

From Patriotic Memory to a Universalistic Narrative: Shifts in Norwegian Memory Culture after 1945 in Comparative Perspective

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The conference „From Patriotic Memory to a Universalistic Narrative: Shifts in Norwegian Memory Culture after 1945 in Comparative Perspective“ was held at the Center for Studies of Holocaust and Religious Minorities (HL-senteret) in Oslo 15 and 16 March 2013. It was the second conference in a series of three, focusing on memories of the Second World War, the German Occupation and the Holocaust in Europe. It was initiated by Arnd Bauerkämper (Freie Universität Berlin) and Odd-Bjørn Fure (HL-senteret), organised in cooperation between the two institutions and supported by Stipendienfonds E.ON Ruhrgas of the Stifterverband für die Deutsche Wissenschaft.

STEFFEN BRUENDEL (Stipendienfonds, E.ON Ruhrgas, Essen) opened the conference by addressing the political and academic context of the event. In particular, he pointed out that the increasingly close exchange between German and Norwegian scholars has led to joint research projects, especially since the 1980s. Moreover, he stressed the need for further comparative research on the transformation of memory cultures in European nation-states.

In the first session ODD-BJØRN FURE (Oslo) explained how the Norwegian memory culture has been transformed since the Second World War. He emphasised that the memorial landscape today is more characterised by diversity than ever, and it has been strongly influenced by the focus on human rights. However, Fure concluded that there has not been a comprehensive shift to universalistic narratives – in Norway or in other European countries – and that it will not be as long as the nation states exists. He underlined that the memory of the war continues to be nationally

framed and only coexists with transnational and universalistic schemes of thinking. One of Fure’s main arguments was that in Norwegian history, both within empirical studies and in popular memory, an unbreakable connection existed between the Norwegian nation and democracy. Attempts to sever this connection, by movements on the left or the right, have failed.

The presentation was followed by a discussion dealing with questions on whether there has been a divergence between Norwegian historiography and public memory, if exclusionary practices in Norway’s past, such as forced assimilation of minorities, can be seen as „the other side of democracy“ and whether the need to protect certain institutions contributed to the exclusion of some narratives until the 1990s.

The second panel grouped together two presentations on the developments in post-war memory culture in Norway and the Netherlands. ARND BAUERKÄMPER (Berlin) explained how the twists and turns in Norway’s memorial culture must be understood as a process of frequently asymmetrical interchange and negotiation between specific actors who pursue particular aims to advance their respective interests. He outlined how the dichotomy of resistance and collaboration broke up in favour of a more pluralistic and self-critical memorial culture in the 1980s. Bauerkämper identified this change as a turn to a more universalistic narrative, triggered by a recognition of the plight of passive, helpless victims. This development has consequently weakened the focus on national martyrs. TOBIAS TEMMING (Münster) presented a case-study of the Netherlands. He explained how and under what conditions the dominant Dutch memorial narratives developed. Temming argued that the rise of the Dutch patriotic memory was intertwined with the silencing of other dissonant memories, such as the support that the Germans received in the Netherlands.

The discussion that followed the first presentation brought forth the question as to whether the changes in memory cultures could be seen as results of international political developments. Bauerkämper answered that the changing context of the post Cold

War order in the 1990s was vital for the turn to a more universalistic memory culture, but stressed that the changes resulted from an interplay between broad overarching tendencies and domestic factors. The role of the media in the power struggle over memory – seen as a process with a top-down and bottom-up dynamic – was also discussed. It was pointed out that the TV series „Holocaust“ in the 1970s created an awareness of the Holocaust among Norwegians, but was perceived as something external. It was only in the 1990s that the Holocaust became recognised as having something to do with Norwegians as well. Bauerkämper pointed out that, although they initially externalized the crime, their very recognition of it paved the way for the later internalisation. In response to Temming’s presentation, parallels were drawn between the differences and similarities of the situation in the Netherlands and in Norway, both during and after the war.

