The Culture of Memory in the "Grandchildren Generation" in Denmark

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The purpose of this article is to present an empirical study of the culture of memory of World War II and the German occupation of Denmark within the "grandchildren generation" in Denmark. This generation's culture of memory presents both continuities reaching back to the national master narrative established in the immediate postwar years, and recent developments allowing new perspectives and narratives to come into view, without totally wiping out older ones. In the following, I shall characterize the culture of memory of the third generation using examples from one individual interview and one group interview with members of this generation in pointing to the characteristics of *internationalization, victimization, universalization and identification.* Finally I will outline some didactical possibilities and challenges posed by the uses of history of WWII presented within this generation's culture of memory.

The findings to be presented in this article stems from the Danish part of the European research project "Traditions of Historical Consciousness" (Welzer 2007). The project was a follow-up on a German study on the transition of memory of the Third Reich within German families in three generations (Welzer et al. 2002). Within the same framework, the European project offered a comparative perspective on the traditions of historical consciousness within the Netherlands, Norway, Denmark, Serbia, Croatia and Switzerland (Welzer et al. 2007). From 2002 to 2005, 20 Danish families in three generations were interviewed on the transition of memories of the German Occupation and WWII within these families. Furthermore, a series of focus group interviews with members from the same generation were conducted to follow

the exchanges on WWII amongst representatives from the same generations. In this article I shall be presenting empirical examples from an individual as well as a focus group interview in order to exemplify some of the findings, which were developed on the basis of the Danish material as well as comparisons within the overall project.

The analytical concepts of "the culture of memory" and "uses of the past" to be used throughout the article are to a certain extent chosen in line with the argumentation put forward by Karlsson in his discussion on the concept of historical consciousness and the analytical operationalization into "historical culture" and "uses of history" (See the contribution by Karlsson). Still, within this specific context I find "culture of memory" more appropriate, as the concept of memory alludes more to the private, un-official ways of using and presenting the past than does the concept of the culture of history. Moreover, memories as well as historical consciousness were the concepts used within the research project as a whole.

World War II – An image of significance

As an introduction to the subject matter I will present an extract from a focus group interview conducted with young people born after 1975. Whereas the individual interviews conducted in the study took a national starting point, the focus group interviews were prompted by five photographs mainly depicting scenes to be interpreted as relating to WWII and, to a lesser extent, to the occupation of Denmark.[1] In the interview, the participants were asked to relate to the photographs, an opening which raised a discussion amongst them on which pictures they found most significant in relation to their historical consciousness of WWII:

Karina: THAT picture, number three. That's really the sort of picture where you think of World War II, of a concentration camp. [...] At least that's what I

1 The five photographs depicted "familiar" scenes from WWII, but were not known icons. As such, the photographs had a certain vagueness allowing for the associations of the interviewees to place the pictures into the historical context. The pictures were: 1: Inhabitants fleeing during the last days of fighting in Berlin, 1945. 2. Stukas taking off from an airstrip in the Soviet Union 1941. 3: A starved Soviet prisoner of war in the camp Stalag 326 1941/42. 4. A pile of corpses in a barren landscape showing "The church yard" of the satellite camp Adabasch, 1941. 5. A Danish Woman who had tried to use a German uniform as disguise, but was discovered and dragged through the crowds in the streets by two armed resistance fighters with armbands.

think of, when I think of World War II, then I think of the terrible things that happened, of the concentration camps. And that is such a [...] [apologizing giggle] typical picture showing such a starved man. [...]
Mikkel: I do not think of it in quite the same way. [...] It's not like, when I say World War II, that's not what I think of first. [...] Then I'm more into war/
Louise: Like picture number two.
Mikkel: Yeah, pictures with war [scenes] and so on.
Karina: Airplanes.
Louise: I think number two is a bit 'Pearl Harbor-like' [the movie].
Mikkel: Actually, I don't think about it [the Holocaust]/ I mean, I know it's there, when I think about it for longer, but when I think of World War II it's war and airplanes.

This brief discussion addresses three features characterizing the culture of memory which will be dealt with in this article. Firstly, it shows the workings of the iconography of the culture of memory where different icons link up to different narratives of WWII.

