, for example, are venues through which federal and local officials, experts and citizens democratically negotiate how to represent and commemorate a past event. It has to be noted, however, that Germany began to develop – in addition to state-coordinated memory praxis – a specific form of *public* initiative that resulted in “bottom-up” grassroots activities which drew attention to sites or other significant issues of the past that had been either intentionally silenced or forgotten by state officials (Till, *New Berlin* 18). The genesis of the memorial site *Topography of Terror* (former Gestapo Headquarters) and the *Gedenkstätte Berlin-Hohenschönhausen* (former State Security Prison) are two striking instances of this development with respect to the commemoration of the NS and the SED regimes, respectively. Even though the *Freedom Memorial* seemed like a “bottom-up” initiative attempting to direct attention to the historically significant Checkpoint Charlie and to the alleged absence of a commemoration of the victims, the envisioned memorial site did not result in a democratic process of negotiation between the public and state officials. I argue that the democratic process was hindered by the most problematic aspect of the site: namely its use of a complex of symbols and the manifestly anti-communist rhetoric it encouraged. Such anti-communist rhetoric – presumably a relic of the Cold War past – resurfaced during the installment’s existence to champion the Western world while fueling a lingering threat, suspicion and mistrust towards the political and cultural inheritors of the East, i.e. the PDS as the successor party of the former SED. The *Freedom Memorial* thus laid bare how ideological stances and categorical thinking were played out in and through a commemorative object, which (normally and amongst many other things) aimed to reconcile formerly opposed camps.

Additionally, when public memory translates into memorial images and spaces, questions of cultural identity and socio-political self-understanding are simultaneously addressed. Considering that the installment was a rather exceptional instance where a single group attempted to impose its ideological stance on post-Cold War Germany and in doing so provoked this self-understanding, we must assume that officials sought to abolish the *Freedom Memorial* since it did not coincide with the self-image and political identity of a democratic nation. The installment contradicted Germany's aspirations of being a 'normal' and 'ideology-free' European nation-state. Hence, it is not surprising that the public debate about the site was rapidly politicized. It is most striking, however, that the political debate fell back into the similar patterns of Cold War rhetoric and ideologically charged jargon. By focusing on the involvement of Berlin politicians during the discussion about the site, it becomes apparent that they, too bolstered their arguments with ideological stances, which originated in the Cold War period and were now re-appropriated to attain or maintain political power. The discourse about the site reveals that those who erected and supported the site discredited the communist past. The debate also shows that the disruptive East / West dynamic remains a frequent feature of reunited Germany, its politics, society and culture.

What made the *Freedom Memorial* at Checkpoint Charlie interesting and challenging for commemorative politics was on one hand the initiative to create a site that honored and remembered the Cold War, addressing an official lack to do so, and confronting the recent past and its atrocities. On the other hand, the memorial site refused to speak about the past with forgiveness or to make a plea for a collaborative, democratic future that 'remembers' collectively. The memorial site in its one-dimensional, un-nuanced and bald indictment of the GDR and communism perpetuated rather than reconciled the divisive Cold War dynamic beyond 1989.

The *Freedom Memorial* as Counter-Initiative to Official Sites

The *Freedom Memorial* was initially announced as an art exhibition in 2004. Hildebrandt conducted the project and received permission from the district *Berlin Mitte* for a temporary *Kunstaussstellung* at Checkpoint Charlie (Rada). Hildebrandt publicly declared shortly after that the art exhibition was meant to counteract the irresponsible treatment of Checkpoint Charlie by state and city officials and the absence of an all-encompassing memorial site for the victims of the Cold War. She also expressed the hope that the public would embrace the *Freedom Memorial* as a permanent memorial site (Puppe). To ascribe further meaning to the installment, Hildebrandt and her working group dedicated the *Freedom Memorial* “to the victims of the GDR border regime and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany” (Hildebrandt). Financed exclusively by the Checkpoint Charlie Museum and opened on October 31, 2004, the group chose a vacant spot at the intersection of *Friedrichstraße* and *Zimmerstraße*, quite far from the path of the vanished Wall. The installation consisted of 120 original Wall panels (which were part of the museum’s permanent exhibition and measured a total length of almost 140 meters) and 1,065 wooden crosses, each dedicated to a single victim of the former East German regime. After eight months of its controversial existence, the *Freedom Memorial* was eventually demolished on July 5, 2005, after the juridical decision of the Berlin magistrate to evict the working group from the terrain.

