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Democracy is opposed to dictatorship: Danish Holocaust memory and the didactic practices of Danish history teachers

Maren Lytje
Aalborg University, Denmark

ABSTRACT

This article addresses the collective memory of the Holocaust in Denmark. It suggests that narratives about Denmark as a particularly democratic nation generate a national bias, which may impede the understanding of the Holocaust as a transnational event and the development of an intercultural and analytical approach to Holocaust education. Through the lenses of Jan Assmann's theory of communicative and cultural memory and based on interviews with 25 informants, the article explores how the didactic practices of Danish history teachers intermingle with the communicative memory of the students' families and social networks to stabilize the canonized narrative of the Denmark as a democratic nation, but also how this narrative might be challenged by drawing on alternative archives.

KEYWORDS

Holocaust Education; Didactic Practice; Secondary School; Democracy and National Identity; Denmark

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Introduction

The dramatic rescue of the Danish Jews across Oresund to Sweden in October 1943 is a popular story, even outside of Denmark. The rescue, so the story goes, was possible due to the support of the Danish people, ordinary men and women who helped their Jewish compatriots because they had been socialized into a democratic culture immune to fascist ideologies (Buckser, 2001). In this narrative, the Holocaust is construed as part of a national history of democracy and resistance, and thus reflects a national bias, which belies the Holocaust as a transnational tragedy that befell European Jewry (Holmila & Gevert, 2011; Lammers, 2011).

The story of Danish democracy and resistance against German oppression results from a blend of historical research, educational efforts and popular culture, which forged the cultural memory of the Second World War in Denmark in the immediate post-war decades, and it has been important for shaping post-war identities and for guiding political orientations and worldviews. (Bak, 2001; Kirchhoff, 1998 and 2013; Lammers, 2011; Warring & Bryld, 1998). However, by the 1980's, researchers began to challenge it. Inspired by the international Holocaust literature, part of this research criticized earlier attempts to entrench the Holocaust in a national history rather than portray it as a transnational event (Lammers, 2011). For example, Lone Rüniz (2000) pointed to the restrictive asylum policy, which barred Jewish refugees' access to Denmark in the 1930s; others such as Bent Blüdnikow and Klaus Rothstein (1993) helped increase the focus on Holocaust memory, and Cecilie Banke and Anders Jerichow (2013) focused on the lessons to be learned from states and individuals' failures to act in the face of state oppression and marginalization of minority groups. Thus, there was a distinct ethical concern in the new Danish Holocaust literature, which brought it into line with international research and its long-standing concern with the legacies of mass atrocity crimes (Spiegel, 2002). The literature thus had a latent, hopeful expectation that a more analytical and intercultural approach could bring the collective memory of the Second World War in tune with an increasingly globalized and multicultural society. By the mid-2000s, this ethical concern could also be detected in informal narratives of the Second World War. At least, a transnational study, which investigated the collective memory of the Second World War, concluded that while the Danish master narrative of resistance was present in the minds of the grandchildren's generation, it was accompanied by an ethical concern specifically tied to the Holocaust (Bjerg, 2011, pp. 241-256).

This shift suggests that the intersection between the German occupation of Denmark and the Holocaust generates what we could call difficult history. There are various definitions of this term. For example, Elisabeth Cole suggests that difficult histories are linked to processes of transitional justice and the coming to terms with the violent past of the nation state. Difficult histories bring differing perspectives, especially the perspectives of victims, into the open and allow them to become part of the collective memory of the new and hopefully democratic nation (Cole, 2007). Similarly, Tsafrir Goldberg and Geerte M. Saveniji argue that difficult histories involve intense, controversial issues, which stem from a clash of memories between different identity groups (Goldberg and Savenjii, 2018, p. 508). Others, such as Deborah Britzman and Dominic LaCapra tie it specifically to the reappearance of collective traumas such as genocide, ethnic cleansing or severe oppression of social groups, and the damage such traumas cause to the integrity of social or national identity and the collective memory which upholds it (LaCapra, D. 2004; Britzman, D. 2000). While these definitions vary, they share in relating difficult history to collective memory understood as the images and narratives which construct the unity and identity of groups, especially national groups. We could perhaps say that collective memory is transformed into difficult history when standard narratives that uphold the integrity of national identity are being challenged. This challenge may originate from groups or individuals who cannot recognize themselves in the narratives that are told, or from historical scholars and journalists who challenge their historical accuracy or point of view. Magdelena Gross and Luke Terra have offered a comprehensive list of the characteristics of difficult history, which exposes this link between difficult history and collective memory (Gross & Terra, 2018). According to Gross and Terra, difficult histories are central to the nation's history, refute broadly accepted versions of the past

or stated national values, connect us with questions or problems facing us in the present, involves violence, and creates disequilibria that challenge existing, historical understanding. I we consider this list in relation to narratives of Danish resistance and the Holocaust, these events clearly involve violence, and they are central to perceptions of national identity as shown above. However, the Danish government's collaboration with Nazi Germany and the restrictive asylum policy, which barred Jewish refugees' access to Denmark in the 1930s refute the broadly accepted version of Denmark as a country of fierce, democratic resistance and connects us with present issues such as human rights abuses and the contemporary treatment of refugees and asylum seekers. As such, it challenges existing historical understanding.