The narratives may be related in some ways, but to a certain extent they also lead separate lives within the culture of memory. Significant icons are images of the Holocaust, of battlefield scenes, of Hitler and National Socialism, but also icons relating to the national narrative of the German occupation in Denmark like rationing cards, curfews, resistance. Secondly, I shall later be making a point concerning Karina's pause and apologizing giggle when referring to the picture of the starved man as "typical". It is my assertion that this giggle is a gateway to the emotional landscape, which this generation moves into when touching upon the memory of the Holocaust. In that sense, the Holocaust takes up a specific and significant place within the culture of memory still it also exposes some more general features related to the quest for identification, but also the tendency of universalization in the use of history. Finally, we see how Louise refers to the movie "Pearl Harbour" in her attempt to interpret the significance and meaning of the historical material on the table. This points to the ways in which this generation draws on very different sources and references when dealing with the past, and more-over how they use the past in different ways and for different ends.

A long-lived master narrative of the Occupation

Below I have chosen to let 19-year-old Amalie speak on behalf of her generation, as I intend to use the individual interview with her as an example of how the culture of memory can be said to work within the third generation. In the interview quoted above, the imaginary prompted by

the photos was mainly focusing on WWII and the Holocaust in an international perspective, whereas the individual interviews were designed to take the national context of the war as their starting point by asking what the grandparents had told about the occupation of Denmark:

Amalie: He (Her grandfather. HB) did tell about the air raid shelters and that you sometimes could hear planes roaring in the sky and things like that. And something about the girls who slept with the soldiers, some Danish girls who had relations with the soldiers and had their hair cut off. It has probably always been those kinds of things that have interested me [...]. And people who said they were on the Danish side, but who were actually on the side of the Germans. Traitors, they were called.
Helle: What do you think about how it was for people, if you should put it in you own words?
Amalie: Then I think that the solidarity was probably strong in some ways. So even though it was negative, it probably also brought people closer together. And, well, one lived in insecurity, and that must have been really awful, but in another way it has/ I see people as very close. That people were brought together. That is how it is with hard times and times of distress.

Amalie gives a very condensed and conventional version of what Bryld and Warring frame as the master narrative of the Danish occupation (Bryld/Warring 1998: 55 pp.). This narrative puts forward an exclusively national perspective and offers a mythically charged image of a small nation, occupied by a greater enemy, but at the same time united in either open, military resistance or quiet support by the whole population. Within this narrative, the policy of collaboration is regarded as a prerequisite for protecting the people while at the same time opening up other ways in which resistance could be expressed. Furthermore, a very clear line is drawn between the united Danish people on "the right side" and groups on "the wrong side" such as Danish members of the National Socialist Party, volunteers on the Eastern Front, collaborators, girls with romantic relationships with German soldiers and their children. These individuals or groups are excluded from the national community of resistance, and as such did not only experience different forms and degrees of social stigmatization and exclusion in the aftermath of the war, but are also excluded from the national master narrative. In a comparative perspective it is interesting and relevant to point to the resemblance between the Danish and the Norwegian master narrative (Eriksen 1995) as well as the way it functions within the third generation's culture of memory (Lenz 2007).

The national master narrative functions as a main interpretative framework within the third generation, not least in understanding and

narrativizing the memories of the grandparents. This can be seen in the quote where Amalie refers to how the memories of grandfather "fit" the overall national narrative. In this way the national and the "local" memories of the family are closely woven together, as the master narrative exerts a homogenizing effect on the culture of memory in the sense that stories or memories differing from this narrative are either not told or overheard because they do not fit this interpretative framework. Moreover, this quote points to a pattern of relating to the Occupation as a time of hardship, but also of solidarity and a sense of community, which is seen as the opposite to the stressful and individualistic conditions of today. The Occupation is a period when the choices to be made where few and simple – and where people stood together: "Sometimes I long for that time even if I never lived it myself", as a young woman says. Even when the grandchildren take an ironic stance towards their romanticizing view on the Occupation, they still draw on the mythical interpretation of the master narrative, where the Occupation both becomes a signifier for a battle between "good and evil" and simultaneously "the good old days".

