The Norwegian Fascist Monument at Stiklestad 1944-45

TOR EINAR FAGERLAND AND TROND RISTO NILSSEN

In 1944, the Norwegian national socialist party, Nasjonal Samling (NS), erected a large monument at the historically and symbolically important place of Stiklestad in central Norway. A few days after the May 1945 liberation, the monument was demolished and removed by the Norwegian resistance movement, with the exception of a nine meter tall obelisk, which was too big to be removed. The obelisk was instead torn down and buried at the site.

Raised by Norwegian ultra-nationalists, and not by the German occupants, the monument represents a difficult and ambiguous part of Norwegian war history that does not agree well with clear-cut distinctions between the German aggressor on the one side, and a united Norwegian opposition on the other. Since 2006, attempts have been underway to uncover remains of the monument.[1] The idea is to make a partial excavation of the buried obelisk, and to produce a study exhibition at the site, focusing on uses and abuses of the past, problematic features of nationalism and the handling of difficult aspects of the past in contemporary Norway. After giving an introduction to the historical site of Stiklestad, this paper first discusses the NS-monument in the light of international literature on historical places, monuments and counter-monuments. It then turns to the didactic challenges and potential of the buried monument, discussing how a painful and ambiguous past might become a tool for reflection and dialogue.

1 The authors of this paper are both members of a task group established by the board at Stiklestad National Culture Centre in 2006. See Raaen 2007.

Stiklestad: A place of history – a place of memory

For almost one thousand years, Stiklestad has remained Norway's most important historical place. Stiklestad is important for both political and religious reasons and plays an important part in the Norwegian collective memory on a local, regional and national level.[2] Its fame dates back to 1030, when Stiklestad was the scene of a great battle where the Christian king Olav II Haraldsson (1015-1030) was killed by his opponents. Shortly after the battle, rumours of the dead king's healing power started to circulate. Defeat was turned into victory as the dead king was sanctified.[3] After the battle, Olav was moved to Nidaros, and miracle stories connected to St. Olav soon turned Nidaros into an important destination for pilgrims.[4] The legacy of St. Olav also made Nidaros and central Norway a natural choice for the new archbishop's seat in Norway in 1153. In addition, "ruling on behalf of St. Olav – the eternal king of Norway" became an important part of the political legitimacy of all later medieval kings in Norway (Krag 2003: 117). The battle of Stiklestad in 1030 thereby marks the breakthrough of both Christianity and a unified national kingdom in Norway.

In the nationalist era of the late 19th and early 20th century, Stiklestad became a popular venue for national gatherings. In 1930, 40 000 people attended the 900-year anniversary of the battle in 1030. The NS, whose establishment in 1933 was inspired by the NSDAP's ascent to power in Germany, chose to gather at Stiklestad already in 1934. At St. Olav's Day on 29 July 1944, the party celebrated the 10th anniversary of its presence at the site.

Today, an annually recurring expression of the place's symbolic value is found in the play "The Saint Olav drama", staged at Scandinavia's largest open air theatre. The play, which was first performed in 1954, attracts an annual number of 20 000 spectators and is the result of exten-

2 The use of the term "collective memory" has been criticized for its vagueness. The critics have, however, not yet been able to introduce a more satisfactory analytical tool for understanding the social dimension of memory. And as the British historian Bill Niven points out: "Its very vagueness, perhaps, is the source not just to our dissatisfaction with it, but also of its appeal" (Niven 2008: 427-436).

3 The cult connected to the dead king spread out throughout Scandinavia and Northern Europe. In England he soon became the most popular saint, and the worship of St. Olav has left traces all over the British Isles, the oldest one dating back to the 1160s. See Krag 2003:116

4 Nidaros is the historical name of today's city of Trondheim. Norway's third largest city, Trondheim is located ninety kilometres south of Stiklestad.

sive cooperation between professionals from across the country and local amateurs and volunteers (Kvistad 2003).