While Helle Bjerg has documented how the new ethical perspective informs the collective memory of the Second World War in the third generation, it is difficult to say whether it reinforces or challenges the national bias, that is, it is difficult to say whether it qualifies as difficult history. The anthropologically oriented research literature does not explore the interrelation between narratives of resistance and the Holocaust, nor the relationship between formal, educational institutions and informal settings such as the family in developing the cultural memory of the Second World War. While the historical research literature is overtly critical of the national approach and calls for a transnational understanding of the Holocaust and for a critical engagement with the policies and world views that led to the marginalization, segregation and murder of a whole people, this understanding does not automatically translate into an analytical or intercultural approach to Holocaust education. It might therefore be worthwhile exploring the interrelation between narratives of democracy and resistance on one hand and the Holocaust on the other by addressing two questions: 1) Do the didactic practices of history teachers maintain or alter narratives of democracy and resistance, and what role does the Holocaust play in that regard? 2) What is the relationship between the process of cultural memory making in the school setting and the communicative memory of the Second World War in the students' families and social networks?

Method

Participants and school context

This article addresses these questions by analyzing six interviews conducted in 2019 with twenty eighth-grade students and 6 history teachers from three schools in the area around Aalborg, Northern Denmark: 1) GL, an urban school with a high concentration of social housing occupied by immigrant families, 2) FRS, a suburban school with a predominantly white middle class, 3) and AAS, a school situated in a small town outside of the urban area with various, social segments but little ethnic diversity. Four of the teachers had more than ten years of teaching experience and two of them less than five. The teachers were selected from the researcher's own network; however, the three schools represent different social segments and an urban-countryside division, which is representative of the area. The students who participated in the interviews were selected by the teachers based on their diverse, academic levels and with a view to a representative gender and ethnic distribution. At the time of the interviews, the students were fourteen years old and had not studied the Holocaust or other aspects of the Second World War systematically. This age group was therefore appropriate for gauging the informal transmission of the Second World War, including the Holocaust, in the students' families and social networks.

Procedure

The student interviews were conducted as semi-structured group interviews and were meant to improve understanding of the communicative memory of the Second World War in the students' families and social networks (the second question). The interviewer told the students that she was interested in their perceptions of important historical events, including their perception of the genocide of the European Jews. The students were also asked to present themselves and their

general interests to stimulate talk between interviewer and students and offer the interviewer clues to talking points. The students were then asked four questions. First, they were asked to identify important, historical events, and they were asked to identify the social settings in which they had encountered them and whether they discussed them with others. The purpose of this line of questioning was to learn about the informal transmission of historical events in the students' families and social networks, and whether they classified the occupation of Denmark and the Holocaust as important events, as one would expect. Secondly, the students were asked directly about their encounters with the Holocaust. They were asked to make free associations with the word "Holocaust," and they were asked when and where they had heard the term (if at all). Finally, they were asked to consider whether they believed people were still affected by the event today. The purpose of this line of questioning was to learn if and how the Holocaust informs the memory of the Second World War in the students' families and social networks, and whether they, as representatives of the fourth generation, still associate the Holocaust with an ethical concern. Thirdly, the students were asked questions about the German occupation of Denmark. They were asked about their own participation in commemoration practices (such as lighting candles on May 4 to mark the liberation of Denmark), their understanding of the role of Denmark during the Second World War, and the contexts in which they encountered the history of occupation. The purpose of this line of questioning was to assess how narratives of the occupation years informed the historical consciousness of the students *vis a vis* narratives of the Holocaust, and to understand whether they perceived the intersection of these narratives as "difficult history". Finally, the students were asked about their knowledge of the state of Israel and of contemporary Jewish communities. This last question was added under the assumption that the conflict between the state of Israel and the Palestinian people might influence perceptions of the Holocaust, especially among Muslim students.

The teacher interviews were semi-structured group or individual interviews at the three schools. The overall purpose of the interviews was to sketch the teachers' understanding of the Second World War including the Holocaust as a school subject, and to examine the formalized transmission of these events *vis a vis* the informal transmission in the students' families and social networks. Thus, the teachers' interviews were primarily aimed at answering the first question: "Do the didactic practices of history teachers maintain or alter narratives of democracy and resistance, and what role does the Holocaust play in that regard?"