New narratives – new perspectives

In the Danish culture of memory the national master narrative has existed alongside, but often not related to the international history of WWII or, as pointed out by Karlsson, the international events is seen from a national perspective. This pattern can still be found within the younger generation, but is also slightly in the process of reconfiguration: Firstly, the exclusively national perspective is often related to or compared with the international context of WWII, and secondly, WWII and especially the Holocaust is gaining influence as a point of reference. This tendency shows itself in the individual interviews prompted by a national context, as these interviews very often include comparisons as "it was much worse elsewhere" and that the Norwegians or the German people suffered much more. In the case of Amalie, the international perspective emerges in the shape of narratives of the Third Reich, the Holocaust and the role of the German people. Amalie expresses the necessity of preserving the material remnants of the concentration camps in order to be able to confront people claiming that the Holocaust never happened. Furthermore, she very explicitly reflects on how her understanding of the situation of the German people was reconfigured when reading the novel "Lunch with Mussolini". She stresses how reading this novel gave her a new perspective on the living conditions of a German family dur-

ing the Third Reich, leading her to a new understanding of how the Third Reich could come about. Amalie highlights the importance of seeing history "from both sides" as opposed to her experience of history teaching in school where the history was only seen from "the perspective of the Jews": *Which is fair enough, but a lot of the other stuff is lacking, I think. It's only now after reading this book that I've* [...] *You always knew that they didn't have freedom of expression, that they were deceived. But now I have had it put into words how it was. I hadn't read about it before, I hadn't been able to feel it myself. And that's what you can do, when you read fiction or see a movie.* Applying the terminology on reflective historical thinking presented by Andreas Körber in this volume, one might say that Amalie reconstructs the narrative of the Third Reich and the Holocaust when she appropriates this new perspective into her understanding. At the same time she starts asking more *deconstructive* questions when she reflects on how the history of WWII and the Holocaust has previously been presented to her. In the reorientation of her historical consciousness on the Third Reich, the case of Amalie exemplifies yet another two features of the memory culture of her generation. Firstly, she draws a moral or at least political connection between the past and the present by using the history of the Third Reich to point to the importance of a democratic government allowing free speech and discussion, seeing the lack of free speech as one of the preconditions for the Third Reich (See Karlsson's article in this volume for elaborations on this "politico-pedagogical" use of history).

Secondly, this reorientation leads her to positioning the German people as victims – not only perpetrators – of the war. With this move, Amalie points towards a very significant feature in the memory culture of the third generation. Here it seems that inclusion into a history of WWII relates strongly to being assigned a role as a *victim*. In a way this victimization means that an individual or a group can be freed from guilt and become legitimate subjects of history, but at the same time they become objects of history as their role as active agents is transformed into rather passive victims (See Ahonen in this volume for a discussion of victimization within the culture memory). Within the interview material as a whole, this change of position and/or the process of being rewritten into history, is to some extent shared by the German people; the girls who had romantic and sexual relationships with German soldiers, Danish volunteers on the eastern front, as well as the German soldiers constituting the occupying power in Denmark[2].

2 This tendency may partly be due to the fact that since the mid 1990s new historical research has been conducted on the history of some of these

Relating the case of Amalie to the general description of the culture of memory of her generation, I would say that her case shows the significance and perseverance of the national master narrative in structuring what seems relevant in history and what meaning to gather from this period. Still, she also represents the tendency of developing a more international perspective, but first and foremost she exemplifies the strength of the configuration of the victim as an important signifying figure within the memory culture of the younger generations.

The emotional imperative of the Holocaust

Moving beyond the national context, the Holocaust holds a strong position in the memory culture of the younger generation. And compared to the former generations – the grandparents' and parents' generation – it seems that the Holocaust is gaining influence and seems to be more present within the memory culture of the third generation. There is no doubt that for the younger generation the Holocaust represents the strongest lesson to be learned from the WW II. Whereas *"Never another April ninth"*, referring to the starting date of the German occupation in Denmark, was the motto of the national master narrative and in that sense of the generation of the grandparents, *"Never another Holocaust"* could be said to be the motto of the younger generation.

A certain explanatory framework is applied in order to explain "how it could happen" when referring to the Holocaust. In the case of Amalie, as well as in many other interviews, the explanations point to Hitler – his demagogical capabilities, his reconstruction of Germany in a time of worldwide economical crisis, but also the fear and lack of alternatives of the Germans involved in the genocide. And again we see how the openness of the third generation towards integrating perspectives previously excluded from the public memory culture, takes the form of victimization.

