CHAPTER 2

Swords, Shields or Collaborators?

Danish Historians and the Debate over the German Occupation of Denmark

Uffe Østergård

This chapter analyses the changing interpretations of the German occupation of Denmark during the Second World War in a comparative frame. Surprisingly, there is not much of a tradition of comparing the historical experiences of the Nordic countries either during the Second World War or in other contexts. This is probably because developments in these countries have been understood as similar, not requiring any explicit comparisons. The main exception seems to be comparative studies of the welfare state. Yet, the endeavour to compare the Nordic countries is most worthwhile, as shown in the first in-depth analysis of the experiences of Denmark and Norway during the Second World War.[1] The two countries have been treated as parallel cases and their different experiences have only been compared in the thorough introduction by Hans Fredrik Dahl and Hans Kirchhoff.[2] We should clearly do much more in the area of explicit comparison, something that has been attempted in another recent anthology of interdisciplinary studies in the history and memory in the Nordic countries.[3]

The main result of my reading of the Danish debates over the Second World War is that of a fundamental contrast between the results of the professional historians and of the reading public,

among them many politicians. The confrontation was brought out in the open in what amounts to a Danish version of the German *Historikerstreit* of 1986–1988 under Anders Fogh Rasmussen's centre-right government in the early 2000s. But the confrontation reflects a much older tradition of populism – *folkelighed* in Danish – and mistrust of all elites.

What followed immediately after the war was an interpretative consensus on wartime Denmark. In this understanding, the resistance movement was interpreted as a sword directed against the German occupation, while the policies of the cooperating – or collaborating – politicians were seen as providing a shield of protection to the majority of the population, including the Danish Jews who were rescued in 1943. Professional historians have challenged this grand narrative in various ways since the 1950s, and while their books have sold relatively well, they have apparently not dented popular belief to any great extent.

Only the populist turn and the interventions of the Prime Minister in 2003 and 2005 have politicised the previous consensus and somewhat belatedly opened the door for a 'moral turn' in occupation studies. Already in the 1990s investigations of the importance of Danish industry and agriculture for the German war effort, treatment of women fraternising with the Germans, asylum-seeking refugees and the like, had begun to change the overall picture of Denmark during the war. The 'moral turn' has not yet been fully accepted by the public, except from one item: the fact that some of the fishermen who helped Jews escaping to Sweden benefitted economically from their apparent altruism. How the debate over the memory of the occupation will develop in future depends mainly on the success of the activist Danish foreign policy characterised by participation in military interventions in various parts of the world.

The Beginnings of the Master Narrative

The discussion of how Danish society adapted to the German occupation in 1940–1945 began almost immediately after the German invasion of Denmark on 9 April 1940 and has continued ever since, albeit with varying intensity. Was it at all possible to defend

Denmark by military means? And if the armed forces seriously had fought back, would they have fought in the right places, or would they have concentrated on traditional land-military defence at Vejle Ådal in Jutland instead of protecting the main target of the German forces, Ålborg airfield in northern Jutland, which the German military needed for the campaign against Norway? Was the Danish capitulation an expression of cowardice, perhaps an expression of a defeatist national character? Or was the acceptance of German occupation on top of Denmark's virtual demilitarisation in the inter-war period part of an alternative and coherent strategy of a societal defence of democratic and human values? Was the Danish accommodation to German interests in the 1930s and the subsequent 'policy of cooperation' – or 'policy of collaboration' – with the German occupying regime during the war morally defensible?

The concept *samarbejdspolitik* (policy of cooperation) was the standard designation of Danish wartime policy under Nazi occupation by its critics in the illegal press. When used by politicians, the term implied that the Danish politicians collaborated across party lines in the national interests. In order to describe their lack of independence, they used the term *tilpasningspolitik* (policy of adaptation) or *indrømmelsespolitik* (policy of accommodation), which I have chosen as an apt English compromise between the different terms. The Danish term *kollaboration* (collaboration) is generally restricted to the active furthering of the enemy cause during wartime. Whether the official Danish policy should really be interpreted as a policy of collaboration, which was the line taken, for example, by the historian Hans Kirchhoff in 1979, is still debated.[4] Kirchhoff himself modified his original vehement denunciation of the official policy in 2001 when discussing the correct terminology regarding the Danish policy.[5] In a recent publication in English on the history of twentieth-century Denmark, another influential historian, Bo Lidegaard, has chosen the term 'cooperation'.[6]

The discussion concerning the Second World War began during the occupation and continued with the trials against collaborators from the summer of 1945 until 1948. The debate then gradually ebbed away, relegated to a parliamentary commission established on 15 June 1945. The commission concluded its work in 1953 with

a comprehensive report in fourteen volumes, consisting of 14,000 pages with stacks of documents and accounts.[7] After this the discussion shifted to professional historians, who organised themselves as the so-called Publication Society for Danish Contemporary History (*Udgiverselskabet for Danmarks Nyere Historie*, DNH) in 1960.

