World War II at 24 Frames a Second – Scandinavian Examples

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World War II shows no sign of fading away. A large number of books and articles are still being published at the same time as memories of the war intermingle with present day politics. Events and processes that began before the outbreak of the war and had effects on Europe long after 1945 are, in many respects, still at the core of most, if not all, European politics. The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, the German-Soviet non-aggression agreement from August 1939, is a vivid example of a European *Lieu de mémoire*. It is, the German historian Stefan Troebst writes, one of several central points of a memory culture dealing with one of the greatest catastrophes in human history (2009: 249–256).

Despite, or perhaps because of, simplified divisions between credible historical research, on the one hand, and subjective memories, on the other, collective memory and memory culture have been concepts at the core of historical research during the last decades. One of the more ambitious attempts to define memory culture takes as its starting point the ongoing struggle between what is included and what is excluded from dominating narratives of the past. This is at the same time a construction of memories and a struggle for meaning. Seen in this way, collective memory is both an important part of a construction process which aims to find meaning in a chaotic diversity and an ideological conflict in which history is used in order to win advantages in the present or in the near future. Thus, memory is a narrative representation of the past oriented towards the future (Karlsson 1999: 48; Sundholm 2007: 115). Since film is such an important mediator of history, moving images give

meaning at the same time as they are at the core in fierce ideological battles, not least when it comes to the Second World War.

The Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact is, like many other significant historical events, important in its own right, but we can hardly underestimate the importance of contemporary political life, which has effect on the mediation aspect. For decades, the secret protocol of the Molotov–Ribbentrop Pact, dividing Eastern and Northern Europe between Nazi Germany and Soviet Russia, remained unknown to the general public throughout Eastern Europe. But when it surfaced in the late 1980s, the new knowledge had a deep impact on the liberation movements in the Baltic States and in Poland. Thus, what we remember, or are allowed to remember, and what we forget depends to a large extent on the development of history cultures. A history culture can be studied both as a structure and as a process. When studying history culture as a process, it is the different ways of mediating history and their consequences which are of importance. When analyzing history culture as a structure, the focus is on differences between, for instance, countries. In a country like Sweden, which has been spared from war during a period of almost two hundred years and been a democracy for almost a hundred years, different attitudes and behaviors are to be found compared with dictatorships and/or war-torn countries. Such a conclusion by no means excludes differences within one country (Karlsson 2003: 30–38). A history culture can include dividing opinions both over time and in regard to one and the same product. With the filming of Väinö Linna's famous novel *Tuntematon Sotilas* (*Unknown Soldier*) as an example, John Sundholm (2007: 120–139) underlines striking differences in the reception of the version from 1955 compared to the one from 1985. While the first one soon became, as the novel, an icon for the Finnish war experience, the second one failed.

It is not surprising to find that the combination of war and film has been a viable one ever since the infancy of cinema. Thanks to films, wars and genocides can come to life and turn into a kind of assembly points for thoughts on and opinions about justified wars on the one hand and immoral and excessively violent assaults on the other. With the Jewish experience as an example, Paul Patera wrote in 1950 that film was the art which most easily prepared the public for "we" against "the others" generalizations. The tragedies of the Holocaust were a shocking proof of this. However, the increasing number of films dealing with the legacy of the Nazi genocide, which premiered in the late 1940s, showed that films could also be a forceful weapon in fighting the prevailing anti-Semitism (Patera 1950: 149–159).

Film and war are interdependent in a number of ways. Films became early on a sharp propaganda weapon, used in wars and conflicts, and thoroughly explored during the First World War. During the interwar period, the Soviet Union and Nazi Germany established strong links between government and film industry. Even power holders in the United States and Great Britain realized the importance of film propaganda, but left the primary responsibility for developing corresponding activities to the various studios. In addition, the wartime film production created, as it turned out, profitable employment. From an American point of view, war as depicted through films has been characterized as "a love affair", and the same goes for many other countries' film industries (Matelski/Street 2003: 3). An interesting conclusion is that films have had an impact during the wars, but even more so as "descriptions" of the war in hindsight, shaping the way we look on armed conflicts, then and now (cf. Paul 2003: 3). "Indeed", writes historian Michael Paris (2007: 2), "it might well be argued that the popular memory of the Second World War has always been shaped more by the moving image than by any other form of cultural transmission."