Scholar Jennifer Cohoon McStotts exemplifies one of the many initial critiques aimed at the *Freedom Memorial*. She emphasizes historical inaccuracy as the overarching conceptual flaw that led the site to its commemorative failure. Hildebrandt’s artificial wall was the problem; it did not follow the trajectory of the original Wall, the whitewashed surface of Hildebrandt’s wall was clean and without graffiti, and the site lacked the entire ‘Wall system’ (i.e. watchtowers) (40). The site’s historical inaccuracy also came under attack from various spokesmen affiliated with official Wall-memorials throughout Berlin. Maria Nooke, manager of the memorial site at *Bernauer Straße* in 2004, described the *Freedom Memorial* as “pseudo-historisch” and critiqued the unconventional means by which the site claimed to be the only site that would properly commemorate the Wall, its victims, and the SED-regime (Lautenschläger). The memorial site *Bernauer Straße* (established in 1998 by the FRG) preserves most of the historical traces of the Berlin Wall

and the width of the border fortifications. Sixty meters of the former border strip (*Todesstreifen*) in its original depth as well as a replica of a watchtower stand as reminders of the division of the city. In addition to these remnants, the memorial site contains the *Berlin Wall Memorial* (dedicated to the victims of communist tyranny), the Berlin Wall documentation center, the *Chapel of Reconciliation* and the original sections of the Wall along the cemetery *Sophien-Friedhof*. Perceived as “commemorative landscape,” the memorial site is under continuing development and its completion is expected in 2011 (Senatskanzlei Berlin, “Berliner Mauer”).

In an interview on March 26, 2010, Axel Klausmeier, scholar and director of the *Berlin Wall Foundation* since 2009, states that the main objective of every memorial site is to preserve the “locations of the Wall from a monument point of view [and] to preserve its authentic substance, to research and document its history and impart this history,” and to enable a “worthy remembrance of the victims” (“Interview”). From his point of view, the short-lived *Freedom Memorial* lacked all of these aspects, and Hildebrandt’s declaration of her site’s exclusive significance was unfounded. Klausmeier explains why the temporary site at Checkpoint Charlie and its aspiration to become the most significant site to remember the Cold War had to fail: “We are the central location of this concept of a central memorial. [Thus] the focus is on the Bernauer Strasse” (ibid). This blunt statement reveals a competitiveness between memorial sites considering the growing tourist industry behind commemoration practices. As opposed to Hildebrandt’s insistence on her site as the major commemorative object, Klausmeier perceives Wall commemoration as an inclusive system of various historical and geographical points throughout the city. He describes the concept of Wall-remembrance as a constant development which ties together all historical locations in order to provide a detailed picture of the 28-year long division of the city. For that reason, Klausmeier undertook a research project in 2001 to document remaining fragments of the Berlin Wall. His book *Mauerreste – Mauerspuren* (2004) provides a unique collection of locations along the length of the Wall. The rich volume includes descriptions of other prominent sites such as the *Mauer Park*, which displays a 300-meter-long section of the inner Wall open to graffiti artists, the *East Side Gallery*, presenting a section of the inner Wall in the district *Mühlenbain* that was painted by 118 artists from 21 countries, and the *Schlesisches Tor*, where one watchtower was preserved on the ground of the GDR’s border fortification and later classified as a historical monument in 1992.