The third session started with JON REITAN’s (Trondheim) paper. He argued that public discussions of Norwegian guilt, shame and co-responsibility – for the participation of policemen and other Norwegians in the arrests and deportation of the Jews – have continued after the official apologies from the Norwegian Prime Minister and the Head of the Police Directorate in 2012. The paper identified a guilt discourse as the main factor shaping Holocaust consciousness in contemporary Norway. It was argued that the trend has been shaped by external forces and transnational processes to some extent, but it must also be seen in light of specific national developments. In her presentation, CLAUDIA LENZ (Oslo) focused on history teaching as a part of the memory culture related to Holocaust. Lenz reflected on the recent development of linking Holocaust education to human rights education, asking if the trend could be seen as a symptom of universalisation and de-nationalisation of memory culture in Norway. She used the Falstad Senteret and the HL-Senteret as case studies and concluded that Holocaust commemoration and education has absorbed international perspectives and outlooks. It has also embraced the universalistic framework of human rights, yet simultaneously represented attempts of na-

tional identity building.

In the discussion, it was questioned whether the process of linking specific historical events to universalistic topics and value systems could go too far, as the process of universalisation may lead to de-historisation. It was also emphasised that the ongoing process that Lenz described – an interplay of de-nationalisation and re-nationalisation – must be considered as part of a modernisation process of the national self-image. Lenz agreed that context matters, but pointed out that national conditions are not excluded by the methodology of human rights education. The methodology is not primarily about preaching human rights, but about applying both national and international frameworks simultaneously.

The fourth session focused on changing narratives in action. ROBERT ZIMMERMANN (Berlin) portrayed how post-war associations of Norwegian and Danish former political prisoners of Nazi concentration camps have attempted to counter an increasing obliviousness to their history among younger generations since the 1980s. He demonstrated that, in contrast to their Danish counterparts, the associations in Norway have expanded their educational activities by altering their entrenched resistance-centered narrative to one more heavily emphasizing their victimhood. The Norwegian organizations have thereby presented themselves not only as advocates of their own story, but also as representatives of universalistic values such as democracy and human rights. DOREEN REINHOLD (Berlin) dealt with the representation of the Second World War and the Holocaust in Norwegian museum culture. She presented an analysis of the exhibitions at Norway Resistance Museum and the HL-Senteret and proposed interpreting museums not only as products of collective memory, but also as tools that are actively involved in shaping it. ILSE RAAIJMAKERS (Maastricht) portrayed the dynamics of the Dutch memory culture by focusing on the form and content of the Dutch national commemoration days of the Second World War – the 4th and 5th of May. She argued that in Dutch post-war memory culture there has been – and still is – a tension between the „particular“ and the

„universal“, between exclusion and inclusion, and between well-defined groups of victims and more universal meanings linked to the war.

Each presentation was followed by discussion. One question related to Zimmermann's contribution highlighted the role of women in prisoners' associations. It was also asked why Danish prisoners' associations did not succeed in reconceptualising their message. As a response to Reinhold's presentation, it was pointed out that the Norwegian Resistance Museum, which has usually been portrayed as the bastion of the patriotic narrative, is more nuanced than the stereotype. Concerning Raaijmakers' presentation, participants stressed that there has not been a linear progression from a problematic, patriotic narrative to an enlightened universalistic master narrative.

The fifth panel included presentations on the changing perspectives on marginal groups in post-war Norway. GUNNAR D. HATLEHOL (Trondheim) portrayed how German war crimes committed on Norwegian territory have become integrated into the memory culture after the war. He placed particular emphasis on the interrelationship between memory culture and historiography. The presentation was followed by a paper prepared by SUSANNE MAERZ (Freiburg). Her contribution showed how the paternal origins and the treatment of wartime children – the offspring of German soldiers and Norwegian women – quickly became a taboo in Norwegian society after the war, and was only first addressed in the 1980s and 1990s. Maerz stated that this rupture started a process of coming to terms with the wartime fate of the children and created a new narrative of the attitudes towards them. She pointed out that the translation of Herbjørg Wassmo's book „The House with the Blind Glass Windows“, published in 1981, and Jostein Gaarder's novel „The Solitaire Mystery“, brought out in 1990, are examples of the universalisation of these narratives. SIGURD SØRLIE (Oslo) drew attention to the post-war narrative of Norwegians who had served in Germany's special armed forces, the SS volunteers. He argued that there has been a discrepancy between memory and reality, and that

historical writing – until recently – has relied on the volunteers' post-war testimony. The historiography has tended to employ a relatively sympathetic and partly uncritical approach to this group. He also argued that the SS volunteers generally faced less public scorn than other collaborators in the years after the war. Contrary to predominant interpretations of memorialization of the Second World War in Norway in the first few decades after 1945, there was no universal silence over Norwegian supporters of the Nazi war.