Since documentaries and, even more so, feature films occupy a central position in most historical cultures, many history producers use moving images for their purposes, not least when it comes to questions of war and peace. Among them we find almost every position from romantic nationalist to war-weary pacifist. Due to its great influence on millions of movie-goers, it has been a temptation to rewrite history in the cinemas so that past defeats become moral victories, war criminals become heroes, or vice versa (cf. Strübel 2002: 8–9). The historical revision on film has in some cases been very successful. Undoubtedly, the South lost the American Civil War, but the Southerners' "lost cause" has time after time undergone a transformation from a military and a political defeat to a bitter-sweet farewell to a culture which, although it is stained by the slavery issue, nevertheless deserves a belated revenge against the industrialists in the North.

The Scandinavian countries had very different war experiences. Denmark and Norway were invaded by German troops on April 9, 1940. The Danes capitulated the same day, and their government was allowed a certain amount of autonomy until 1943. In Norway, the fighting went on until resistance became impossible, when British forces had to leave the battlefield. While Vidkun Quisling led a puppet government, Norwegians in exile formed a government in London. Sweden succeeded in remaining neutral, although the neutrality was determined by the winds of war. After the outbreak of the war and in the following years, special consideration was shown for the powerful German neighbor, but in the

last years of the war the demands of the Allies took priority. Considering this, one can say, as a starting point, that in all three countries the films, like history writing in general, show markedly different features.

While especially American, German, British, French and Soviet war films have been analyzed in international research in recent decades, the study of Scandinavian examples is still rare. However, the material basis for such an analysis is rich. It consists primarily of films and television series depicting aspects of the Second World War in the Scandinavian countries and the extensive press material, dealing both with the production and the reception of these history products. Of special interest are the Danish film *Flammen og Citronen* (*Flame and Lemon*, 2008), the Norwegian film *Max Manus* (*Max Manus – Man of War*, 2009), the Swedish television series *Någonstans i Sverige* (*Somewhere in Sweden*, 1973) and the Swedish film *1939* (1989). We will look at them as history cultural products that refer to the actual history of the Second World War. But it is most likely that their producers have worked even harder to capture the values of present society that prevailed during the period when the films and televisions series were produced. Seen in this way, films about the past always say more about the time when they were produced.

Scandinavian cinema during World War II

As in all other countries, film also played a vital role in Denmark, Norway and Sweden during the Second World War. In Norway, attempts were made to adapt the national film production to the "new orientation" that Quisling and his party Nasjonal Samling tried to impose on the Norwegian society. The result was meager, yielding only a few political films (Sørenssen 2007: 220–230). Also, the German censorship could not foresee all possible alternative interpretations of certain films. For instance, the importance of resisting occupiers was indeed occasionally depicted, especially in films with historic settings. *Snapphanar* (1942), a Swedish film about the fighting and, eventually, consensus between the Swedish army and the Danish guerrilla movement during the wars between Denmark and Sweden in the 17th century took on a new meaning when it was shown in Denmark. To many Danish viewers, the Swedes from the old days could be seen as the Germans of today. The historic Danish guerrilla soldiers in the south of Sweden were forerunners of the resistance movement in wartime Denmark.

Danes and Norwegians who opposed the Germans lacked the opportunity to make their own movies. This did not mean that they were for-

gotten. The genre of occupation and resistance soon became popular in Hollywood. The first of these films were released during the war. The American movie makers made quite an effort to cover a great deal of European geography. Settings for the occupation-and-resistance-genre were the Netherlands, Yugoslavia, Czechoslovakia, France and Norway. With few exceptions, the unity of the resistance fighters was praised, not least of those in Norway. The popularity of Norway in Hollywood can be explained with the actions of Vidkun Quisling. He became the personification of the fifth column which in the wake of the German attack betrayed the unsuspecting and peace-loving Norwegians. The other reason is that, once the German invasion was a fact, the Norwegians, despite hopeless odds, did actually fight tenaciously against the German army. Furthermore, King Haakon VII refused to surrender or support any form of German-friendly government. To the American public, Norway was, as President Roosevelt put it, "at once conquered and unconquerable" (McLaughlin/Parry 2006: 173–176).