The dominant figure in the professional research on the occupation period was Jørgen Hæstrup (1909–1998). Without really feeling at home in the academic environment at the history department at the University of Copenhagen, Hæstrup took a degree in history in 1934 and became a high school teacher at Skt. Knuds Gymnasium in Odense. During the occupation, he was active in the resistance. He went underground in September 1944 and spent the rest of the occupation in Copenhagen. In 1947, Hæstrup began to collect material about the Danish resistance movement, using the data for his doctoral thesis *Kontakt med England 1940–1943* ('Contact with England, 1940–1943'), which he defended at Aarhus University in 1954. He depicted the resistance movement as having a significant role during the occupation, which pleased the many resistance fighters who attended his dissertation defence. It was less important that the official opponents at the defence, professors C.O. Bøggild-Andersen from Aarhus and Sven Henningsen of Copenhagen University, expressed strong criticism of his use of the sources and other aspects of methodology.

In a follow-up study from 1959, entitled *Hemmelig alliance* ('Secret alliance'), Hæstrup produced the classic interpretation of the Danish resistance movement, de-emphasising contradictions between the movement's Conservative, Social Democratic and Communist members. Instead, he concentrated on the so-called 'distorted distribution of British weapons' between active resistance fighters and what he considered the inactive, anti-Communist officer group (known as 'Ogroups') who obtained the most weapons. This led Martin Nielsen, editor of the Danish Communist Party newspaper *Land og Folk,* to accuse the army chief of staff Lieutenant General Viggo Hjalf of treason, at which Hjalf sued Nielsen for libel. Nielsen lost, served three months in prison, and paid a large sum in compensation. However, a debate in the Danish parliament, *Folketinget*, led to Hjalf's early retirement. The two volumes, *Kontakt med England*

1940–1943 and *Hemmelig alliance* were eventually published in English in 1976–1977 as a single volume entitled *Secret Alliance.*

The predominant narrative about Danish politics during the occupation, 'the war of the entire people' against Germany and Nazism during the Second World War, was established very rapidly even before the war ended. The activities of the politicians and high-ranking civil servants (*departementscheferne*) were interpreted as a 'shield' that protected the population against the worst, while the resistance movement was viewed as a 'sword' directed against the occupying power. This effort saved the Danish position at the last minute, placing Denmark on the side of the victorious Allies as co-founder of the United Nations in the summer of 1945. How this move was possible for a country which in real terms had been allied with Nazi Germany until the summer of 1943 at least, almost beats imagination. Much of the success of the manoeuvre depended on the fact that the majority of the Jews in Denmark, by good luck, were saved from Nazi persecution in October 1943. The legal fig leaf for the policy of accommodation was provided by the creation of the logically contradictory label 'peace occupation' for the situation after the German invasion on 9 April 1940. Regardless of the fact that until August 1943 most of official Denmark had condemned and persecuted the resistance fighters – and some even longer – the last months of the war and the first six months of peace witnessed the formation of a successful alliance between the resistance movement and the politicians, which soon brought Denmark back to normal and reduced the war experience to an exotic parenthesis.[8]

After Hæstrup had pursued his research for many years largely as a hobby, his situation changed when the DNH[9] launched a thorough investigation of the history of the occupation period, accompanied by a generous grant from the state and privileged access to the national archives. In 1961, Jørgen Hæstrup became the academic co-director of the society together with national archivist Johan Hvidtfeldt. In 1965, DNH was able to publish *Besættelsens Hvem-Hvad-Hvor* ('The who, what and where of the Occupation'), and in 1966, Hæstrup's own *Til landets bedste … Hovedtræk af departementchefsstyrets virke 1943–1945* ('For the good of the country… Main characteristics of the work of the permanent secretaries' administration 1943–1945').

To the surprise of many members of the resistance, Hæstrup defended the administration of the permanent secretaries after the cessation of cooperation in August 1943, when the cabinet ministers withdrew and the Parliament ceased to function. In Hæstrup's view, these officials operated as a virtual appendage to the resistance movement, providing a 'shield' for the 'sword' of the resistance. Hæstrup thus provided a scholarly version of the understanding of the Danish policy under occupation that had already been formulated in the summer of 1945, when the politicians resumed power in cooperation with selected representatives from the resistance. This 'consensus line' saw the occupation as marked by a broad consensus: almost the entire Danish population resisted the German occupation power, even if there was disagreement on the means of the struggle.

This 'master narrative', as the interpretation has been baptised by the historians Claus Bryld and Anette Warring, is not exclusively Danish, although it has often been portrayed as such.[10] It corresponds surprisingly well to the myths of the importance of the resistance in most occupied countries in Western Europe as depicted by the British historian Tony Judt in his masterly 2005 synthesis of Europe's post-war history, *Postwar*. Judt draws attention to the reverse relationship between the real importance of the resistance and the myth that came to surround it. In his own words:

> The only source of collective national pride were the armed partisan resistance movements that had fought the invader – which is why it was in western Europe, where the real resistance had actually been least in evidence, that the myth of Resistance mattered most. In Greece, Yugoslavia, Poland or Ukraine, where large numbers of real partisans had engaged the occupation forces and each other in open battle, things were, as usual more complicated. […] 'Resistance', in short, was a protean and unclear category, in some places an invented one. But 'collaboration' was another matter. Collaborators could be universally identified and execrated.[11]

This observation led Judt to his only comments about Denmark during the Second World War: 'In Denmark the crime of collaboration was virtually unknown. Yet 374 out of every 100,000 Danes were

sentenced to prison in post-war trials. In France, where wartime collaboration was widespread, it was for just that reason punished rather lightly.'[12] Such large-scale comparisons have only recently been introduced into the study of Danish occupation history.