The teachers were asked questions pertaining to three themes 1) their understanding of the status of the Holocaust and the German occupation of Denmark in the national curriculum and their own syllabi, 2) their main didactic approaches, and 3) their choice of teaching materials. In relation to the first theme, they were asked to define the term "Holocaust," to discuss the salience of the topic for the students, and to identify the most important learning objectives. They were also asked to relate the Holocaust to the German occupation of Denmark and to the Israel-Palestinian conflict. Regarding the second and third theme, they were asked about their substantive focus when teaching about the Holocaust (which countries, which actors, which concepts etc.), and how they organize their teaching (which didactic models, pacing and sequencing, which historical thinking concepts, etc.), and finally which teaching materials they preferred. The first theme was supposed to highlight the teachers' own historical identities and values and how these might inform their choice of didactic approach and teaching materials, whereas the last two themes highlighted concrete practices and what these practices might reveal about the transmission of the cultural memory of the Holocaust in the school.

Analysis

The interview data was analyzed using Jan Assmann's theory of collective memory. Assmann's theory focuses on the formation of collective identities in the interplay between formal institutions and the informal interactions of social groups, mostly within the framework of the nation state. The theory is therefore appropriate for analyzing how the interplay between formal and informal transmissions of narratives of resistance *vis a vis* the Holocaust may maintain or

challenge the national bias. Assmann's theory of collective memory is supplemented with an account of the Danish history curriculum, which constitutes the obligatory framework of the teachers' syllabi and teaching methods, and it reflects the official understanding of the cultural memory of the Second World War in Denmark.

Communicative memory, cultural memory, historical knowledge

In his theory of collective memory, Jan Assmann draws on Maurice Halbwach's idea that memory is a social phenomenon which occurs in group interactions and forms group identities. According to this theory, groups form their unity and identity by constructing a common image or narrative of the past. In the modern age, this group identity ultimately refers to a national identity. Assmann agrees with Halbwachs that memory is a social phenomenon but offers a correction to his theory. In Assmann's view, Halbwachs neglected institutionalized forms of memory, which transmit meaning across generations and allow the group to become conscious of its specificity and unity and to reproduce its identity over time. Therefore, Assmann distinguishes between two aspects of collective memory: communicative memory and cultural memory. Where communicative memory is characterized by its proximity to everyday life and spans the three generations within living memory, cultural memory is distanced from the everyday. It transcends the horizon between past and present and can span thousands of years (J. Assmann, 1995). Through its social frames, communicative memory grants meaning and identity to a social group, whereas the cultural frames of cultural memory grant meaning to the cultural collective, typically the nation; and where communicative memory relates to the recent past and can be captured by oral history, cultural memory is objectified and can be captured in mnemonic artifacts such as monuments or schoolbooks. The two domains are not isolated but overlap and influence each other. For example, the narrative of German victimhood, which is an important part of the communicative memory of the Second World War in many German families (Welzer et al., 2015), has been objectified in memoirs, unofficial sites of memory and literature and might become an important part of German identity in the future.

According to Assmann, cultural memory operates according to "fixed points" of important events the memory of which are maintained through "cultural formation and institutional communication." (J. Assmann, 1995, p. 129). The knowledge of fixed events preserved in cultural memory has two functions: it is formative because it has an educational, civilizing or humanizing function, and it is normative in that it provides ideals for rules of conduct (J. Assmann, 1995, p. 132). In that sense, cultural memory is imposed "from above" whereas communicative memory emerges "from below." We could also use Aleida Assmann's terminology and say that cultural memory "exist in two modes:" as archive and as canon. Where the archive refers to the potentiality of all the images, texts and artifacts left us by the past, the canon refers to the actual use of some of these images, texts and artifacts in a specific context (A. Assmann, 2008, pp. 97-107). Finally, Jan Assmann makes a third distinction between historical knowledge and collective memory and argues that where "knowledge has a universalistic perspective, and tendency towards generalization, memory, even cultural memory (which involves historical knowledge) is local, egocentric and specific to the group and its values" (J. Assmann, 2008, p. 113). In that sense, historical knowledge might offer a critique of collective memory, as was the case with the newer historical research literature on the Holocaust in Denmark.