In addition to these historical locations officially commemorating the Wall or the border system, another commemorative feature emerges as an important element of Berlin's memorial landscape: the sites for the victims of the Wall. Berlin's official web site presents four of these key locations. The memorial for Günter Litfin remembers the first victim shot in August 1961 and was initiated by private citizens at the site of the former post of GDR border troops (Senatskanzlei Berlin, "Günter Litfin"). The second site is dedicated to Peter Fechter who was shot and bled to death at the border strip in August 1962. The steel cross at the very location now serves as a gathering place for the public and members of the government not only to annually honor his memory but also that of "all the victims of the Berlin Wall" (Senatskanzlei Berlin, "Peter Fechter"). The third site is the *Weisse Kreuze Denkmal* on the Eastern side of the Reichstag building remembering those killed during an attempt to flee to the West. In 1971, a private group called the *Berliner Bürger-Verein* established seven of these white crosses at the point where the outer wall met the riverbank. Each cross is inscribed with the names of particular victims. However, the installation intends to honor all the "unknown victims of the Wall" as well (Senatskanzlei Berlin, "Weiße Kreuze"). The fourth site provides a more detailed list of victims. The art installation *Parlament der Bäume gegen Gewalt und Krieg* is located in the vicinity of the *Elisabeth-Lüders-Haus* (the library of the German Bundestag) and consists of original Wall segments. The names of 258 victims are inscribed on slabs of granite, placed in the area and flanked by trees. Designed by artist Ben Wagin, the site also displays several memorial stones, pictures and texts, created by various artists (Senatskanzlei Berlin, "Parlament der Bäume").

This brief overview reveals some important characteristics of how the memorial sites for both the Berlin Wall and the victims developed into official sites generally accepted by officials and the public. One of the most immediate and significant characteristics is geography. Memorial sites are primarily established at locations either linked to former historical events or to significant points of the urban topography e.g. near centers of national and state importance (*Reichstag*, *Brandenburger Tor*, etc.). Another characteristic is Germany's democratic process of memorial creation. In other words, the process of memorialization consists of constant deliberations by multiple interest groups, including government officials, stakeholders, experts from various disciplines, and the public. No single group has unilateral authority in this process. The democratic deliberations do not revolve only around the question of *how* the representation of a past event and the memories thereof can be translated

into exterior design. These negotiations also reveal a great deal of self-perception of a collective and their contemporary understanding of the past, present and envisioned future.

On the surface, Hildebrandt's site did not contradict the described democratic process of memorialization. The *Freedom Memorial* stood at the famous Checkpoint Charlie. Hildebrandt and her working group consisted of private citizens seemingly in dialogue with city officials. Yet the installment's demolition after only eight months testifies to the fact that it violated basic tenets of Germany's commemorative culture. Simply stated, the overwhelming geographical and historical importance of Checkpoint Charlie did not save the site from extinction. The failures of the site, then, lie in aesthetics, iconography and political rhetoric.

The *Freedom Memorial* under the Microscope: The Specificity of Checkpoint Charlie

When examining the site's location, we need to take into account that "any memorial marker in the landscape, no matter how alien to its surrounding, is still perceived in the midst of its geography" (Young 7). Hildebrandt considered the spatial texture of Checkpoint Charlie as the "*bedeutendste(r) Platz der freien Welt*" where the division of both worlds "*begann und endete*" and where the desire for "*Menschenrechte, Demokratie und Freiheit*" defeated oppression and state tyranny (Hildebrandt). Admittedly, Checkpoint Charlie marked a tense point of confrontation between East and West during the Cold War when Soviet and American tanks faced each other in 1961. As part of the collective memory, which even goes beyond national borders, Checkpoint Charlie remains a place where the two ideological concepts of (Western) freedom and (communist) oppression in the East intersected. The significance of this intersection, however, was not limited to a certain place and time. From 1961 on, Checkpoint Charlie developed into what Mikhail Bakhtin calls a *chronotope*: A time-space formation that organizes and structures the understanding of the past through a place that inscribes meaning in the course of time (cf. 15). In other words, the present inscribes meaning onto a historical place and continuously reassesses this meaning according to present needs and future aspirations. Regarding Checkpoint Charlie, the collapse of the GDR (and the Soviet Union) has shifted the meaning from the ideological