The Grand Narrative Under Attack – The Second Generation of Historians

The consensus line has since been challenged in various ways by some of the representatives of the second generation of historians who had been DNH-trained by Hæstrup. In 1995, Henning Poulsen, professor at Aarhus University, somewhat cynically summed up the Danish war experience as follows:

> We collaborated politically with the occupation power and achieved conditions that, in comparison with other occupied countries, were good and relatively free. We then got a resistance movement at half price, and, finally, we became an allied power without entering the war.[13]

Other prominent members of this second generation of historians, all born in the early 1930s, were Henrik Nissen of Copenhagen University and Aage Trommer of Odense University (now part of the University of Southern Denmark). The most productive of them, though, is Hans Kirchhoff, who denounced the Danish wartime policy as 'collaboration' in his 1979 dissertation focusing on the anti-German near-rebellions all over the country in August 1943 except in the capital, Copenhagen. In 2001, Kirchhoff collected his life's research in *Samarbejde og modstand under besættelsen: En politisk historie* ('Cooperation and resistance during the occupation: A political history'). A superb synthesis of a long career dedicated to the 1940–1945 occupation period, the book demonstrated that interesting history is not written (only) by journalists.

In the extensive bibliography entitled *Samarbejde og modstand: Danmark under den tyske besættelse 1940–45: En bibliografi* ('Cooperation and resistance: Denmark during the German occupation 1940–45: A bibliography') from the Royal Library in 2002, Kirch-

hoff is the most prolific with 117 entries, not including newspaper articles. He and his generation cannot be accused of having ignored the wider public and of reserving their findings for an exclusive scholarly community of fellow historians. On the contrary, they went on television as early as the late 1960s, producing a whole series of programmes on the Second World War. Their books were always reviewed at length in the newspapers and inevitably attracted critical interest from the general public and surviving members of the resistance movement in particular. Yet, their criticism of the dominating consensus narrative of a united Danish front of resistance against the Germans never really caught on, even though their books sold in relatively large numbers.

Communication to the broader public outside the narrow circle of professional historians has always been a significant element in Kirchhoff's work. There is virtually no media in which he has made known his own results and those of his many students. The highpoint thus far is the collection of essays mentioned above, *Samarbejde og modstand under besættelsen*, which provides an extremely well-crafted synthesis for the broader public and covers the period that has preoccupied Kirchhoff through a long professional life. The work has taken its place in the current debate and represents a profound break with what he termed the use – and especially abuse – of contemporary history in the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. In the preface, Kirchhoff writes:

> Good colleagues tell me that the grand theme of the occupation concerning cooperation or resistance is out, that the research stands at a crossroads and is drying up, and that it can survive only by focusing on other questions such as human rights and Europeanisation, which are in today. I do not agree, and I also think that the intense media debate on the policy of cooperation in these years repudiates this judgement. As I see it, it is more important than ever, now that the generation of the occupation years is dying out, that the historians intervene in a discussion which so often obtains the character of an ahistorical attack on the line of cooperation and a superficial embrace of the resistance point of view, which has now become gratuitous following the

> fall of the [Berlin] Wall. This book can be seen as a contribution to such a necessary historicization.[14]

In a subsequent anthology of fourteen portraits of people who chose opposite policies, Kirchhoff provides an exquisite summary of the predominant point of view among the majority of professional historians, regardless of generation:

> A pervasive theme in the book is the choice between cooperation and resistance, that which in the confused debate of our day seems to be so easy and uncomplicated. With 70 years of distance, we would all certainly say that there ought to have been resistance from the first day of the occupation! To this one can say that all the occupied countries cooperated or *collaborated* with the enemy during the Second World War, regardless of whether they were occupied peacefully such as Denmark, or were occupied following war and conquest. Negotiations had to take place with foreign troops in the country, and everyday life had to go on […] Collaboration in the hour of defeat became France's response to German occupation, a response supported by the vast majority. But with the Allies' victory and the growth of the resistance movement, collaboration became synonymous with treason, and in the final settling of the accounts after the war, collaborators were shot and executed en masse. A similar development took place in occupied and liberated Europe, where, in the summer of liberation of 1945, it could lead to loss of life or in any case to losing a career to have been on the wrong side. Therefore, only very few defended collaboration in its own right as the legitimate response of the weak to the attack by the superpower Germany, and as a choice between a greater or a lesser evil. This resulted in a European myth of cooperation as a form of hidden resistance, a myth that has clouded the discussion right up to the present day.
>
> In a sociological perspective, all the citizens in the occupied countries participated in the collaboration by producing and working and driving for the Germans. They may have been clenching their fists in their pockets, but they followed the Germans' directives and were thus helping to make the occupation easier for them. Only

a small minority chose to resist. The vast majority were primarily occupied with personal matters, with family, work and providing food. As we know, the instinct for self-preservation is not the most noble of goals, but it is the most basic!