In Sweden the film supply was also limited. Before the war, Swedish film distributors wanted to limit the import of films from Hollywood and cooperated to a certain extent with the German film industry. It has rightly been claimed that most representatives of Sweden's film industry did not support the racial and pro-Nazi political goals. Instead, they hoped to "side-step German propaganda efforts by steering clear of politically sensitive stances of any kind" (Wright 2007: 266). After the outbreak of the war, this proved easier said than done. The German Propaganda Ministry was especially until 1943 successful in persuading Swedish film distributors not to show films with anti-German messages. As a result, before the end of the war it was only in membership based film societies that it was possible to watch Leslie Howard's *Pimpernel Smith* (1940) or Charlie Chaplin's *The Great Dictator* (1941).

In the domestic film production, the will to preserve Swedish neutrality was a strong theme. A recurrent motive was Swedish soldiers standing guard along the Swedish coasts, ever ready to keep the looming threats at a safe distance. With *Kadettkamrater* (*Cadet Comrades*, 1939) as an example, film historian Jan Olsson stresses that this type of films were based upon "camaraderie and patriotism, it pays tribute to military life and its hardships as well as the military justice system" (1979: 70–71).

Already in 1942, a critic of the Nazi regime could be seen on the silver screen. *Rid i natt!* (*Ride Tonight!*) was a film adaptation of the famous author Vilhelm Moberg's controversial novel with the same title, which invited comparison between the aristocratic oppression of the peasants in the 17th century and the ongoing German occupation of large

parts of Europe. During the last war years, more allegories of the Nazi regime's brutality could be seen at the movie theatres. Other Swedish films discussed neutrality dilemmas and the concessions made by the Swedish government during its neutrality policy. However, the critical tone was rather short-lived. Symptomatically enough, it did not take long after the war for the soldier's life to again become the subject of fun and ridicule, especially in the Swedish equivalent of the good soldier Svejk, *Soldat Bom* (*Soldier Bom*, 1947), which also received some international attention (Liljefors/Zander 2003: 214).

Memories of a war not fought – the Swedish perspective

The shift did not mean that the well-proven guard theme disappeared from sight. One of the most popular novels in post-war Sweden was written by the author and journalist Jan Olof "Jolo" Olsson and dealt mostly with the Swedish soldiers who were on guard along the Swedish borders from the outbreak of the war 1939 until its end in the spring of 1945. *Någonstans i Sverige* was made into a seven-part television series in the early 1970s. It starts with a familiar motive: a guard on his post in a wintry landscape. The nostalgic feeling was reinforced by the choice of the musical theme – Ulla Billquist's signature tune "Min Soldat" ("My Soldier"), a Swedish equivalent to Marlene Dietrich's "Lili Marlene" or Vera Lynne's "We'll Meet Again". During and in-between the exercises there are political debates, such as the Communist defense of the Soviet attack on Finland, while at the same time strong demands are heard for the deployment of Swedish soldiers to Finland.

Recently, a Swedish journalist concluded that *Någonstans i Sverige* is to be seen as the way the radical generation of 1968 looked upon the war in the aftermath (Arnstad 2009: 159). Even though he does not present any real arguments for his point of view, there are scenes supporting his conclusion. For instance, a mild critique of the lack of Swedish willingness to go to war is presented early on, since it is obvious that many soldiers had never stood on skis before. The harshness of the first war winter is turned into hope of returning home, something which takes a dramatic turn when Germany attacks Denmark and Norway. Other aspects of the war which are commented are, for instance, the internment camps for Communists, the soldiers' difficulties in keeping their relationships with their women back home alive and the difficulties for the women on the home front.