Picture 1: Stiklestad 1930. At the 900-years anniversary of the battle of Stiklestad approximately 40 000 people gathered at the site.

Photo credit: Alf Dahling, Stiklestad Nasjonale Kultursenter, Norway.

NS and Stiklestad

The NS came to power in 1940, with the help of the German occupants. The party was based partly on a national socialist ideology, partly on a radical version of traditional national values (Sørensen 1989: 27-70). While in power, it worked energetically to promote its own interpretation of traditional Norwegian values and symbols. In order to legitimize its collaboration with the German occupants and the attempt to convert Norway into a national socialist society, NS made extensive use of old-Norse history (Sørensen 1998: 27-46).

Picture 2: Vidkun Quisling unveils the monument in 1944.

Photo credit: Unknown, Stiklestad Nasjonale Kultursenter, Norway.

By means of the monument at Stiklestad the party aimed to establish a spiritual and ideological link between the medieval king and patron saint, King Olav Haraldsson, and the party leader, Vidkun Quisling (Mehle 1944: 211). The monument was created by the famous sculptor and NS-member Wilhelm Rasmussen, and in contrast to previous and later installations at Stiklestad, the NS-monument was huge and dominating. It consisted of a large flight of steps, a relief displaying the battle at Stiklestad in 1030 and the death of King Olav, and a nine meter tall obelisk displaying the sun wheel – the NS' symbol, often worn by the storm troopers and party members as armlets and pins. Engraved in the obelisk were some lines from the poem "Tord Foleson" by the Norwegian writer Per Sivle.[5]

5 Tord Foleson was King Olav's standard-bearer at the battle of Stiklestad. According to the myth, Foleson lost his life in the battle, but only after having managed to plant the king's banner in the ground, where it would remain throughout the battle. The Poem was written in 1885, in a period when Norway was in union with Sweden, but when Norwegian nationalism was dawning. Its most famous line reads as follows: "The symbol stands, even when man falls".
The poem is also quoted in a Memorial Wall at the former concentration camp Bergen-Belsen commemorating the Norwegian prisoners there, thus showing how traditional nationalist symbols could be used for promoting very different ideas and messages.

In Norwegian tradition, World War II is portrayed as a period dominated by national unity (Eriksen 1995: 42-94). Approximately 55 000 Norwegians were, however, members of the NS during the war. Norwegians thus had different opinions on the German occupation, and they responded to it in different ways. Since the large majority of the population disliked collaboration with the occupants, it was important for the leadership and the members of NS to show that their motives were just as morally untainted and nationally orientated as the ones of the non-collaborators. The use of traditional Norwegian symbols was an important part of the party's political communication. The building of the NS-monument at Stiklestad was meant to be interpreted as a way of presenting the party's core values, internally towards its own members, and externally towards the rest of the Norwegian population.[6]

The planning and building of the NS-monument at Stiklestad was not done by the Germans or in cooperation with the occupants. It was an entirely Norwegian project, demonstrating the will and ability of the NS to act independently on motives it regarded as pure and national.[7] The timing of the project further underlines this independency, as the monument was raised at a point in time where German defeat was inevitable. The monument represents, in many ways, a blurring of the well-established boundaries between nationally orientated heroes on the one side, and traitors and footmen for the Germans on the other. This has made it a difficult part of the past to include in traditional ways of remembrance. The buried monument has thus remained a part of our unspoken past, both at a local and a national level.