To all appearances, there was never any choice in Denmark between cooperation and resistance for the majority of the population. For the most part, people heeded the message of the King and the Government for peace and order and without major problems supported the war programme of the Freedom Council [*Frihedsrådet*]. Neither did there exist any choice for the official Denmark, that is, the politicians, civil servants, business, organisations and the press, who supported the line of cooperation to the bitter end as the only correct policy which could protect against the misfortunes of war and German repression. Those who turned to active resistance were exceptions confirming the rule that, all things considered, the path to illegal struggle was longer for a politician, police chief or trade union boss than for a schoolteacher, machinist or shop assistant. One need only be reminded that most of the Freedom Council were unbound and free intellectuals. What distinguished them was their social role, that which Max Weber has called the 'ethic of *responsibility*' as opposed to the 'ethic of *conviction*'. The dilemma is of a deep moral and existential nature, and it existed throughout occupied Europe, where resistance could provoke retribution leading to death and destruction of innocent people.[15]

The Politics of History – A Danish 'Historikerstreit'

Alternative narratives of the war existed, but they remained marginal until the late 1990s, even though some of the Communist narratives gained great popularity in the teaching of Danish history and literature in secondary schools (primarily Hans Scherfig's novel *Frydenholm* from 1962). Criticism of the 'policy of accommodation' became more vocal only with the fall of Communism and in the face of an emerging activist Danish foreign policy from the early 1990s onward, which entailed Danish participation in the NATO bombing of Serbia in the Kosovo crisis in 1999 and the interventions in Afghanistan in 2002 onwards and in Iraq in

2003–2007. The liberal-conservative Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen has successfully formulated a new narrative about Danish neutrality policy in the twentieth century which seems to have carried the day.

Apart from specific polemics, which tended to flare up in conjunction with the publication of historical research, the discussion over the occupation years, somewhat paradoxically, only resurfaced after the end of the Cold War in the 1990s. In 1995, the fiftieth anniversary of the end of the Second World War triggered a public debate about the appropriateness of commemorating the end of the war on 5 May 1945 with a laser beam from bunker to bunker along the west coast of Jutland, which had been fortified to ward off an invasion that never came.[16] However, a fundamental critique of the wartime policy of accommodation was only formulated by responsible decision-makers after the election of a centre-right coalition government in 2001 (with the support of the nationalist-populist Danish People's Party).

This change of government marked a radical departure from the centre-left coalition of Social Democrats and Social Liberals which had ruled for a decade and had generally dominated Danish politics since 1929. In this new constellation, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen of the Liberal party *Venstre* officially condemned what he called the 'cowardly policy of cooperation'. His initiative may seem slightly out of place as his party has traditionally represented the interests of the farmers who had profited most from the occupation, when Denmark supplied the German war effort with agricultural products. Anders Fogh Rasmussen held a symbolically laden speech in 2003 at the Naval Academy to mark the sixtieth anniversary of the end of the official policy of accommodation in August 1943. He expressed his condemnation of Denmark's acquiescence in 1940 and of the subsequent policy of toleration of the German Occupation which until then had been defended by most politicians. It must be taken into account that the main political reason for Rasmussen's statements was his wish to mobilise support for the interventionist Danish foreign policy after 2001, which culminated in Danish participation in the American-led invasions of Afghanistan in 2002 and Iraq in 2003. The interven-

tion in Iraq, in contrast to the foreign policy activism of the 1990s, most notably Denmark's participation in NATO's 1999 bombing of Serbia in support of Kosovo's independence, was based on a narrow majority in parliament and is still very controversial. In contrast to most other participating countries, however, it is still not much debated.

Anders Fogh Rasmussen's speech in 2003, which is discussed below and is available in Danish on the 'About 1945' homepage of the Ministry of Education (published in 2005), should thus be primarily read as a contribution to a domestic political debate over Danish foreign policy. But his views extended far beyond the present political situation, which has led to a confrontation with the professional historians, who almost unanimously rejected the Prime Minister's contribution to the debate as the ahistorical wisdom of hindsight. They saw it as a condemnation of his predecessors' choices without any attempt to appreciate the difficult situation in which they found themselves and the background to the choices they made in a situation where they had no support from the Allies. The discussion must be seen as an extension of the Prime Minister's contest with the intellectual elite in general in his campaign against what were called 'arbiters of taste' (*smagsdommere*), a campaign he declared in his New Year's address on 1 January 2002, shortly after taking office. However, Fogh Rasmussen's speech is also connected with the fact that aside from a brief Marxist flirtation in the 1970s, most of the Danish historians, ever since the professionalisation of the discipline at the universities in the 1880s, have been very closely linked to a single political party, the Social Liberals of *Radikale Venstre*.[17] The dominant figure, and also a prominent politician, was Peter Munch, or Dr P. Munch, as he preferred to be called. As minister of defence during the First World War and as foreign minister from 1929 to 1940, Munch had been responsible for the foreign and security policy denounced by critics as the 'German course'.[18] With few exceptions, post-war historians of all political persuasions have shown an understanding for the policy conducted during the war, even though some, among them Hans Kirchhoff, chose to call the policy of cooperation by its correct European name of collaboration.[19]

Fogh Rasmussen's reinterpretation is linked to the nationalist position expressed by the theologians in the Danish religious movement *Tidehverv* (literally 'New Era'), a current that forms the ideological basis of the Danish People's Party's political success.[20] However, the fact that the position has also gained ground within the Liberal Party, which during the occupation represented those agricultural interests that profited so much from cooperation with Nazi Germany,[21] is surprising, to say the least. That such a change is possible testifies to a lack of historical consciousness, or at least a lack of continuity, in Danish political culture. At the same time, however, it shows that the professional historians do not exercise a monopoly on interpretation of the past. One can discuss whether they have ever had such a monopoly. It is enough to think of the outcry that has occurred each time the second generation of historians of the occupation demonstrated how few persons were actually involved in the resistance, or how little effect their actions had on the course of the war. Today, however, it has become clear that the historians no longer determine how the Second World War is remembered and which lessons can be learned from this important episode in the national narrative.