But the main theme in the television series is not radical critique. The willingness to support the by then dominating perspective of the "small state realism", meaning the realistic but not always consistent or morally righteous neutral policy which prevailed in Sweden between 1939 and 1945, is obvious in a scene with the German troop transports by rail to Norway through Sweden. The latter, widely discussed subject in Swedish postwar debate, is highlighted when a Swedish officer with sympathies for Germany complains that it has come to his knowledge that Swedish soldiers are armed and pointing their weapons at the Germans. He is also upset that a Swedish guard "salutes" the German soldiers with his fist. The problematic fact that German soldiers were allowed to travel on Swedish railways is neutralized when the commanding officer takes the soldier's side, ironically saying that he hopes that the German soldiers did not shit down their pants in fear. This comment is very much in line with a dominating viewpoint during the first postwar decades, claiming that Sweden, as a small country with a realistic policy towards the mighty Nazi Germany, in reality did not have any choice. This opinion is also supported in a regular reading of a well-known photography, showing a Swedish soldier on high ground, pointing his rifle down at a large number of unarmed German soldiers. In fact, this picture was taken after the end of the war and depicts German prisoners of war, but has repeatedly been described as if it was from the early war years when the Swedes were in full control of the German transports (Liljefors/Zander 2003: 217–218).

When Swedish territory really comes under attack in the television series, when the Germans are retreating through northern Finland, the matter is quickly resolved thanks to a Swedish trademark: calm, reasoning and convincing argumentation. The peace is of course welcomed, and the soldiers promise to meet again, but the comradeship of the war years does not last.

The television series was eagerly anticipated. The selection of first-rate actors, ambitious attempts to recreate the environment of the war years as well as the use of period newsreel footage, which was inserted into the narrative, guaranteed quality. The Swedish soldiers could in a way be seen as a kind of counterpart to the elderly, confused and often inefficient grey guard in the British television comedy *Dad's Army* (1971). In both cases the war is ever-present but the main characters seldom or never come in direct contact with it. On the other hand, in the Swedish version the war is not only fun and games. It was, as writer Jan Olof Olsson and director Bengt Lagerkvist claimed, important to show the grey reality without any heroes and the contrast between the high

command and the common men, who despite hard conditions eventually became good soldiers (Adrup 1973; Björkman, 1973).

When the first parts were broadcasted the men behind *Någonstans i Sverige* received support from none less than the commander-in-chief of the Swedish army. He, like many others, had nodded in agreement in front of the television set: this was the way it had been (Sörensson 1973). Indeed, the television series became as popular as the novel and brought a breakthrough for several Swedish actors. In fact, Janne Carlsson became – and still is – known as "Loffe", the nickname of the soldier he played in the television series. *Någonstans i Sverige* was, as director Lagerkvist emphasized, typically Swedish and he did not expect it to be exported to the neighboring countries since the Swedish neutrality policy had not always been regarded well there during the war (Nilsson 1973). Critical voices were also heard in Sweden. The television series, they argued, showed a mendacious, fudged and even pathetic picture, which carefully avoided any potentially charged political conflicts in favor of humor. However, such views were the exception. One of the critics noted that he was in the minority, since he was surrounded by people competing to come forward and share their memories from the war years (Fagerström 1974; Nilsson 1974).

An explanation for the popularity was that television series' depiction of the turbulent year 1939 seemed to reflect the economic crisis that was discussed in the early 1970s (Fabricius Hansen 1973). The author himself wrote that there were no reasons to look back upon the 1940s in a nostalgic way, but the popular culture of that time supported such a sentiment. And even though restraints and restrictions were much more severe then than during the early 1970s, it seemed to Jan Olof Olsson that a lot of Swedes thought that life was much easier back then, when the war was all around but not in our midst (Olsson 1974: 19, 44).

The connections between the outbreak of the war and contemporary crisis were even more obvious in the film *1939*, which had its premiere at the 50th anniversary in 1989. In the late 1980s and the early 1990s Sweden, then ruled by the Social Democrats, came under a lot of domestic criticism, which included the (lack of) neutrality during the Second World War and the Cold War. In *1939*, World War II from the Swedish horizon revolves around two women. The film deals mainly with their joys and worries, but it also includes Swedish military accidents, the German train transports through Sweden, the Norwegian resistance movement and conflicts between town and countryside.