struggle of relatively equal superpowers to the triumph of the Western hemisphere over the communist East. It is precisely this interpretation of Checkpoint Charlie that Hildebrandt attempted to inscribe into its texture by dedicating her “Freedom Memorial to *all* the victims of the GDR border regime and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany [...] to whom we owe today’s freedom in unity” (Hildebrandt). Not only is this hyperbolic statement a distortion of historical facts that attempts to glorify the victims and celebrate their deaths as a victory for the free West over the oppressive East, it also reveals a profound anti-communist stance behind Hildebrandt’s installment of 1,065 crosses at Checkpoint Charlie. In order to “keep the spirit and historical importance of the location alive,” Hildebrandt’s working group artificially inflated the “atrocities of the GDR border regime and the Socialist Unity Party of Germany” by including victims that “died trying to escape across the Baltic Sea, at external German borders [or] on other escape paths” (ibid.). In so doing, Hildebrandt had Checkpoint Charlie commemorate not just this specific geography, but also all possible geographic points of communist oppression. Not only was her list of victims very vague in its description, it was also inclusive to the point of historical relativism, for this list also included “killed Soviet deserters” (ibid.). Metaphorically speaking, Hildebrandt and her working group performed a sort of “Gerrymandering” in order to apply a West / East, good / bad schemata that re-appropriated the notion of two hemispheres and ultimately underscored the perception of the “East” as the threatening and dreadful “Other” in contemporary Germany.

The Iconography of the Site

This notion of the threatening and dreadful East was reified in the very iconography of the *Freedom Memorial*. The site’s materiality and aesthetic manifestation suggested a blatant symbolic meaning that signaled a burst of Cold War ideology. By means of two significant symbols, the Wall on the one hand and the Christian symbol of the cross on the other, the memorial embodied what has been irretrievably lost in Berlin: the Wall, which had been “decommissioned” after Germany’s reunification and lost its commemorative function, and the victims (Ladd, *Ghosts* 7). The constellation of the two symbols (120 original Wall panels of 140 meters length and 1,065 wooden crosses, each dedicated to a single victim) and its spatial narrowness conflated

these symbols to an image of a graveyard. The image of a graveyard thus suggested a place where the dead are individually remembered, honored and mourned in a collective space.

Hildebrandt's *Freedom Memorial* rendered Checkpoint Charlie into a *sacralization* of the historical place. The installment's composition in no subtle way alluded to soldiers' cemeteries of the First and Second World War, implying sacrifice in military combat for a collective goal. The sacredness of military cemeteries was thus bestowed upon Checkpoint Charlie. With this resemblance to the war grave image, the *Freedom Memorial* in Berlin intended to establish a link between the two World Wars and the Cold War on an emblematic level, and in so doing drew upon the equalization of the atrocities of the two World Wars with the crimes of the SED-regime of the former GDR. Turning a blind eye to the unfeasibility of equating the Cold War with the atrocities of the two World Wars, which, of course, quantitatively far outnumbered the victims of the GDR, Hildebrandt had difficulties providing information about the 1,065 victims she claimed to commemorate. When Hildebrandt could neither present names nor cause of death for more than twenty of the commemorated victims, historians at the University of Potsdam declared her historical research methods a "*Bankrotterklärung*" (Rogalla).

Nevertheless, the *Freedom Memorial* displayed the wooden crosses, each placarded with the name, age, cause of death and (if available) a picture of an individual victim. In addition to the historical inaccuracy of the re-erected Wall, the symbolism of the crosses stirred up even more controversy. By virtue of this key symbol, the images signified and visualized the fact that many people were killed on German soil. Thus, political parties of the Berlin government soon entered the debate and were particularly sensitive to the imagery of the graveyard. Although it was often insinuated by governmental opponents, especially the more conservative CDU, criticism of the crosses was certainly not an attempt on the part of the ruling liberal parties PDS / SPD to deny or conceal the fact that the SED-regime murdered its own citizens.

As a striking ancient human symbol, the appropriation of this iconography in the context of a memorial puzzled politicians and spectators alike. Although the cross is charged with multiple meanings, it is presented in this specific context as the quite familiar symbol of Christianity and formal Christian burial ceremony. It has thus a particular theological implication. Hence, the appropriation of Christian symbols in the context of the commemoration of SED-victims was a manifest counteraction to the atheistic ideology of the former

communist state in which the church had no place. Even though the Protestant and Catholic Church continued to play some role in the lives of a large segment of the GDR population, the number of church members drastically decreased from the 1970s on due to SED efforts to eliminate or reduce the influence of the church (Kegerreis). To commemorate the victims of the SED-regime by means of this distinct Christian symbol thus underscored once more the ideological stance behind Hildebrandt's installment. The site's iconography demonstrated that the former division "between eastern and western hemispheres," which Hildebrandt claimed to memorialize, still lingered on in a concealed and cryptic way (Hildebrandt). It is thus not surprising that the Catholic Church, seemingly realizing the site's importance as *sacralized* place, even went so far as to publicly bless the crosses on the night before the memorial's demolition. The Evangelical Church offered to relocate the crosses to a dignified location in order to save them (Schulte).