Stiklestad in the aftermath of the war

A conference held at Stiklestad in 2005 sparked a debate about the future of the buried NS-obelisk in the media, among academics and in the local community. Representatives of the older generation, including both resistance veterans and former Norwegian SS-volunteers, oppose any kind of intervention at the site. Others, especially younger people, argue that the silence has lasted long enough, and that it is time to bring this

6 On the fascist way of political communication, see Griffin 1996.

7 Archival studies undertaken by the authors show that the regional NS-leader, Torbjørn Eggen, was instrumental in the planning and implementation of the project. The project had the support of Vidkun Quisling and the party leadership in Oslo, but not of the German authorities who actually tried to stop the building. The party's own ideological arguments for the monument are presented in Mehle 1944. See also Fagerland 2010.

part of Stiklestad's history to light. Some feel that an excavation of the monument would be tantamount to an acceptance or even glorification of the NS-regime. Others fear that the monument will be a popular gathering place for neo-Nazi groups. Finally, some also point to the monument's pedagogical potential. The question of what to do with the obelisk fuels emotional debates between different generations and different interest groups. The complex picture represents a huge challenge for the Stiklestad National Culture Centre (SNK), whose primary task is the dissemination of the St. Olav heritage.

Places, monuments and counter-monuments

The geographer Tim Creswell outlines "location", "locale" and "sense of place" as three fundamental aspects of the concept of place. "Location" refers to the fixed objective co-ordinates on the earth's surface. "Locale" refers to the material setting for social relations – the actual shape of place within which people conduct their lives. Finally, "sense of place" refers to the emotional attachment people have to place (Creswell 2004: 7). The concept of place therefore represents both fairly unchangeable structures made by nature (location), an interplay between human beings and nature marked by both continuity and change (locale), and an ongoing production of social meaning (sense of place). The two last elements in Creswell's definition clearly indicate that the concept "place" means more than just a neutral container, or physical framework, for human interaction. Our perceptions of identity and belonging are closely connected with places and the sense of meanings we read into them, and some places are therefore infused with more meaning and prestige than others (Creswell 2004: 50).

The meaning of a place is sometimes closely connected with important historical events. At historical places the place in itself represents both the relative continuity of the physical landscape and the continuous changes made by people and societies. At such places the changeability of time is counterbalanced by the constancy of the place and a sense of closeness to historical events can be experienced more distinctively (Eriksen 1999: 92). Historical places are therefore well suited and commonly used as theatres and meeting spots for presentation, interpretation and re-interpretation of the past for groups and communities (Rodell 2008: 15-30).

At historical places of special importance, the significance of the place is often emphasized by monuments (Eriksen 1999: 94-97). These monuments are reminders of historical events, but also of the current

significance and relevance of these events (Stugu 2008: 91-96). Historical monuments have traditionally been unambiguous, and their main purpose has been to provide authoritative interpretations, to simplify, to clarify and to create unifying identities based on shared memories (Michalski 1998). Some of the essence of a group, a community or a nation is that the individuals that constitute these entities share a great many things, and that there are others that they have forgotten. One of the main functions of traditional commemorative artefacts is therefore that they permit only certain things to be remembered, and that they by exclusion cause others to be forgotten (Forty/Küchler 1999: 7-9).

Groups with different interpretations of the past will in general not erect competing monuments on the same historical site. Instead, each group will seek to remove the opponent's monument and replace it with its own. This happened during the German occupation when NS held the power at Stiklestad and in 1944 physically removed the Olav column from 1807 in favor of its own monument. It happened again in 1945, when the NS-monument was destroyed by the Norwegian resistance movement. It was important for the NS to erect their own monument at Stiklestad before St. Olav's Day in 1944, and it was equally important for the victors of the war to erase all traces of the NS-monument prior to St. Olav's Day in 1945. The NS-monument represented an ideology considered incompatible with the values of the Norwegian post-war society and shortly after the war the Olav column from 1807 was re-erected. In this way Stiklestad was re-conquered as a site for national unity and identity.

An alternative to the traditional ways of remembrance presented above is the counter-monument (Gegen-Denkmal) philosophy. This philosophy was developed in Germany as an attempt to cope with the country's traumatic heritage from WWII (Michalski 1998: 172-189; Young 1993: 27-48). A central principle is the readiness to face painful and ambiguous memories. Self-criticism is also very important. This means courage and a will to face unpleasant topics, but also a willingness to question values which are highly regarded by individuals and society in the past and the present. According to James Young, the counter-monument philosophy with its painful self-reflection is the most powerful expression of a new German generation which is conscious of its ethical duty to remember, but at the same time deeply sceptical towards traditional ways of remembrance.