The majority of Danish historians, as mentioned, have rejected the activist reinterpretation of the message of the Second World War. One can almost speak of a Danish *Historikerstreit* on a par with the German debate in 1986–1988 over war guilt and suffering. The debate between politicians and professional historians broke out in 2003 with a commentary in the Social Liberal newspaper *Politiken* by the historian Niels Wium Olesen from Aarhus University. Olesen belongs to what we can call the third generation of occupation historians. He previously headed the Collection for Occupation-era History in Esbjerg and has co-authored the most authoritative and balanced investigation of all sides of the occupation period together with Claus Bundgård Christensen, Joachim Lund and Jakob Sørensen (all three born in the late 1960s or early 1970s). Their book, *Danmark besat: Krig og hverdag 1940–45* ('Denmark occupied: War and everyday life 1940–1945') , first appeared in 2005. Their basic view of the Danish policy of accommodation resembles Kirchhoff's nuanced judgement.[22]

The historians' detailed and empathetic judgement of the Danish occupation, compared with the situation in other occupied countries in Europe, stands in fundamental contrast to Fogh Rasmussen's condemnation of the Danish policy as collaborationist. In his 2003 Naval Academy speech, Fogh Rasmussen declared:

> 29 August 1943 is a date we should remember – and be proud of. On that day, Denmark's honour was saved. The Danish government finally stopped cooperating with the German occupying powers and resigned. After three years of cooperation with the Germans, clearly defined lines were finally drawn. Nor was it a day too soon […] The government, the *Folketing* and the established Denmark did not benefit from the cessation of cooperation with the Germans. On the contrary, the official Denmark, from the start of the occupation of Denmark on 9 April 1940, had obediently complied with the Germans, cooperated on all levels, and encouraged the population to do the same. In taking up the post of Foreign Minister in 1940, Erik Scavenius declared that 'the great German victories' had 'struck the world with amazement and admiration'. He concluded that Denmark should now find its place in a necessary and mutually active cooperation with the Germans. It was not enough that Denmark's political leadership decided to follow a passive policy of cooperation in relation to the Germans. The government at the time consciously and openly chose an active policy toward the occupying power in the hope that some of the sovereignty would be respected. Recent historical research reveals that it was in fact a case of a very active cooperation policy. Many were convinced of a German victory. Politicians, officials and organisations began to prepare for Denmark's place in a new, Nazi-dominated Europe. Centrally placed officials worked on plans to transform the Danish economy following the Nazi planned-economy pattern.
>
> The main argument for the policy of cooperation was that all Danish resistance against the German superpower was useless. By cooperating with the occupying power, Denmark and the Danish population were sheltered from most of the horrors of war. And it succeeded. The Danes escaped the worst destruction. Agriculture and industry profited from the war. Viewed on the basis of such a

cold calculation, some people might perhaps call the cooperation policy necessary, clever and appropriate. But this is a very dangerous way of thinking. If everyone had thought like the Danish cooperation politicians, Hitler would in all probability have won the war, and Europe would have become Nazi. But fortunately, the British and later the Americans and Russians did not think like the Danish elite. They fought a life-and-death struggle against the Nazis and thereby secured our freedom. In the final analysis, it was the population's growing dissatisfaction with the cooperation policy and the efforts of the courageous members of the resistance that forced the government to renounce cooperation with the Germans. We should be happy about this, and proud of it. We owe a great debt of thanks to the resistance fighters who, through sabotage against the Germans and cooperation with the Allies, defied the cooperating politicians and ultimately ensured Denmark its place on the right side of the struggle against the Nazis.

Naturally, one should be cautious in making a judgement about the past on the basis of the present. Today we know that the Nazis lost the war after the US and the Soviet Union became involved in 1941, and therefore the active Danish policy of cooperation appears as mistaken and contemptible. If it had been continued until the end of the war, Denmark would have appeared as a German client state and ally. In the light of history, it would have been a catastrophe. But did things appear differently at the start of the war? If the Germans had indeed won, would Denmark not have profited in adapting itself to the German dominance in time? Many people thought so. However, it appears naive to think that Hitler would have given special consideration to Denmark in the event of a German victory. There were also highly placed officials who from the very beginning of the war had distanced themselves from these naive ideas. Denmark's independent emissary in Washington Henrik Kaufmann and the counsellor to the Danish legation in Berlin Vincens Steensen-Leth realised from the outset that the policy of cooperation was naive and mistaken. They warned that Denmark would never obtain concessions from the Nazis, neither on this point or that, because it was the very idea of the democratic state of law that the Nazis wanted to kill off. The Nazis accepted only

> one form of system, the national socialist form. There was no room for special treatment in what Hitler called the 'clattering of small states'. Even judging by the assumptions of the time, the Danish policy appears naive, and it is very contemptible that the political elite in Denmark conducted not only a policy of neutrality, but acted with such a degree of active adaptation to German interests.
>
> In the struggle between democracy and dictatorship, one cannot be neutral. One must take a stand for democracy and against dictatorship. It is on this point that the active policy of active adaptation constituted a political and moral failure. All too often in history, we Danes have sailed under a flag of convenience and allowed others to fight for our freedom and peace. The lesson from 29 August 1943 is that if our values of freedom, democracy and human rights are to be meant seriously, then we ourselves must also make an active contribution to defending them. Also against difficult odds, even when unpopular and dangerous decisions have to be made. Thank you.[23]