It was precisely the threefold symbolism of the crosses, the pictures of the victims, and the segments of the Wall that made the demolition of the *Freedom Memorial* seem like an act of blasphemy, disrespect towards the victims, and historical insensitivity. The removal of both the wall and the crosses seemed to embody the irresponsible treatment of the Berlin Wall shortly after Germany's reunification and thus echoed the critique of many scholars:

In the summer of 1991, when most of the Wall had been removed, auctioned off, or sold to tourists in bits and pieces, the area was studded with the Wall's steel rods left by the *Mauerspechte* (the wall peckers)...[T]hey powerfully marked the void as second nature and as memorial. (Huyssen 58)

To tear down the re-erected segments of the *Freedom Memorial* would, according to Hildebrandt, simply mean to repeat the same mistake of failed historical preservation and ultimately degrade "historical ground" once again (Fülling, "Die Mauer kommt wieder"). Even if one does not agree with Huyssen, who suggests that the void of the vanished Wall already serves as a commemorative space that renders an artificially constructed memorial site superfluous (58), Hildebrandt's re-erected wall still could not fulfill the role of an appropriate memorial space. This geo-historical incorrectness, as Dorothee Dubrau (Green party) lamented, leads to misperceptions among those (mainly tourists) who are eager to discover places where the Berlin Wall once symbolized the division of West and East, i.e. where the Wall actually stood (ibid).

Resurfacing of the Cold War Rhetoric

Shortly after the site's erection, the fate of the *Freedom Memorial* quickly became a flashpoint of political debate. Property issues and contractual obligations introduced the site to the realm of politics. Hildebrandt had leased the property from the *Bank Aktiengesellschaft* (hereafter BAG) for 35,000 Euro per month until the end of the year 2004. Since the BAG neither agreed to extend the contract nor did Hildebrandt remove the installation after the expiration of the contract, the BAG sued Hildebrandt and won (Schulz, "Ich werde sie wieder aufbauen"). The BAG's offer to the working group to purchase the 1.5-acre (5.717 square meters) parcel for 36 million Euros turned out to be a kind of cat-and-mouse-game between the BAG and the *Arbeitsgruppe 13. August* (Schulz, "DaimlerChrysler") since it was a well-known fact that the museum had suffered severe financial problems in recent years (Verheyen 235). More importantly, city officials who saw Hildebrandt's "spectacular personal action" (Seils) resulting in a site resembling "Disneyland" made it clear that the *Arbeitsgruppe 13. August* could neither hope for financial support from the FRG nor the city of Berlin (Volkery). Based on these facts, one might simply state that this attempt to commemorate the SED-regime failed for solely financial and juridical reasons.

This fairly objective property dispute soon deteriorated into an ideological quarrel. In one of the first public statements, Thomas Flierl – Senator of Cultural Affairs (PDS) – pointed the finger at the "distortion of historical facts" (Seils). Such seemingly unbiased statements by politicians, however, masked an ideologically charged rhetoric, originating in the 28-year long division of East and West. An attempt to memorialize this Cold War legacy demands an unencumbered process of historical interpretation, meaningful examination, and democratic negotiation. The debates, however, revealed how quickly the allegedly overcome ideological stances can resurface. In the case of Hildebrandt's push for a memorial favoring a rather plain and heavy-handed aesthetic, the reactions of city officials exposed current (ideological) splits in the Berlin government. The debate made apparent the dichotomy of the conservative Christian Democratic Union (CDU) on the one hand, and on the other the ruling coalition of the Berlin government from 2002 to 2006, consisting of the liberal Social Democratic Party (SPD) and the

Party of Democratic Socialism (PDS) (the latter being the successor party of the former SED; today *Die Linke*).