In contrast to traditional history and monuments, the counter-monument philosophy's goal is not to provide simplifying and unifying interpretations. Instead, the main goal is to spur debate and reflection about the past in itself, as well as about how today's society interprets

and makes use of the past. A counter-monument is therefore interrogative rather than authoritative, critical instead of self-exalted, challenging instead of reassuring, dynamic instead of static and complex instead of one-dimensional.

Stiklestad: A place with many layers of history

Use of painful and problematic heritage in Western Europe is commonly related to different aspects regarding moral, ethical and political training (democratization). There are several ways of dealing with an inglorious past, and one of the most striking is how the former Nazi concentration camps are taking part in the democratization processes by transforming the traces of genocide and repression to sites of knowledge, learning and reflection. Wolfgang Benz points out that the former memorial sites must avoid being "cult-like places of emotions". Instead they should be starting points for moral and political reflections. Commemoration can be a key to engagement and reflections on essential features regarding specific painful events in the past, and must "calmly and assuredly" be permanent components in the political culture. That is why, according to Benz, the memorial sites should be an integral part in commemoration practices and political discourse, not solely in the public interest through anniversaries (Benz 2005:33).

For good or for worse, the different layers of history at Stiklestad represent case studies of how regimes and political movements try to define, adapt and grasp the political legitimacy of St. Olav for contemporary purposes. One of the questions that arose in dealing with the Nazi-monument was whether the obelisk should be excavated at the place it was buried, exhibited inside the museum building or moved to a war-related museum. Didactic uses of the past can take different directions, but in our context we strongly believe in taking advantage of the authenticity of the place. In order to link educational programs directly to the place and the physical remains still existing, we therefore wish to show the excavated remains of the monument in situ and to produce an indoor study exhibition, also at Stiklestad.

Picture 3: The Fascist Monument at Stiklestad torn down, May 1945.

Photo credit: Sigurd Hegdahl, Foreningen Gamle Steinkjer

The theoretical foundation of both the excavation and the study exhibition is, at least partly, linked to the counter-monument perspectives presented earlier in this paper. In our attempt to make use of the authenticity of the place and our strong belief in including several different layers

of history into the project, the SS-Dienststelle Neuengamme study exhibition and the outdoor exhibition at KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme have been important sources of inspiration. The main task of KZ-Neuengamme is to present the history of the place as a part of the concentration camp system in the Nazi-period. However, the memorial is also an example of how West Germany dealt with historic places of the Nazi period in the post-war years. After a long-lasting conflict over its realization, the memorial, in its current shape, contains multiple layers of utilization before and after 1945. The memorial's topography thereby reflects the claims of different actors on local, national and international level. Neuengamme is presently in a process of restructuring on the basis of recent historical, pedagogical and creative insights. Remains from the concentration camp period, for instance the prison inside the concentrations camp, the former roll-call area and the prison latrine, have been excavated and are now parts of a landscape consisting of markers, symbolic reconstructions and wartime and postwar buildings.[8]

Both the counter-monument philosophy and the "new archaeology" approach used in Neuengamme, focus on the dialogical dynamic between the landscape, the visitors and new and old installations in use. The project at Stiklestad aims to release, and not to seal, the discussion. The planned combination of excavations, installations and exhibition aims to confront the society and stimulate the exchange of ideas and reflection between generations and in the general public at large. Hopefully, the inclusion of new layers of history will regenerate the significance of the place and increase its potential to communicate with a continuously changing society.