The Swedish exclusion from the war is not as unproblematic in *1939* as in *Någonstans i Sverige* (Qvist 1990). During an exercise, one of the female characters says to her friend that it feels like there is not a war

going on, like the Swedes are trying to hide from evil, probably in vain in the long run. But even if the film mirrored the debate, the response was not positive. It was praised for credible period features, but the prevailing verdicts were more in the style of "an anonymous harmless cavalcade" and "stacked anecdotes" better suited for television (Hjertén 1989; Schildt 1989; Schiller 1989). One of the few defenders was the former leader of the conservative party, Ulf Adelsohn, who praised the film. Not only did it give a trustworthy view of the life in the Sweden of 50 years ago, it also offered a perspective on how other countries looked upon Sweden during the war, which was useful to reflect upon since Sweden was about to negotiate membership in the European Union (Adelsohn 1989). However, not too many wanted to take part in the history lesson, and *1939* became a financial fiasco.

The heritage of April 9

"Do you remember April 9, 1940", the voice-over belonging to the resistance fighter Flamman (The Flame) rhetorically asks several times in the Danish film *Flammen og Citronen*. The German occupation is probably the most important historic event in both Denmark and Norway – in competition with the national sovereignty 1905 in the Norwegian case – which also had a great impact in Sweden. In a comparison between the Scandinavian countries, the Danish historian Claus Bryld has emphasized the similarities in the postwar history writing. Although the different war experiences, he finds an emphasis of Nazi-skeptical attitudes before, during and after the war (Bryld 2007: 34). Beyond the similarities, the German occupations left their mark on Danish and Norwegian societies. Therefore, World War II have had a different and more important position in postwar Denmark and Norway than in Sweden, which after 1945 adopted neutrality "as a state of mind", to quote the Swedish historian Alf W. Johansson (1997: 170).

It did not take long before a "basic story" was prepared in Denmark and Norway. According to the Danish version, the Second World War and *besættelsen* (the German occupation of Denmark) were two distinct and different phenomena. Although Danes took part in the fighting on both German and Allied sides, it was the national events in Denmark which were the important ones. As in Norway, two periods became dominant: the first days of April and especially the German invasion on April 9, 1940, and the beginning of May 1945, when liberation came. Even though the enormously successful Danish television series *Matador* (1978) takes part during the years 1929–47, the events during the

war are of special significance in the story of the transition of Denmark from a class society to a welfare state, based upon egalitarian principles. Indeed, there are a few examples of Danish collaborators and traitors in *Matador*. Instead, it is either active or passive resistance against "them", the vaguely portrayed German occupants, which is highlighted. *Matador* also follows a main theme in postwar Danish historical culture. The efforts to save the Jews in October 1943 are seen as the ultimate proof that resistance was widespread (cf. Grubb/Hemmersam/Jørgensen 1995: 61–72). There are numerous examples of this "provincial" way of discussing the war in Denmark as well as in Norway. It has maintained a strong position, mainly because both countries more or less indirectly belonged to the victorious Allied side (Bryld/Warring 1998: 41–42).

More films set during the war were produced in Norway than in Denmark, but regardless of the fact that the war looked very different in the two countries the films showed strong thematic similarities. With production starting during the last year of the occupation, films on the resistance movement were produced at irregular intervals in Denmark, in some early cases with illegal sequences from the war years. It was emphasized that the early films were authentic, capturing sabotage operations, interviews with traitors and with scenes from underground weapons factories. More often than not the "good" Danes were seen in the role of David, armed with old and primitive weapons, in a heroic, strong-willed and intelligent fight against the Goliath Nazi oppressors and their Danish allies. Many of the films illustrated the consensus view, which was the result of the compromise characterizing the composition of the liberation government of 1945. Moreover, from the 1970s onwards the focus on resistance fighters was supplemented with films on the rescue of the Danish Jews to Sweden in October 1943 (Stræde 2004: 123–142; Voilladsen 2000: 5–27). The documentary *Det gælder din frihed* (1946) was a mixture of "dramatic reality" and "lyrical moods", wrote one of its supporters (Roos 1945: 16–17). Claiming authenticity and documentary truthfulness, this particular film did not exclude a sharp criticism of Danish foreign policy leading up to the outbreak of the war in 1940 and of the marked willingness among Danish politicians to cooperate with the German occupants. Therefore, the role of heroes was given only to the resistance fighters. Such a challenge to the consensus-oriented historiography resulted, not surprisingly, in an emotional and passionate debate (Hemmersam/Nielsen 2009: 92–93).