The history curriculum

The national history curriculum is important for the construction of cultural memory as the schools are primary sites for the transmission of "canonical" artefacts. In Denmark, the development of the history curriculum has followed other Scandinavian countries in emphasizing historical thinking skills (Eckmann et al., 2017, p. 85 & 91). However, the curriculum carries traces of other and often contradictory traditions as well. On one hand, the curriculum states that history is an important subject for transmitting "Danish culture and history" to the next generation, and

unlike its Nordic neighbors, the government has introduced a national "canon" list of compulsory topics, the majority of which refer to national history. Here, the Holocaust is nationally anchored under the heading, "The August Rebellion and Jew Action 1943," thus echoing the tendency to embed the Holocaust in the national history of democracy and resistance by evoking the battle against the German occupation. On the other hand, an important aim of the curriculum is to develop the students' historical consciousness. This requires teachers to relate historical events to the students' lifeworlds and engage them in reflections on their own and others' identities, including reflections on the use of history in collective memory making. This approach seems in opposition the canon approach: instead of emphasizing national unity, the historical consciousness approach highlights existential uses of history and its role in identity-making processes (Lytje 2022, p. 63). Recently, historical thinking skills have become central to the curriculum. Historical thinking asks us to discriminate between substantial and structural knowledge (Lee, 2004). Substantial knowledge refers to "knowledge about the past," whereas structural knowledge refers to the production and presentation of substantial knowledge. This requires students to develop the formal skills necessary for producing historical knowledge, and to use these skills in different contexts (Seixas, 2017).

At first, the Danish curriculum appears to be a hotchpot of didactic approaches. On one hand, it emphasizes identity formation and asks students to engage in the cognitive process of social categorization of self and other, either by positing social categories as stable (the canon approach) or as fluid (the historical consciousness approach). On the other hand, students are expected to critically read and analyze texts and other artefacts and place them in historical contexts, and they are expected to produce historical explanations or narratives. These seem to be rational skills which require students to exercise emotional restraint and step away from the question of identity. However, in a study about teaching difficult histories, Tsafrir Goldberg has shown that the salience of identity has a considerable impact on students' motivation to explore historical thinking concepts such as historical empathy and source analysis. Even though students peruse historical sources for information that will confirm the virtue of their own identity, the emotional need for social identification still promotes historical learning as the students are forced to consider and argue for their positions (Goldberg, 2013). In the Danish context, the differing didactic approaches visible in the curriculum also share another common denominator: they are all brought to bear on the question of democratic education (Lytje, 2022), and they hark back at the Educational Act, which since the post-war years has highlighted democracy as an educational target in response to the experience with Nazi and fascist dictatorships. Today the act specifies in the preamble that "it is the duty of the school to prepare the students for participation … in a society characterized by freedom and democracy […] and to familiarize the students with Danish culture and history [my translation]" (Ministry of Education, 2020). This means that history is easily brought under the sway of civics understood as the intentional educational effort to affect students' beliefs, commitments, capabilities, and actions as members or prospective members of the Danish community and the Danish state. For example, historical thinking skills offer the students some critical, analytical tools which might be beneficial in public life as well as the labor market; and the canon point "The August Rebellion and the Jew Action 1943" is easily adjusted to discussions of freedom, democracy, and dictatorship, which are brought to bear on the national context, thereby familiarizing the students with "Danish culture and history." It should be noted here that civics is not an independent subject in the national curriculum. In principle, it is built into all subjects and refers to the democratic values laid out in the preamble of the educational act. In practice, it is often taught as part of history and social science classes, but in an unsystematic manner given the lack of curriculum specifications.

Historical consciousness and national identity: The teacher interviews

Curriculum developments and the emphasis on "freedom and democracy" have a significant impact and manifest themselves in the teachers' syllabi and didactic approaches. Regarding the syllabus, the teachers generally place the Holocaust under the umbrella of the Second World War

and emphasize Danish resistance and German perpetration. Regarding the didactic approach, the teachers emphasize the development of the students' historical consciousness and try to relate historical events to the students' lifeworlds.

Syllabus

The Second World War as an umbrella term includes the power politics of the European states in the early twentieth century, the rise of Nazism with a focus on propaganda and anti-Semitism, and the occupation of Denmark, often with an emphasis on Danish resistance. Thus, the Holocaust is cast as part of a general political development, rather than an historical event, which befell the European Jews. In this development, Denmark occupies a special place in that it is perceived as the primary site of resistance, whereas Germany becomes the primary site of totalitarian ideologies and perpetration. This tendency is reinforced by the choice of textbooks or IT-platforms, which are influenced by the canon list and has a significant impact on the teachers' choice of content and contextualization. For example, one teacher at FRS referred directly to the role of textbooks in lesson planning, stating that, "it fits the textbook system." Another said that he knew that he was "supposed to answer that they found their own materials," clearly embarrassed by letting the textbook guide his lesson planning. Three other teachers initially stated that they used textbook materials sparsely, but later revealed that textbooks form the core of their syllabi and that other materials function as supplements.