As can be seen, the Prime Minister's condemnation of the policy of cooperation is not without reference to recent historical research. This is hardly surprising considering the fact that one of his closest staff members at the time was the historian Bo Lidegaard, who has written a very successful book on Denmark in the 1930s and 1940s, which interestingly contradicts the interpretation of his political boss. Fogh Rasmussen simply chose to disagree and to ignore the historicising relativism of most historians in favour of a contemporary political judgement intended to justify Danish participation in the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Yet, Anders Fogh Rasmussen's condemnation of the policy of accommodation does not represent a complete breach with the grand narrative. On the contrary, after the liberation, almost all politicians, with the exception of the honourably steadfast Social Democrats Hartvig Frisch and Hal Koch, sought to distance themselves from their positions during the occupation and embraced the resistance movement. The sword and shield metaphor had, as previously shown, become central in the Danish collective remembrance of the war. It fused the two policies as supplementing variants of resistance, where

disagreement was only about the means. What was new was the unequivocal moral condemnation of the cooperation arrangement, a moralism about the past in which Fogh Rasmussen was far from unique (see, for instance, Hans Kirchhoff's speech on accepting the H.O. Lange prize for the popularising of research in 2001 and his book published in the same year).

In fact, one can conclude that while the professional historians have won out on the book front, they appear to have lost the battle for public opinion. Books abound about the Second World War, defending the policy of accommodation as the only political option for a small country that had been delivered up to the mercy of the German great power, books which explore the dilemmas from all possible angles. Some of them, such as Bo Lidegaard's work from 2005, sell in very large numbers. At the same time, however, the majority of politicians and possibly the majority of the voters support the activist attitude, which condemns 'the policy of accommodation' as morally abominable and as an expression of cowardice from which we have fortunately recovered following the end of the Cold War and, most notably, with the help of the centre-right coalition government in 2001. Historians' nuances and understanding of the impossible choices in the past apparently play a minuscule role in the debate over Danish public opinion at the beginning of the third millennium. It is as if the Danes of today are fighting the war our predecessors neglected to fight between 1940 and 1945 – apart from the fact that Denmark made a decisive contribution by supplying Germany with agricultural products and with volunteers for the Waffen SS.[24]

Virtually all professional historians in Denmark seem united in their understanding of the policies during the Second World War, an understanding which differs fundamentally from the basic narrative held by the rest of the population, no matter whether it is the older consensus narrative or the former Prime Minister's moral(istic) condemnation of the policy of cooperation. There is only one feature of the war experience which seems to be remembered in the same way – the rescue of the Jews.

Holocaust in Denmark?

The rescue of the Danish Jews in October 1943 is a major and unrivalled event in Danish history, laying the foundation for Denmark's humanitarian reputation. The rescue is internationally recognised to a remarkable degree, both at the Yad Vashem Institute in Jerusalem and the Holocaust Memorial Museum in Washington. Both exhibitions contain an original fishing boat which took Danish Jews across the Øresund Strait to Sweden, along with inscriptions thanking the people of Denmark for their heroic deeds. This collective expression of thanks has a particularly strong effect, since otherwise only individuals recorded by name are given prominence in Yad Vashem's memorial park. In her famous book on the trial of Eichmann in Jerusalem, published in 1963, Hannah Arendt singled out Denmark as a small, 'stubborn' country where it proved impossible for the Nazis to make people accept their perverted ideas about their Jewish fellow citizens.

The spontaneous popular efforts by Danes to save the Danish Jews can be regarded as an expression of those virtues and values which Danes want to associate with everything Danish. Seen in light of what Denmark otherwise contributed to the Second World War, as a passive occupied country whose government accommodated the German occupation and supplied Germany with food and other important products, it may be said that this popular contribution redressed the balance, compensating for the cowardice and outright collaboration of official Denmark during the occupation. For a long period, the Allies had good reason to question whether Denmark should be classified as an ally of Germany or as an opponent. By the skin of its teeth, Denmark was included in the group of allied victors when the United Nations was founded in 1945. As we have seen, questions about Denmark's position during the war have been raised in recent public debates. New generations of historians and journalists have investigated the extent and the enthusiasm with which Danish business circles complied with the German side, an effort which even included Danish participation in the German exploitation of the conquered territories in Eastern Europe, including the use of forced labour in some Danish-run factories in Estonia and elsewhere.[25] That the participation of Danish businesses

in the war effort was complemented by the participation of Danish volunteers in Waffen SS units has been convincingly demonstrated by recent research.[26]

The rescue of the Danish Jews does not wipe the stain from the Danish national conscience. However, it serves as recompense for the lack of a moral stand on the part of a small state in the most crucial test of strength in the twentieth century. The saving of the Jews shows what people are capable of when they share the same values and the same political culture. The rescue also demonstrates the importance of individuals when they commit themselves. 'Courage to care', as it is known in international Holocaust education. Yet, while some Danish self-praise is justified, it is important to remember the conditions that enabled Danes to rescue the Jews, especially when compared with the situation in other small or medium-sized countries such as the Netherlands and Norway.