Another example of a film which caused Danish debate was the Swedish television drama documentary *Jane Horney* (1985). According to the official version told by the Danish resistance movement, Jane Horney had been a beautiful but dangerous Swedish woman based in

Copenhagen, who had to be eliminated because she was a German spy. The television series drew another picture. Jane had not reported to the Gestapo but to the Swedish police. Among the shady activities she learned about, the so called traitor's route between Denmark and Sweden was the most compromising. The route was jointly operated by the non-Communist part of the Danish resistance movement and the Germans in order to prevent Communist activities in Denmark after the end of the war. It was the fact that Horney learned about this route which was the actual reason for her being killed by resistance fighters, the film producers claimed (Leopold 1985). That this was controversial history writing became obvious in connection with the 40th anniversary of the end of the war in 1985. The remaining resistance fighters attacked the film producers and the Danish television, whose management had bought the television series and planned to broadcast it. The opponents to *Jane Horney* did not succeed in banning the television series altogether, but due to their protests its broadcast in Denmark was postponed for a few weeks (Ahnfeldt-Mollerup 1993: 65–85).

One resistance fighter, who twice had orders to kill Jane Horney but failed to do so, was Bent Farschou-Hvid. He and his closest companion Jørgen Haagen Schmidt were better known under their alias, Flammen (The Flame) and Citronen (The Citron). They are the protagonists in the latest example of the Danish resistance film genre, *Flammen og Citronen* from 2008, already mentioned above. Both of them are at the centre of the resistance group Holger Danske, named after a mythical Danish king who according to the legend is said to be sleeping but who is always prepared to wake up and save his country when it is under attack. The resistance fighters took part in a number of sabotage operations and executed a dozen Nazi-friendly Danes. However, in the process, Flammen and Citronen become involved in disputes within the resistance movement and are used to eliminate persons suspected of being able to testify against Danes in high positions about their collaboration with influential Germans. With this plot, the film actually kills two birds with one stone. On the one hand, the film audience becomes aware of the debate which has been going on in Denmark during the last decade, in which criticism has been raised against some of the executions that resistance fighters were responsible for. It is also, on the other hand, obvious that the two main characters in the film are tricked by the resistance leader – who has personal reasons for concealing some compromising dealings with the Germans – into shooting innocent Danes and Germans, thereby saving their heroic status both in Danish history and in *Flammen og Citronen*.

Like many other Second World War films from later years, the director and the writer of the script of *Flammen og Citronen* combine the more traditional war epic with elements of the Holocaust. In a key scene, the Flame's girlfriend asks him why he kills Nazis. He answers that his father sent him to Germany in 1940. At the hotel where he worked was a Jewish woman who had escaped detection. One day she is exposed and half beaten to death. The Flame does not respond directly to the additional question whether the Jewish woman had been his girlfriend, but his reaction reveals that this was indeed the case. Her destiny during the Nazi persecutions gives him the reason to fight, if necessary to the death. And to the death it is. Both the Flame and the Citron perish during the resistance struggle, but their memory lives.

Flammen og Citronen is the most expensive Danish film production to date. It also attracted a large number of moviegoers and led to interviews with old resistance fighters and increased attention for museum exhibitions about the occupation. The critics' response was mixed, praising both director Ole Christian Madsen and the leading actors, Thure Lindhardt and Mads Mikkelsen, but also complaining that the film was closer to a gangster drama than a war film (Skotte 2008). Others found it to be a nuanced and somewhat critical perspective on the resistance movement, saying it was "sober and serious" (Iversen 2008). Some voices criticizing a lack of historical correctness were heard, but equally interesting was that the film attracted much interest but sparked little debate, as a Swedish journalist noted (Söderberg 2008).