The CDU supported Hildebrandt's idea to remember and honor the victims since the party traditionally commits itself to a strong relationship with the United States and thus felt obliged to honor the achievements of the victorious superpower of the Cold War. Accordingly, Joachim Zeller – chairman for the CDU in Berlin – admonished Berlin's government for an “unbearable, disgraceful, and shameful” treatment of Checkpoint Charlie, a place “whose name was well-known all over the world” (Fülling, “Joachim Zeller”). He furthermore expressed the hope that the coalition would realize that Hildebrandt merely attempted to draw their attention to the decade-long neglect of a dignified remembrance of the Wall and its victims. The political opponents accused one another of historical reductionism and revisionism. While the CDU stressed that the PDS would simply neglect the legacies of the SED-regime, the PDS and especially Thomas Flierl felt that the CDU supported the *Freedom Memorial* in order to foster the fear and suspicion towards the former East and, more importantly, the political and cultural inheritors of the former GDR, namely the PDS.

The court's decision to demolish the *Freedom Memorial* further divided the Berlin government. According to Flierl, the artificial wall and the “jungle of crosses” (Gessler, “Abseitige Mauer”) were a “tasteless” attempt to “reconstruct anxiety and atrocities” (Hüttel). After Flierl's remark that “a contract is a contract” and the demolition of the site was juridically unavoidable (Klausmeier, “Kulturpolitiker”), CDU politicians expressed their suspicion that the PDS simply wanted to forget the atrocities of the former regime (Ladd, “Niemand hat die Absicht”). Even though Flierl promised a *Gedenkkonzept Berliner Mauer* at Checkpoint Charlie to replace the *Freedom Memorial*, the CDU was quick to dismiss these plans: “[Flierl] is just not the right gardener for a new memorial landscape” (Hüttel).

With the attempt to “discuss the memorial site without polemic,” the *Kulturforum* in Berlin organized a debate with delegations of the Berlin government (Gessler, “Häme”). However, the ideologically charged rhetoric undermined the intended reconciliation of this event. CDU Secretary for Cultural Affairs, Uwe Lehmann-Brauns, was convinced that Flierl's behavior could be attributed to his communist past: “He simply wanted to get rid of the memory of the Wall. He belongs to the circle of perpetrators of the pre-1989 years anyway” (ibid.). In an interview with *Die Welt*, Flierl explained that his SED-party membership before reunification had nothing to do with his objections

to the *Freedom Memorial*. Consequently, he reminded the German public and his political opponents that the PDS exercised a radical break with the former SED-party after Germany's reunion (Flier).

Regardless of Flier's attempt to place the discussion in a post-Cold War and ideology-free realm, the supporters of the *Freedom Memorial*, mostly CDU politicians and organized groups of former SED-victims, employed even stronger Cold War rhetoric. The accusation that the PDS-SPD coalition simply wanted to "erase" the memory of the SED-victims by "killing the victims twice" when demolishing the memorial on July 4, 2005 elevated the discussion to an international level (Ritzmann). The United States as the former superpower of the Western hemisphere entered the debate and called for action: Together with the CDU party, US-American republicans planned to lay a wreath for the victims on the day of the demolition (Sontheimer). They endeavored to underscore the coalition's ideological motives for the demolition, but in so doing, they also perpetuated the ideological binary of East and West.

Roughly one week before the demolition, the DaimlerChrysler AG wrote in a letter to the BAG that the historical site Checkpoint Charlie remains the responsibility of the US even after reunification. Hence, the demolition of the memorial would betray the significance of the site Checkpoint Charlie (Schulz, "DaimlerChrysler"). Even more striking is the letter by Theodor Hans, retired intelligence officer for the US Army, to the US Diplomat in Germany, John Cloud. Hans urged the diplomat to convince the Berlin Senate to keep the memorial since it would honor not only the victims of the GDR-regime but also "the memory of the US efforts and sacrifices made during the Cold War and in defense of West Berlin" (Hildebrandt). As *Die Welt* reported, Cloud sent a letter to Hildebrandt with words of encouragement: "We can do it...because Checkpoint Charlie is an important place for the entire world." He remained silent, though, regarding any concrete political action (Schulz, "Ketten").