Karen, the most experienced history teacher at FRS, exemplifies the tendency to cast Denmark as the primary site of resistance and Germany as the primary site of perpetration. In her teaching, she focuses on Danish resistance, including the rescue of the Danish Jews, and on the rise of the Nazi regime, thus framing the Holocaust as part of a national history of the Second World War. In her view, stories of resistance and perpetration are important: where stories of resistance provide the students with suitable ideals, stories of perpetration allow them to understand the complexity of choice in difficult situations, and the human capacity for perpetration given the right circumstances. However, there are conflicting views about the status of Danish resistance. For example, Karen's colleague, Martin thinks that the privileged status of Danish resistance in the history curriculum is problematic: it casts Denmark as a victim nation, despite the Danish government's collaboration with Nazi Germany and the relative tranquility in Denmark during the occupation years. Therefore, Martin would ideally like to challenge the cultural memory of the Second World War. Despite his intentions, however, Martin has noted that stories of resistance stick with the students, whereas stories of collaboration and perpetration do not. This is perhaps not surprising given the canon list, the teaching materials and the educational act. However, as the analysis of the student interviews will show, another explanation might be that narratives of democracy and resistance dominate the communicative memory of the Second World War in many of the students' families.

Didactic approaches

The canon list and the educational act might partly explain the tendency to frame the Holocaust as part of a national history focusing on the virtues of "freedom" and "democracy." Another explanation might be found in the teachers' didactic approaches. In the interviews, most of the teachers explicitly state that the main objective of teaching history is to develop the students' historical consciousness. The teachers follow Jörn Rüsen (2004) and Bernard Eric Jensen's (2003) in understanding historical consciousness as a narrative category by which we use our interpretations of the past to understand the present and form guidelines for future actions. Consequently, they believe it is important that history takes its point of departure in the students' lifeworlds. For example, Paul from the urban school, GL, believes that teaching history ideally means forging a connection between the communicative memory of the individual student and the cultural memory of the community. This is his reason for teaching about the Holocaust rather than other genocides. According to Paul, the community to which the students belong have a direct connection to the Holocaust, insofar as many of the students "have great grandparents who

experienced the war," and "it has impacted the way in which the world is organized today." The special status assigned to national history, then, could be a consequence of the teachers' wishes to relate history to the students' own, (national) identities and to enable them to deal with the historical and political culture of which they are part.

The focus on developing the students' historical consciousness might also explain why the Holocaust is regularly taught within the framework of civics. For example, the teacher might ask the students to compare the discriminatory measures of the Nazi regime to discriminatory measures of contemporary regimes or to the current radicalization of the public debate about Muslim minority groups. According to some of the teachers, the contemporary perspective renders the Holocaust relevant to the students' lifeworlds and thus contribute to the development of their historical consciousness. It also falls in line with the educational act and its emphasis on democracy.

The teachers' emphasis on developing the students' historical consciousness as well as the tendency to embed the Holocaust within the framework of civics renders the Holocaust a negative symbol of the fundamental values of democracy, much in the same way as the master narrative of Danish resistance and German perpetration. The Holocaust is what might happen if we fail to uphold the nation's democratic values. In that sense, the Holocaust is meant to develop the students' democratic sensibilities by alerting them to the deterioration of moral norms and the poor treatment of minority groups. For example, Paul from GL perceives contemporary atrocities as a failure to learn from history, and all the teachers from FRS agree on the analogy between the status of the German Jewish communities in the 1930s and Syriacs in the 2010s.

There was one exception to this pattern, though. According to Anders from AAS – the school outside of the urban area – students who learn about the Holocaust or related matters often develop an "acute sense of ethical responsibility," which he refers to as "a reactionary revival:" they come to believe that we should treat each other with dignity and respect and live peacefully together. In his view, there is "*trop de morale, pas assez d'histoire* (Eckmann, 2017, p. 57). According to Anders, the students' responses to learning about the Holocaust are predominantly emotional rather than cognitive, and they are incapable of understanding scales of grey in xenophobic statements and perceive all such statements as "racist." The lack of nuance and the perceived moralizing tendency of Holocaust education bothers Anders, who would like the students to discriminate, e.g. between different types of xenophobia.

The conflicting views on the moral prospect of the Holocaust might be explained by differing understandings of the Holocaust as history and as memory. Most of the teachers, rightfully, see the Holocaust as the mirror image of good and decent democratic practices, and they are adamant that this image is embedded in the students' consciousness as a symbol of what not to do, and as a reflective tool when thinking about discrimination today. As such, they perceive it as part of the cultural memory of the nation in that it has "an educational, civilizing or humanizing function, and […] provides ideals for rules of conduct" (J. Assmann, 1995, p. 132). Anders, on the other hand, is interested in imparting historical knowledge in order to develop the students' universal analytical skills and ability to discriminate between varieties of the same phenomenon.