A meeting place for dialogue and learning

After the war, membership in Nasjonal Samling was defined as treason by Norwegian law, and all members were criminalized and sentenced (Dahl/Sørensen 2004). Disclosures about the concentration camps and other forms of Nazi cruelty added to the tension and the moral condemnation from the rest of the population (Lauridsen 2002; Westlie 2009).[9] Elements of the "ice-front" between the two sides still exist, and "former NS-member" and "child of a NS-father or mother" remain stigmatized

8 (KZ-Gedenkstätte Neuengamme: http://www.kz-gedenkstaetteneuengamme.de/).

9 The atrocities committed by the infamous informer Henry Rinnan and his group probably made reconciliation in central Norway (Trøndelag) more difficult than in many other parts of the country.

social categories. For 60 years there has been little dialogue between those who judged and those who were judged. As a result, many former NS-members and also many of their descendants have remained in small sub-cultures dominated by little self-reflection and even less self-criticism.[10] During the war, Stiklestad was used to legitimize a regime based on racism, dictatorship and indoctrination. After the war, the place has occasionally been used by extreme right wing organizations as well. One reason for the existence of such organizations might be that the well-established black and white interpretations of WWII have provided little room for dialogue and few meeting places for learning and reflection.

According to modern museum philosophy (often labeled as "new museology"), promoting dialogue about ethical dilemmas should be among the main tasks of museums today (Corsane 2005: 38-70). Still, as Young points out, there is an inverse proportion between the huge amount of memorialization of the past taking place, and the striking lack of contemplation and study invested into the same past (Young 1993: 273). The Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington made by the young Chinese-American Maya Lin in 1982 is, however, an example of the potential for dialogue and contemplation that lies in including also the darker and more ambiguous parts of the past. Situated among the huge traditional monuments at Washington Mall, all celebrating former American presidents and generals, the wall is in many ways an inversion of its surroundings. According to May Lin, the aim of her design was to bring about the realization of loss and a cathartic healing process in the American people, and the monument has turned out to be a highly treasured place for the expression of grief. The monument is also in its essence interrogative, implying terrible questions about futility, dying in vain, and about when and for what Americans should die in war (Forty/Küchner 1999:137-142; Sturken 1997:44-84).

It is a widely held belief that the preservation of monuments, artefacts and other traces from the past enable us to remember the past, and that the decay or destruction of such traces implies forgetting. Some

10 Skepticism towards established knowledge about WWII and the Holocaust is still widespread among former NS-members. Such suppressions are also found among their descendants. On this topic, see for instance Olden 1988 and Westlie 2002. The work of the Danish historian John T. Lauridsen shows many parallels between the collective remembrance in Denmark and Norway. Also in Denmark, those who chose the wrong side during the war remained in their roles as villains. Lauridsen's work also shows that neither convictions nor the years after wars have contributed to an increased understanding of democracy among former Nazi-members and their descendants (Lauridsen 2002).

traces from the past are therefore put on special protection lists, while others are left to decay or, like the NS-monument, are deliberately destroyed. The destruction of the NS-monument in 1945 is therefore a classical example of iconoclasm: the destruction of physical artefacts in hope of achieving oblivion. All destructions of monuments leave however, a void, and sometimes these voids can be just as noticeable as the monuments themselves (Forty/Küchner 1999:10). The strong emotions and sentiments revealed in the present debate imply that the physical removal of the monument did not lead to permanent oblivion of the dark past at Stiklestad.

The presence of the NS-monument and the national socialists' use of the St. Olav heritage represent a sidetrack to the positive heroic national narrative of Stiklestad. The buried obelisk and its invisible place in the Norwegian collective memory of WWII provides, however, important insight into the values and motives of NS-members as well as insight into post-war thinking about the NS and its members. The passage of time has only made the didactic potential of the buried obelisk more evident. And, as illustrated by the example of the Vietnam Memorial Wall at the Washington Mall, even at places already heavily infused with monuments and meaning is it possible to approach the past in new and more dialogical ways.