Furthermore, there is also a strong tendency to use WWII and the Holocaust as steppingstones for referring to present wars (at the time of the interviews the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq were the most acute) and recent atrocities and genocides. When connections are made between the historical events of WWII and the Holocaust and present conflicts, it is mainly not in the form of specific historical or factual comparison or analysis. In that sense WWII and the Holocaust are not treated as specif-

groups within Denmark. Se Bundgaard et al. 1998; Lylloff 1999; Warring 1994.

ic events within specific historical developments, but rather as icons or symbols of war and evil as such:

Dorthe: [...] That picture [number three], it also resembles that famous picture from Yugoslavia.
Michael: Yes.
Peter: It does, actually.
Interviewer: I hadn't thought about that, actually.
Jens: That's just 'history repeating itself'.
Dorthe & Anders: Oh yes!

As was the case with the nostalgic tone in the use of the Danish occupation, the past is dealt with in an a-historical way, where the Holocaust is treated as a universal example of the theme of evil and inhumanity replayed and repeated. In the quote above this occurs in the form of an iconographic resemblance, also exemplifying how memory is collectively shared and constructed (Welzer et al. 2002). Within the reference to these icons of memory, while not actually unfolding the specificities or the meaning attached to them, it seems that there is a common ground of understanding, which I have elsewhere described as a shared "encyclopedia of public memory" (Bjerregaard/Bjerg/Lenz 2006).

Furthermore, the Holocaust does not only act as a moral imperative, but also as what I have chosen to call an emotional imperative. Let us look again at Karina's apologizing giggle referred to in the beginning. I suggest that by interrupting herself when referring to the picture as "typical", Karina reflects an unease which is sensitive to the question of whether or not it is appropriate to deal with the Holocaust as any other historical event and in that sense treating human suffering as "representative" or "typical".

Later in the same interview the participants discuss their difficulties in relating to the Holocaust:

Louise: But then again, just imagine if it were you. If you try to put yourself in the shoes of those people [...] really, really try to relate to how it would be if somebody just decided 'Your race is not good enough, because you are 1.70 or something' [...]
Karina: I just think, the first time I visited a concentration camp/ I think, I've tried it three times/ Then I was completely/ I mean, I felt sick/ And you were shown where they were gassed and you walked around in there/ And I just thought it was SO disgusting and I felt like crying and was beside myself, but already the second time, a year and a half later, when I also went on a trip where you went by a concentration camp/ Of course it was still TOTALLY

disgusting, but still/ Then I also thought my own reaction was disgusting, that you already/ I still thought it was really awful, but that I/
Louise: You took it a bit easier/Lighter?
Karina: Yeah, a bit lighter than the first time. [...]
Jesper: It's terrible, but I think it's hard to imagine it for yourself/ I must admit that I didn't feel sick/ It's terrible and disgusting, of course, that it could happen, but [...] I don't know why it doesn't affect me so much, but [...] I can easily see that it's terrible, also what you're saying, that it's been seen so many times, that you've heard the story again and again and seen so much on film, that you're kind of fed up with it.

What is discussed here is how to approach the Holocaust – or rather what it does to you when you approach the Holocaust. Following this discussion it seems that there is an imperative to feel both a certain horror and disgust when confronted with the issue, and a capability to identify with "how it felt" to be in the position of the victim. [3]

This "emotional imperative" carries with it didactical possibilities as well as challenges. On the one hand it supports the position of the Holocaust within the culture of memory as an event still regarded as highly relevant to relate to, learn about and learn from. On the other hand it may also put forward a way of dealing with the Holocaust where feeling the appropriate and the strongest emotions becomes the measure of "getting it right". In that sense the emotions set the standard for the scale on which the approach to the Holocaust is measured and evaluated, in the sense that "if you don't feel – you fail". Again there seem to be common traits in the memory culture within Denmark and Norway. As an example, crying seems to be obligatory after the emotional detour into the past in the "White Buses to Auschwitz"-trips attended by app. 10.000 young Norwegians every year (Kverndokk 2007). Going back to Karina's apologetic giggle and her reflection on her three visits to concentration camps, I think her giggling can be interpreted as a kind of apology for her approach to the picture of the unique suffering of this one individual, who is at the same time a representative of so many other individuals that the suffering becomes immense. By referring to this picture as "typical" it seems that she offends the suffering which should not be typified or analyzed, but left untouched and respected – or sacred, one might say. The following discussion also shows the risk of banalization (Eschebach 2005) in the form of a wearing-out of the emotional appeal of the remnants, the pictures, the stories of the Holocaust; You get "fed up" or "It's not shocking any longer". Another element in banalization