Many US newspapers, however, considered the scheduled date for the demolition, July 4, as an affront to the United States. It was speculated that the red-red government of Berlin had scheduled that date on purpose to show their lack of respect towards the US and everything they had done for (West) Germany ("Berlin Demolishes Cold War Memorial on July 4"). The critique from abroad influenced the government to postpone the demolition to July 5 without providing any concrete explanation. The postponement, however, showed how effective the interference of the United States was, especially since the danger of damaging the diplomatic relationship of the two states became

an issue. In retrospect, the interference of the United States in the *Freedom Memorial* debate did not result in any severe diplomatic conflicts. It made apparent, however, that both the United States and a significant part of the West German population still felt threatened by a communist political system that lost its infrastructural, socio-political and state-sponsored materiality with the collapse of the Soviet Union, but whose spirit seems to linger on even after existing socialism has been overcome.

Conclusion

The discussion about the Cold War past in general and Checkpoint Charlie in particular reflects differing conceptions of Germany as a modern nation-state after reunification. Complicated by still existing ideological stances, the negotiations about Germany's memory culture is by nature a search for a cultural identity after a 28-year long division of the two German states. In order to carve out a viable future identity, monuments and memorials constitute a re-casting and re-definition of often significant portions of public space and amount to public statements about the content and goal of this enterprise (Verheyen 23-24). Insofar as the installment at Checkpoint Charlie vanished, and future concepts of how to commemorate the site and its meaning have not yet been realized, we can assume that the cultural reconciliation necessary for the democratic process of memorialization has not yet been achieved. The lacking reconciliation and the inability to confront the past critically and without prejudice complicates the struggle to conceptualize a "new Germany," as historian Konrad Jarausch puts it (18). Considering that Berlin's memorial landscape is uniquely politicized since no other Western European city has experienced such turmoil and transition, the analysis of the *Freedom Memorial* provided remarkable discursive insights into Germany's state of cultural identity and self-perception after reunification.

The consensus is that there are many questions that will have to be answered in the future about what the appropriate form of Cold War commemoration is. This is particularly problematic since – as Jarausch argues – the historic rupture of 1989 had a profound effect not only on German identity as a reunited nation-state, but also on the identity formation of single individuals, especially those who lived in the former East state (9). The disappearance of the separated states and its ruling

parties has threatened to devalue a considerable part of individual lives. Many people who believed in the system of the GDR feel increasingly deprived of their life history and of their memories. They remained, not surprisingly, often silent in both the discussion about the *Freedom Memorial* and the appropriate way to commemorate the atrocities of a system they believed in for over four decades. The collision of multiple perceptions and interpretations of the past, which renders a consensus difficult to achieve, was complicated by yet another group that sought to see their interests represented. The voices of those who lost loved ones to the SED-regime contributed an emotional element to the debate. They emphasized that a 28-year long separation of West and East demanded, in the first instance, mourning. For many of them, Hildebrandt's memorial seemed to come closer to fulfilling the needs of mourning than any other official attempt to memorialize the victims of the SED-regime hitherto. The site thus functioned as a replacement *Trauerort* because many deaths went undocumented and bodies were often neither recovered nor returned to the respective families: "For a long time," says Gino Proksch, brother of a Wall-victim, "we didn't even know that he was dead [...]. At this memorial we can at least mourn him" (Schulz, "Ort der Trauer"). While official memorials focused on either 'all victims' of the Wall or individual martyrs, the *Freedom Memorial* seemed to individualize and centralize victimhood and to give the Wall-victims a higher profile in Berlin's urban landscape.

Despite its obvious historical inaccuracy, its heavy-handed iconography and its manifest ideological stance, the *Freedom Memorial* temporarily provided a seemingly needed place to mourn in post-reunified Germany. With the *Freedom Memorial* now dismantled and other future plans in limbo, it remains to be seen whether or not new sites will perform similar functions, make similar mistakes and form new paradigms in German memory politics. The political and public discourse about the *Freedom Memorial*, however, laid bare that "places of memory" often become "places of memory politics" since ideological barriers are still not overcome and continue to linger in the political culture of a once divided, and now unified Germany (Till, "Places" 289).

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