First, there were differences between the Danish and Dutch situations. Danes could more easily rescue Danish Jews because the shores of Sweden were so close by (an hour or less by small craft) and because Sweden itself was neutral. The presence of a close, neutral neighbour and the geography of Zealand are the main reasons why things turned out so differently for Jews in Denmark than for the Jews in the Netherlands. The extermination of the Dutch Jews has left an open wound in the collective Dutch memory that is not treatable with excuses. However, Danes should remember that it was infinitely more difficult to help Jews in hiding for many years than helping them cross from Denmark to Sweden. Moreover, the Dutch suffered under a much harsher Nazi regime, led by the fanatical Austrian Arthur Seyss-Inquart. This difference in war experience has been an important factor in explaining the great difference in attitude between Denmark and the Netherlands after the Second World War. Nevertheless, the two countries share many similar views and values, and their structural position and interests as small states in Europe are certainly comparable.

A second factor behind the Danish success in rescuing its Jewish citizens compared to the Dutch relates to the conflicting attitudes within the German occupying power in the two countries. The German *Wehrmacht* had no interest in provoking resistance in Den-

mark, as this could have changed a situation that in fact continued unaltered until the end of the occupation. Such stability allowed the Germans to use Denmark as a base where exhausted soldiers could rest and recuperate. German soldiers called Denmark the 'cream front' (*Sahnefront* or *flødeskumsfronten*), where they were sent to recover from battles elsewhere. The Danish population did not see the situation in this light, but for German soldiers, Denmark was a comfortable billet where they could regain their strength after the horrors of the Eastern Front. Moreover, not all German officers shared the Nazi regime's anti-Semitic ideology. They saw no reason to carry out the strict orders and hunt down those whom both they and the Danish population regarded as Danish citizens, that is, citizens of a nation that was not at war with Germany. This attitude was not known to the organisers of the escape routes nor to those who fled. And it certainly does not detract in any way from the heroism shown by those who rescued the Danish Jews. However, the success of the Danish rescue lies in the fact that the Germans were not that interested in capturing the fleeing Jews.

Something else we can learn from the attitude of the Danish population during the Second World War, and which has a more general relevance than the actual rescue of the Jews, is the Danish population's relative immunity to totalitarian ideologies. Even during the Nazi occupation, and with the privileges which would accrue to a Danish Nazi, the Danish Nazi Party only managed to attract less than 2 per cent of the vote in the free elections of March 1943. Even though Communists were not allowed to stand for election, the turnout was 89.5 per cent, the highest ever recorded. The five parties of the old coalition government won 94.5 per cent of the vote. The Communists would probably not have received many votes at the time, even if they had been allowed to stand. The many votes received by the Communists in the autumn of 1945 primarily represented a protest against the politics of accommodation and admiration of their 'patriotic' efforts and active resistance during the war. This admiration nevertheless failed to last beyond the summer of liberation in 1945.

The rescue of the Danish Jews can thus be attributed to a combination of determined passive resistance *and* accommodation which

marked the occupation years, complemented by lucky timing. Had the attempt to round up the Jews came in November 1942 as it did in Norway, the end result would most probably have been very different. However that may be, the policy of accommodation made it possible to delay the German action to such an extent that the will to resist in Denmark as well as the rest of Europe had increased.

In many respects, Denmark had a good war. This is probably why Danes today want to fight it again, ignoring the results of professional historical research. As such, the debate testifies to the fundamental democratic-populist (or populist-democratic) and anti-elitist nature of Danish political culture. For many years such attitudes were expressed in views about the European Union. Now they have moved to other areas. That is a different history on which I have written elsewhere.[27]

Notes

1 Hans Fredrik Dahl, Hans Kirchhoff, Joachim Lund & Lars-Erik Vaale (eds.), *Danske tilstande: Norske tilstande. Forskelle og ligheder under tysk besættelse 1940–45* (Copenhagen, 2010).

2 Hans Fredrik Dahl & Hans Kirchhoff, 'Besættelse – dansk og norsk', in: Hans Fredrik Dahl, Hans Kirchhoff, Joachim Lund & Lars-Erik Vaale (eds.), *Danske tilstande: Norske tilstande. Forskelle og ligheder under tysk besættelse 1940–45* (Copenhagen, 2010), 9–30.

3 Anne Eriksen & Jón V. Sigurdsson (eds.), *Negotiating Pasts in the Nordic Countries: Interdisciplinary Studies in History and Memory* (Lund, 2008). See also Claus Bryld, 'The Five Accursed Years: Danish Perception and Usage of the Period of the German Occupation, With a Wider View to Norway and Sweden', *Scandinavian Journal of History*, 2007, 32.

4 Hans Kirchhoff, *Augustoprøret 1943: Samarbejdspolitikkens fald, forudsætninger og forløb*, 3 vols. (Copenhagen, 1979).

5 Hans Kirchhoff, *Samarbejde og modstand under besættelsen: En politisk historie* (Odense, 2001), 13–14.

6 Bo Lidegaard, *A Short History of Denmark in the 20th Century* (Copenhagen, 2009).

7 *Den Parlamentariske Kommissions Beretning til Folketinget*, 14 vols. (Copenhagen, 1946–1953).

8 Claus Bryld & Anette Warring, *Besættelsen som kollektiv erindring: Historie- og traditionsforvaltning af krig og besættelse 1945–1997* (Frederiksberg, 1998); Nils Arne Sørensen, 'Danmarkshistoriens vigtigste parentes: Om besættelsestidens virkningshistorie', in: Joachim Lund (ed.), *Partier under pres* (Copenhagen, 2003), 346–368; Henning Poulsen, 'Dansk modstand og tysk politik', *Den*

Jyske Historiker, 1995, 71, 7–18; Henning Poulsen, *Besættelsesårene 1940–1945* (Århus, 2005).