3 In the overall project a very similar discussion can be found in focus group interview with Dutch youngsters (Jensen/Moller 2007: 236 pp.)

points to the moral function of the Holocaust where it is lifted out of the historical context and is taken, on account of its immensity and incomprehensibility, to represent pure evil. The use here is related to emptying the past of any specific historical content and using it as a reference for the necessity of respecting human rights and preventing human atrocities.

The didactical challenges to be singled out here is pointing to the need of balancing the immediate emotional appeal and identification within the confrontation with the Holocaust, with the competence of reconstruction and understanding of the historical specificities leading to the occurrences within the emblematic issue of the Holocaust. This may again form the basis for an analysis of what the many complex "lessons to be learned" are, rather than extracting only one single essential message.

Using media – using the past

The final question to be addressed is how this culture of memory gets established or, more specifically, what sources the young generation draw on in constructing their relationship to WWII and the Holocaust.

Firstly, this generation's culture of memory clearly shows that the sources for developing historical consciousness are definitely not made up of formal history education alone. Media such as film and television are very much drawn upon as sources of knowledge, interest and identification, but also the narratives of their grandparents are identified as important. Still, the national master narrative of the Occupation forms an interpretative framework for what counts as relevant within the culture of memory.

When Louise remarks "It's a bit Pearl Harbor-like", she flashes a significant feature of this generation. Very often fiction – first of all movies but also novels – is used as a reference for "how it was" or for what kind of stories have made an impression. The standard reference in a Danish context is the television series "Matador" dealing with the period before and during the war in a small Danish provincial town. The series was shown on Danish television several times during the last decades, making the narrative and iconography a common reference point for all three generations,also references to movies occur very often in the third generation interviews. In the group interview quoted above there are media references like "Pearl Harbor", "Schindler's List", "Das Boot", the television series "Band of Brothers", the Anne Frank diary. In addition, especially the boys seem to be consumers of documentaries (on

Discovery). The media referred to also point to the way WWII and the Holocaust is "used" today. Here there is definitely an element of entertainment in the way the media products are consumed, but at the same time the media also create a basis for identification, for opening up to new narratives and perspectives, for gaining knowledge and for further questioning. The significance of movies for the culture of memory may fortify the tendency of a morally oriented use of the past as movies nearly always feature one or two main actors or stars. These are depicted as real persons having to make tough moral choices. This, of course, strengthens the image of WWII as a moral war where the choices of the few determined the fate of the many. Furthermore, the family tales also have this structure, where moral high ground is claimed – even when resistance was only lived out passively.

To sum up, the interviews show a wide range of ways of using history. Moreover, as far as their use of different types of media is concerned, such as fictional movies, documentaries, and computer games the younger generation can be said to use the history of WWII for entertainment and "infotainment". Another – and very different – usage is their way of integrating the past into moral considerations of right and wrong, the kind of usage termed "politico-pedagogical" by Karlsson in this volume. Within this usage, the Occupation or WWII is related to issues such as human rights or war, but very often the connection is made in ways that lift the historical incidents out of the historical context, dehistoricizing and universalizing them in the process. The national narrative is also used in a nostalgic form as a frame of projection for a bygone time "when life was simple and there was still such a thing as solidarity". In this usage, the past turns into a mythical landscape that is very much in contrast to the complexity and confusion of today. Still, there are also tendencies of a highly reflective way of dealing with the past related to the way in which new perspectives are challenging the national master narrative. Here, some of the informants do not use the past for moral judgment, but rather as a source of moral reflection on the dilemmas of the people then and of themselves now, dilemmas without any clear answers.