A pedagogical programme focusing on the dark history of Stiklestad could therefore highlight questions regarding both the past and the present. Who were the members? What were their motives? Could we have done the same under similar conditions? Why was Stiklestad important for the National Socialists? And finally, why has the "ice-front" between those on the right, and those on the wrong side, after 60 years, not been replaced by dialogue and learning? The "obelisk project" at Stiklestad thus has a potential to stimulate reflections, not only about the NS-monument itself, but also about nationalism, democracy and our own post-war history culture.

References

Benz, Wolfgang (2005): Places of Remembrance, Culture of Remembrance. Exhibition catalogue for The Dachau Concentration Camp, 1933 to 1945, Text and photo documents from the exhibition, with CD, KS-Gedenkstätte Dachau 2005, Karl M. Lipp Verlag, Munich.

Corsane, Gerard (ed.) (2005): Heritage, museums and galleries. An Introductory Reader, Routeledge, London.

Cresswell, Tim (2004): Place; a short introduction, Blackwell Publishing, Oxford.

Eriksen, Anne (1995): Det var noe annet under krigen; 2.verdenskrig i norsk kollektivtradisjon, Pax, Oslo.

Eriksen, Anne (1999): Historie, minne og myte, Pax, Oslo.

Fagerland, Tor Einar (2010): NS-bautaen på Stiklestad, forthcoming.

Forty, Adrian/Küchler, Susanne (1999): The Art of Forgetting, Berg, Oxford.

Griffin, Roger (1996): "Staging the Nation's Rebirth: The Politcal and Aesthetics of Performance in the Context of Fascist Studies". In: Günter Berghaus (ed.), Fascism and Theatre; Comparative Studies on the Aesthetics and Politics of Performance in Europe, 1925-1945, Berghahn, Oxford, pp. 11-29.

Krag, Crag (2003): "Olav 2 Haraldsson den hellige". In: Norsk biografisk leksikon, volume 7, second edition, Oslo.

Kvistad, Ynge (ed.) (2003): Stiklestadspelet: Slaget som formet Norge, Oslo.

Lauridsen, John T. (2002): Dansk nazisme 1930-45 – og derefter, Gyldendal, København.

Mehle, Eyvind (1944): Olavstanken; Fra Stiklestad til Stiklestad, Centralforlaget, Oslo.

Michalski, Sergiusz (1998): Public Monuments: Art in Political Bondage 1870-1997, Reaktion Books, London.

Niven, Bill (2008): "On the use of 'Collective Memory'". In: German History; The Journal of the German History Society, Volume 26, number 3, Oxford July 2008, pp. 427-436.

Olden, Asgeir (1988): Født skuldig, Oslo.

Raaen, Per Steinar (ed.) (2007): Makt og merke i tusen år; Forstudierapport, Stiklestad.

Stugu, Ola (2008): Historie i bruk, Samlaget, Oslo.

Sturken, Marita (1997): Tangled Memories. The Vietnam War, the AIDS Epedemic and the Politics of Remembering, University of California Press, Berkeley.

Sørensen, Øystein (1989): Hitler eller Quisling. Ideologiske brytninger i Nasjonal Samling 1940-1945, Cappelen, Oslo.

Sørensen, Hans Fredrik/Dahl, Øystein (eds.) (2004): Et Rettferdig oppgjør?: rettsoppgjøret i Norge etter 1945, Pax, Oslo.

Rodell, Magnus (2008): "Monumentet på gränsen; om den rumsliga vändningen och ett fredsmonument". In: Scandia, årgang 2008, bind 74, hefte 2, pp. 15-52.

Westlie, Bjørn (2002): Oppgjør; I skyggen av Holocaust, Aschehoug, Oslo.

Westlie, Bjørn (2009): Fars krig, Aschehoug, Oslo.
Young, James (1993): The Texture of Memory. Holocaust Memorials and Meaning, Yale University Press, New Haven.