Summary of teacher interviews

The teacher interviews indicate that the school reinforces the master narrative of Danish resistance and the particularity of Danish democracy, sometimes against their expressed intentions. The Holocaust is often used as an ethical signifier and a symbol of anti-democratic developments, which should be avoided in democratic-minded societies. The teachers want the Holocaust to inform the students' historical consciousness and therefore seek to relate it to their lifeworlds, and teaching about the Holocaust becomes a way of reflecting on concepts such as "freedom" and "democracy," thereby almost unwittingly familiarizing the students with "Danish culture and history." In that sense, the teachers clearly assign significance to the Holocaust, but as an historical event, it remains strangely detached from cultural memory insofar as it functions as

a mirror image of who we want to be; it is not "local, egocentric and specific to the group and its values" (J. Assmann, 2008, p. 113).

The status assigned to the Holocaust partly stems from the Danish curriculum, which maintains the established "canon." However, it also stems from the teachers' emphasis on developing the students' historical consciousness, which seems to favor a Danish perspective and sometimes renders historical events exemplary, reflexive tools. On the other hand, the "historical knowledge" approach may be equally reactionary. Anders' statement that the students' ethical concerns constitute a "reactionary revival" echoes the *Keule Swung* in Holocaust education, where those who point to the xenophobic tendencies of contemporary, far right-wing groups are charged with promoting the oppressive agenda of liberal elites.

The master narrative of victimhood and perpetration: Student interviews

Like the teacher interviews, the student interviews showed clear traces of the master narrative of democracy and resistance. These traces were often linked to family narratives, historical feature films, various group experiences, and social media, and were present in the part of the interview focusing on the students' perceptions of important historical events, where many of the students talked about the Second World War without being prompted by the interviewer.

In the two schools close to the city of Aalborg, GL and FRS, family narratives often pivoted around German aircrafts and the fear of air bombardment. For example, Nina from FRS relayed with some pride that her great grandfather participated in the resistance as "planes were crashing," thereby prompting her fellow student, Ursula to state that her grandparents also "saw the planes crash." At GL, Michael, a student with Danish background, opens the discussion of important historical events by mentioning his great grandmother, whose farm was expropriated by the Germans due to its proximity to Aalborg Airport. Michael remembers his great grandmother talking about the bunker in the backyard, and the fear of air bombardments. According to Michael, "they spent a great deal of time in the bunker." The recurring aircraft theme is not surprising given the proximity of Aalborg Airport, which played an important role for the German engagement in the North Sea.

Outside the urban area at AAS, the students do not draw directly on family narratives. Instead, they use snippets of information about the Second World War to reflect on the possible consequences for their own lives had Germany won the war. One of the students, Kasper opens the train of reflections by pointing to the Second World War as an important historical event. He believes that "if they hadn't done it [liberated Denmark], they [the Germans] would probably still be gassing people and have large territories around the world." The information about gassing stems from *The Boy in the Striped Pajamas*, which the students have seen in school in their Danish lessons. Prompted by Kasper, another student, Emma, mentions a family visit to Dachau, which she describes as "very emotional" and "chocking," particularly the gas chamber, and then relates the emotional experience to the importance of Denmark being a democracy as opposed to a dictatorship.

For many of the students, the evil of dictatorship is incarnated in the use of symbols such as the Swastika and the Nazi salute. The association between Nazi symbols and the evil of dictatorship seems to be a result of adult responses to the use of such symbols. For example, Kenneth from FRS recounts an episode when he, as a seven-year-old boy, had greeted his father with the Nazi salute without knowing its meaning. Kenneth still recalls his father's anger and his subsequent talk about Hitler and the evil he represents. Despite these adult responses, the students also perceive Hitler as a farcical figure, which they encounter in various memes on social media. At first, the students are embarrassed to disclose the content of the memes but prompted, a Polish-born student from GL mentions a meme of Hitler next to an image of a cleaning fluid entitled "Polish remover." The students are clearly aware that adults might disprove of such imagery, much in the same way as Kenneth's father disproved of the Nazi salute.

In the part of the student interviews focusing on important, historical events, there are clear traces of the master narrative of Danish victimhood and resistance and German perpetration. These traces are scattered and consist of locally anchored family stories about resistance and the fear of air bombardment, images of Hitler and Nazi symbols such as salutes which are prohibited, tourist visits to memorial sites, and snippets of information from feature films. Thus, the students' depictions of the Second World War partly echo the teachers' and suggest a high level of correspondence between the communicative and cultural memory of the Second World War. However, there are some indications that the students' use of social media might alter aspects of this narrative. At least, Hitler as a farcical, cartoon-like figure suggests a distance between the students and the event and a down-playing of the atrocities committed by the national-socialist regime.