The varied uses of different media as sources not only for gaining knowledge, but also for generating interest, excitement and identification concerning WWII and the Holocaust, pose fruitful challenges for history teaching aiming at the development of reflective historical thinking through the development of competencies. It invites history teaching of any kind to work both with and against different types of representations of WWII and the Holocaust, in the sense that it needs to enable pupils/students/visitors to use the principles of reconstruction and decon-

struction (See Körber and Lenz for theoretical and empirical elaborations of these principles) as well as concepts for assessing and discussing the quality and reliability or rather plausibility of the media products consumed. In the interviews conducted in this study, movies or books are very often used in arguments for a certain position or fact in relation to the history of WWII without any kind of reflection on the reliability of the source or of the specificities connected to the kind of narrative presented by one form of media or the other.

Conclusion

The specific study of the memory culture of the third generation in Denmark does not only reflect specific Danish or generational features. In relation to the findings of the overall project of "Transitions of Historical Consciousness", the characteristics of the memory culture put forward here also reflect broader tendencies, both in a generational and an international perspective (Jensen/Moller 2007; Welzer et al. 2007). To sum up, the memory culture of the third generation can be said to oscillate different "layers" of memory culture: The national master narrative of the Danish Occupation provides an encyclopedia of icons of memory and an exclusive narrative of the Danish people united in solidarity and resistance against both the outer enemy and the different groups of "traitors". This narrative carries a clear moral lesson of resistance and solidarity to be learned. Still, this narrative is also subject to a certain degree of questioning and reflection as the perspectives of hitherto excluded groups and themes are brought to the fore and are being incorporated into the culture of memory. This process is what Jensen and Moller have coined the "de-heroicized" version of the national past, which seems to exist alongside the narrative of "being on the right side" within the third generation (Jensen/Moller 2007: 255). Moreover, the new tendencies within the culture of memory seem to be trans-generational, but perhaps somewhat more distinct within the third generation. These tendencies take the form of: *internationalization*, not least in the way the Holocaust moves even further into focus; *victimization*, where new groups, narratives and perspectives are included, but mainly by passing as victims; *universalization* in the sense that the events of the war and the Holocaust are lifted out of the historical context and related to general moral issues such as human rights, (evils of) war, genocide – as "the lesson to be learned". Finally, members of the third generation show a widespread tendency to relate to the past by seeking *identification* and stressing the importance of being able to project oneself into history by feeling the

horror, the disgust, and the anxiety. The last feature seems not least to be facilitated by the types and the ways in which different forms of media are used in relating to WWII. In that sense the immensity of the historical events still reaches out – it shocks, touches and offends – or at least they are approached as something that should. It only leaves us with the didactical challenge of what to do when affect is not enough.

As such, the didactical challenges and potentials of this development within memory culture are like two sides of a coin: The way in which the events of the Occupation, WWII and the Holocaust still bear the sign of both relevance and interest or excitement for the third generation paves the way for an engagement in and with this period of history. Simultaneously, it represents a danger in diffusing two features of history: On one side the mere fact of specific events in the past. On the other side hand history as the fact of existing in time, which is related to the process of sense making in time. This is what Karlsson in his contribution describes as a delicate balance between the genetic and the genealogical perspectives of history. Moreover, it points to the question, also raised by Karlsson, on whether there is such a thing as an abuse of history. In a didactical perspective one might say that the challenge is to assure and facilitate both processes of identification, not least with shared human themes of, for instance, suffering or agency and choice, but also de-identification and analysis of historical specificities. A reflection of this double-sided challenge could be a history teaching which welcomes the varied forms of media drawn upon by the youngsters as well as the varied usages of history related to this period on the one hand, and on the other hand confronting this with the development of the competences of both reconstruction and deconstruction and for assessing and discussing reliability and validity. This would require the application of both conventional concepts of history as a scholarly discipline and the development of competencies for distinguishing between different types of narratives and media (See the contributions by Körber and Lenz respectively for a theoretical and empirical elaboration on this thinking). If history education about WWII, the Holocaust and related themes only "go with the flow" of identification and universalization, the potential reflection and knowledge based analysis of historical specificities and not least its complexities may be lost. On the other hand the aim must be to fertilize the sense of relevance and relatedness to the past which these themes seem to offer in ways that also leave space for the development of personally relevant meaning-making processes.

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