Hatlehol's presentation was followed by discussion regarding the alleged retreat of historians from the public to the academic sphere. There were also questions concerning the role of Norwegian perpetrators who exploited foreign prisoners of war in the memory culture after the war. Hatlehol answered that their role has been a neglected theme. In response to Sørli's contribution, it was argued that the presentation was a major blow to the proposition of a monolithic master narrative after the war. Some discussants also pleaded for more detailed research on the atrocities committed by Norwegian SS volunteers at the Eastern front. Not least, the impact of the Cold War needs to be taken into account in order to explain the memorialization of the Norwegian soldiers who had fought for the Third Reich.

In the closing debate of the conference Arnd Bauerkämper pointed out that memorial cultures are constructed and in no way identical with the past, and in order to grasp the selective memories it is necessary to apply a comparative perspective. He also highlighted that memory cultures must be seen as processes of inclusion and exclusion, and in several countries the latter has coincided with externalisation. As to the development indicated in the title of the conference, Bauerkämper advanced that there has been no linear and uniform development towards a universalistic narrative in Norway and in the Netherlands. However, he stressed that there has been a gradual shift in a universalistic direction in the way that suffering has gained importance at the expense of the honouring of martyrdom. Odd-Bjørn Fure emphasised that many of the presentations demonstrated the analytical potential of studies of memory culture

when they are related to relevant empirical historical events and processes of the Second World War. Yet studies of memory culture should resist the temptation to universally deconstruct history and conflate it with memory. In particular, the strength and historical significance of resistance is to be acknowledged as much as evidence for collaboration. The title of the workshop advances a thesis on a process of historical reorientation in the field of memory, in Norway and elsewhere in Western Europe, after the Second World War: a move from patriotic memory to a universalistic narrative. The conference made clear that there has not been a complete shift to a universalistic narrative. The development has rather been gradual and nonlinear.

Conference Overview:

Steffen Bruendel: Historical Research and the Impact of Academic Cooperation. How Norwegian Historians Developed a Transnational Perspective on their History

Panel I: The Evolving Meaning of Norwegian Patriotism

Odd-Bjørn Fure: Societal Processes – Changing Constellations of Memories. The Case of Norway in Comparative Perspective

Panel II: Developments in Post-war Memory Culture in Norway and in the Netherlands

Arnd Bauerkämper: Beyond Resistance versus Collaboration: The Twisted Road to a Universalistic Narrative in Norway

Tobias Temming: Competing Memories. Myth, Conflicts and Taboos in Dutch Memory Culture after 1945

Panel III: Towards a Universalistic Narrative and the Role of the Holocaust in Norway

Jon Reitan: The Holocaust and the Question of Guilt in the Norwegian Historical Culture

Claudia Lenz: Linking Holocaust Education to Human Rights Education – a Symptom of the Universalization and De-Nationalization of Memory Culture in Norway?

Panel IV: The Changing Narratives in Action – Education & Representations

Robert Zimmermann: From Captivity into the

Classroom – Educational Initiatives of Prisoner Associations in Denmark and Norway since 1945

Doreen Reinhold: The Representation of the Second World War and the Holocaust in the Norwegian Museum Culture

Ilse Raaijmakers: Between „the Particular“ and „the Universal“ – the Dynamics in Dutch Memory Culture in Comparative Perspective

Panel V: Changing Perspectives on Marginal Groups in Postwar Norway

Gunnar D. Hatlehol: In Command of History? Historians, Memory Culture and German War Crimes in Norway

Susanne Maerz: From Taboo to Compensation: How Children of Norwegian Women and German Soldiers Were Treated in Postwar Norway

Sigurd Sørli: Norwegian Volunteers in the Waffen-SS and their Commemoration of the Second World War after 1945

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