The Holocaust: An ethical signifier?

In the first part of the interview, the students make ample references to the Holocaust, especially to "gassing." When prompted by the interviewer, the students also reiterate statements about "learning from history so as not to repeat it." However, there are indications that the Holocaust plays a lesser role for the students' historical consciousness. For example, when asked about the significance of the Holocaust today, many of the students respond that it no longer concerns them, even though they have mentioned the Second World War as an important historical event. It is also telling that references to "gassing" and concentration camps in the first part of the interview do not prompt the students to reflect on the Holocaust. Instead, they take it as a cue to reflect on their own lives and the virtue of democracy as opposed to dictatorship.

Lack of knowledge cannot explain the minor role of the Holocaust in the students' communicative memory of the Second World War. When prompted, high-performing students offer a variety of information, for example about the *Kristalnacht* or the geography and chronology of the genocide, and most of the students recognize the term "Holocaust" as "what happened to the Jews," or offer snippets of information about the concentration camps. Nevertheless, the students feel little personal investment in the event. As one student puts it: "I think that older people are affected by it, but not younger people." Another student adds that this might be the reason young people make jokes about it, while old people find such jokes insulting.

During the interview, it transpires that most of the students have encountered the Holocaust in the context of the school. This might explain why it plays a lesser role than narratives of democracy and dictatorship. Stories of Danish resistance and German perpetration are anchored in both communicative and cultural memory, whereas the Holocaust exists in a floating gap between the two. The significant overlap between cultural and communicative memory in the fourth generation thus suggests a high degree of success in forging a cultural memory "from above", and that newer historical research literature has not been successful in challenging it.

Ethnicity and the archive

In the interviews some of the students from immigrant communities offered alternative perspectives on the master narrative of democracy and resistance, and the Holocaust as an ethical signifier. Alternative narratives were often framed as oppositional national narratives, whereas the Holocaust was used to reflect on the experience of immigration and alienation from the national community.

The former perspective might be illustrated by the Polish-born student, Nicolai from GL, who displayed a keen interest in Poland during the Second World War. This interest stems from family narratives and from his father who is an educated historian. Nicolai's great grandmother was sent to Auschwitz as a forced laborer, but Nicolai stresses that his "family is not Jewish." The Auschwitz narrative clearly plays an important role in the construction of a Polish identity in the family and is based on the premise that Polish suffering matches the suffering of the European Jews, a point that Nicolai makes twice during the interview. Similarly, he denies Polish complicity in the

Holocaust and the national character of the Judaism. The Auschwitz story was presented as a response to the story of air bombardment, and thus offered an alternative story of national victimhood – one permeated by anti-Semitic tendencies.

The latter perspective might be illustrated by Annisa from AAS, who has Indonesian background. Throughout the interview, Annisa highlights her Muslim identity. For example, she mentions that her family often talk about the Second World War because they are "Muslim and it is important for our culture." She does not specify why the event is important, but during the discussion about the Holocaust she repeatedly relates the situation of the Jews during the Holocaust to her own Muslim identity and her experience of intolerance. For example, she believes it is unfair that "they [the Jews] were not allowed to have their own culture," and interjects that "one should respect other people's faith," and that we " should all be equal." It was a general pattern that students who identified themselves as Muslims were more prone to using the Holocaust as an ethical signifier and relate it to their own experiences of not belonging to the majority culture. For example, two female students with Iraqi backgrounds from GL, who showed no interest in the history of the Middle East, identified the Holocaust as an act of intolerance like the one they experience as children of Arab immigrants.

Concluding remarks

This article began by problematizing the national bias embedded in the cultural memory of the Second World War in Denmark. It suggested that while newer research literature calls for a transnational understanding of the Holocaust and for a critical engagement with the marginalization of minority groups, this does not automatically translate into an analytical or intercultural approach to Holocaust education in the school setting. The article therefore asked two questions: 1) Do the didactic practices of history teachers maintain or alter narratives of democracy and resistance, and what role does the Holocaust play in that regard? and 2) What is the relationship between the process of cultural memory making in the school setting and the communicative memory of the Second World War in the students' families and social networks? The student interviews suggest that narratives of democracy and resistance play an important role in the communicative memory of many of the students' families. However, there were differences between the schools in this regard. In the city and suburban schools, the students readily drew on family narratives, which informed their engagement with the cultural memory of the Second World War, whereas the communicative memory of the students from the small-town school, AAS was profoundly informed by cultural memory. This suggests significant local differences in the extent to which communicative memory informs cultural memory and vice-versa.