9 *Udgiverselskabet for Danmarks Nyeste Historie* was founded in 1951 in order to publish the political memoirs of the former Minister of Foreign Affairs Peter Munch. Together with excerpts from his diaries, the memoirs were published in eight massive volumes in 1959–1967. In 1961, the Society initiated systematic research of the political history of the occupation. Researchers working under auspices of the Society had privileged, though not unlimited access to the sources in the national archives. Many of the historians who later became famous as the second generation of historians of the occupation thus trained under the supervision of Jørgen Hæstrup.

10 Bryld & Warring 1998.

11 Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London, 2005), 41–42.

12 Judt 2005, 46.

13 Poulsen 1995, 17.

14 Kirchhoff 2001, 7.

15 Hans Kirchhoff (ed.), *Sådan valgte de: Syv dobbeltportrætter fra besættelsens tid* (Copenhagen, 2008), 11–12. The 'Danish Freedom Council' (*Frihedsrådet*) was created in September 1943 to coordinate the fight for liberation. The Council intended to unify the many different groups that made up the Danish resistance movement, bringing together representatives from the Communists, Free Denmark, the Danish Unity Party and Ringen. Key members were Børge Houmann, Mogens Fog, Arne Sørensen, Frode Jakobsen, Erling Foss and Aage Schock. Directives from the British Special Operations Executive, SOE, helped in uniting the different groups.

16 The debate has been thoroughly examined in Bryld & Warring 1998 and by Nils Arne Sørensen, 'Narrating the Second World War in Denmark since 1945', *Contemporary European History*, 14, 2005:3, 295–315.

17 Jens Christian Manniche, *Den radikale historikertradition* (Århus, 1981). A second edition is available at <www.historienu.dk>, accessed on 1 December 2010.

18 Peter Rochegune Munch (1870–1948) was a Danish politician and member of parliament for *Det Radikale Venstre* from 1909 to 1945, representing the island of Langeland. He served in several key posts, as minister of home affairs (1909–1910), minister of defence (1913–1920), minister of foreign affairs (1929–1940) and as the Danish delegate to the League of Nations (1920–1938). See P. Munch, *Erindringer 1870–1947*, 8 vols. (Copenhagen, 1959–1967); Viggo Sjøqvist, *Peter Munch: Manden Politikeren Historikeren* (Copenhagen, 1976); Ole Krarup-Pedersen, *Udenrigsminister P. Munchs opfattelse af Danmarks stilling i international politik* (Copenhagen, 1970). In addition to his scholarly works of history and contributions to general histories of Denmark, Munch left a profound mark on many subsequent generations of schoolchildren through his much-read textbooks on world history. The critical expression 'the German course' (*tyskerkursen*) was coined by the polemicist Bjørn Svensson in an eponymous book from 1983.

19 Kirchhoff 2001 and 2008.

20 *Tidehverv* originated as a left-wing reaction among Danish theologians in the 1920s. The movement was against all attempts to turn the Christian message in the Lutheran church into moralist missives. In the 1970s, the movement was taken over (hijacked in the opinion of some former adherents) by pastor Søren Krarup and turned into an anti-immigration and anti-EU movement. In an interesting manoeuvre, this small group has succeeded in formulating an intellectual language for the populist *Dansk Folkeparti* (Danish People's Party). I have analysed the relationship between the party and the intellectual group and their virtual intellectual hegemony since 2001 in Uffe Østergård, 'Kamp om historien – historie som kamp', in Finn Collin & Jan Faye (eds.), *Ideer vi lever på – Humanistisk viden i videnssamfundet* (Copenhagen, 2008), 204–223.

21 Joachim Lund, *Hitlers spisekammer: Danmark og den europæiske nyordning 1940–43* (Copenhagen, 2005).

22 Claus Bundgård Christensen, Joachim Lund, Niels Wium Olesen & Jakob Sørensen, *Danmark besat: Krig og hverdag 1940–45* (Copenhagen, 2005; 3rd edn 2009).

23 Anders Fogh Rasmussen's address at the commemoration at the Naval Academy on 29 August, 2003. The text is available in Danish on the homepage of the Ministry of the State of Denmark (The Prime Minister's Office): Anders Fogh Rasmussen, 'Tale på Søværnets Officersskole 29. august 2003', <www.statsministeriet.dk>, accessed on 1 December 2010. For reactions to the speech and discussion about the policy of cooperation generally, see Henrik Skovgaard Nielsen, 'Besættelsestiden i den offentlige debat – Samarbejdspolitikken: Moralsk svigt?', <www.befrielsen1945.dk>, accessed on 1 December 2010.

24 Lund 2005; Claus Bundgård Christensen, Niels Bo Poulsen & Peter Scharff Smith, *Under Hagekors og Dannebrog: Danskere i Waffen SS 1940–45* (Copenhagen, 1998).

25 Joachim Lund, 'Building Hitler's Europe: Forced Labor in the Danish Construction Business during Word War II', *Business History Review*, 84, 2010.

26 Christensen, Poulsen & Smith 1998.

27 See, for instance, Uffe Østergård, 'Denmark and the New International Politics of Morality and Remembrance', *Danish Foreign Policy Yearbook,* 2005.