The teacher interviews showed that teachers generally uphold the intentions of the history curriculum and the educational act by focusing on the importance of "freedom" and "democracy," thereby reproducing the "canon." The teachers' emphasis on historical consciousness and the tendency to ask students to use history to reflect on themselves and their own lifeworlds also tends to reinforce the narrative of Denmark as a particularly democratic society. The communicative memory of the students' families and social networks is thus imbued with influences stemming from the school and vice versa, and there are clear overlaps and exchanges between the two memory domains. We could also use Aleida Assmann's terminology and say that the teachers draw on the already established canon of cultural memory, rather than drawing on the "archive" and its vast potential for introducing other perspectives.

The Holocaust is an important part of teaching about the Second World War in Danish schools, and the teachers often use the Holocaust as a mirror image, reflecting the virtues of Danish democracy as the inverse of German dictatorship. The student interviews indicated that the Holocaust plays a fairly small role for the fourth generation, and that their use of social media might alter the status of the Holocaust as an ethical signifier. At least, Hitler as a farcical, cartoon-like figure and memes making light of the Holocaust suggests a distance between the students and

the event and a down-playing of the atrocities committed by the national-socialist regime. This also means that the students do not automatically see the Holocaust as a "difficult history" that challenges their identity and historical understanding.

Neither students nor teachers showed awareness of former European, Jewish communities, and most of the students had no perception of the state of Israel, except for Nicolai who was overtly anti-Semitic, and Amir who had Palestinian parents. The last theme of the student interviews focusing on the students' perceptions of the state of Israel and contemporary Jewish communities rendered very few responses, which were limited to anti-Semitic prejudices about Jews being clever, wealthy, or highly religious, and when asked if they had Jewish friends, the students did not understand the question at first. In a similar vein, the teachers were generally reluctant to teach the Holocaust from a transnational perspective because they believed it would impede the students' ability to relate to the event. Thus, the increased focus on the transnational character of the Holocaust in the research literature does not translate into history teaching, and the established "canon", and the teachers' focus on developing the students' historical consciousness might even impede the development of such understanding.

In the data, gender and class did not play a significant role in determining the students' understanding of Second World War, including the Holocaust, whereas the city-country divide and ethnicity did. In the multi-ethnic classroom, the correspondence between the communicative and cultural memory of the Second World War was not a given, and the master narrative of Danish democracy and resistance was occasionally challenged. Nicolai, for example, deliberately used another hyper-national narrative of the Second World War to emphasize his Polishness *vis a vis* the other students' Danishness and against the "Jewishness" associated with the Holocaust, thus proposing an overtly anti-Semitic counter-narrative. For Annisa, the Holocaust found resonance with her own experiences of intolerance.

The article points towards future research perspectives, some related specifically to Holocaust education, others related more generally to history didactics. For example, it remains an open question whether the emphasis on developing the students' historical consciousness generally has an inbuilt national bias which favors the "canon" rather than the "archive." Goldberg's (2013) research suggests that identity issues associated with the students' historical consciousness might be tempered by a deliberate focus on developing historical thinking skills in peer-to-peer interactions and debates about difficult histories. In the Danish context, however, the students do not necessarily perceive the Holocaust as part of a difficult history, and the event does not automatically activate processes of social identification. It also remains an open question how democracy and nationalism become linked in various school subjects and textbook materials, and how this might influence the political consciousness of adolescence. Regarding Holocaust education, the interviews have shown a need to develop materials which can address the transnational character of the Holocaust. However, one of the most interesting perspective arising from the interviews regarding Holocaust education pertains to the way in which the interviewed Muslim students in Northern Denmark relate to the Holocaust. The interviews directly contradict other studies such as Short (2013) in indicating that Muslim students are more prone to sympathizing with the victims of the Holocaust and relating it to their own experiences of discrimination and marginalization. It would be interesting to explore whether this tendency is general for the local area in which the interviews were conducted and if so, what might account for it.

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About the author

Maren Lytje holds a Ph.D. in intellectual history (2015) and currently works as associate professor at the Department of Education at UCN. Her Ph.D. thesis explores how democracies decide on the lives worthy of protection. It analyzes the contemporary just war literature and the political justification of the War on Terror through a range of political and philosophical issues such as human rights, biopolitics and the relationship between the aesthetic value of the visual world and the discursive value of democratic politics. It was subsequently published as a book by Peter Lang and has resulted in three articles related to the themes developed in the thesis. Her post-Ph.D. research has primarily focused on Holocaust education, Holocaust memory, critical theory and the use of primary source material in history teaching. The current article is part of a research project about the Holocaust in the historical consciousness of Danish adolescence, and the potential for developing historical thinking skills and historical empathy through a close engagement with primary source material.

Email: MALY@ucn.dk
ORCID: https://orcid.org/0000-0002-6366-6315