April 9 was also an important date in Norway, especially with the fighting there during the ensuing weeks as well as the resistance struggle after the German army established control over the country. A famous part of the struggle was the commando raid against the German heavy water-plant, immortalized in the Norwegian film *Kampen om tungtvannet* (*The Fight over the Heavy Water*, 1948) and *The Heroes of Telemark* (1965), starring Kirk Douglas. Even if films, as other history production, mainly mediated a heroic version of resistance and unity, there were some exceptions such as *I slik en natt* (*In Such a Night*, 1958) and *Over grensen* (*Across the Border*, 1980), dealing with Norwegian collaboration and anti-Semitism (Bruland 2004: 458–460; Vibe 1977: 117–126).

The latest addition to the genre, *Max Manus*, however, looks more like the resistance classic *Ni liv* (*Nine Lives*, 1957). In both cases the focus is on the harsh life of the resistance fighter. A telling example is the German ship "Donau". In the film, Manus and his comrades sink the ship because it is used to transport German soldiers. In modern Norwegian history culture, "Donau" is also synonymous with the deportation

of the Norwegian Jews. Neither this, nor any other aspect of the Holocaust is included in the film.

Max Manus is based on the life of the resistance fighter of the same name. In the accompanying book *Max Manus. Film og virkelighet* (Nordseth-Tiller/Moland 2008), it is obvious that the film team wanted to get as close to a traditional scholarly historical ideal, to "the true story" as possible. However, film makers usually have to concede to other priorities. Instead of capturing the multitude and diversity of "the actual past", they have concentrated on dramaturgical aspects, making the story efficient and trustworthy in its own right (Zander 2006a: 14–22).

Picture 1: Scene from Max Manus

Photo credit: Filmkameratene

That the result was doomed to be subjective, no matter how many facts it was based on, was something that Norwegian film critic Jon Selås (2008) was aware of. With the exception of the soundtrack, he found that the film makers had handled this subjectivity in the best possible manner. The film could, he stated, function as a reminder to the Norwegian youngsters of today of all the suffering and sacrifices that the Second World War generation had to put up with in order to create the modern Norway. Other critics concurred in the chorus of praise and predicted hundreds of thousands of Norwegian moviegoers. Among the supporters, some claimed that *Max Manus* was the best Norwegian film ever made, and that Aksel Hennie's performance in the leading role was outstanding (Olsen 2008; Steinkjer 2008). Other critics, who were generally positive, raised critical remarks. The film, they said, was very traditional and conservative and would most probably raise a debate (Alver 2008; Haddal 2008). In this they were right; *Max Manus* is one of the

most successful Norwegian films in decades. But not everyone liked what they saw. The writer Erling Fossen (2008) reacted against what he saw as yet another example of glorification of a resistance movement. His article met with harsh criticism, not least from former resistance fighters. One of them went so far as to call Fossen's article an example of an argumentation typical of the Nasjonal Samling (Sønsteby 2008).

When *Max Manus* had its Swedish premiere a few critics supported the Norwegian praise. Most were, however, less favorable. Too few choices had been made, it was claimed, and therefore too many persons, places and events had been introduced. Furthermore, the mixture of genres was considered problematic: the film was a psychological drama, an action thriller and a romantic story rolled into one (Janson 2009). Another recurrent remark was that, more than anything, *Max Manus* reminded one of an adventure book for boys, painted in moral black and white and without psychological depth or historical complexity (Aghed 2009; Andersson 2009: 51–52).

Films and World War II

In many synthesizing historical works of the past century there have been two recurring characteristics: war, terror and genocide on one hand, the emergence of welfare states and technological development on the other. Among the latter, film made a great breakthrough early on and has been one of the most, probably the most, influential history mediator during the last hundred years. One explanation for the filmic domination is that moving images are often pluralistic. Another is that films, more than other media, appeal to the onlookers' emotions and their understandings of good and bad, white and black. In this process, the differences between imagination and reality, facts and fiction, tend to be blurred even while the films' message can be clear, unambiguous and convincing. Thus, films and television series can – and have repeatedly done so – contribute to focusing on suppressed historical misdeeds, often when the history cultural conditions have been in favor of change. For instance, the television series *Roots* (1977) and *Holocaust* (1978), with their critical approach towards slavery and the Holocaust as well as the prolonged silence about these events, were produced after a decade of harsh criticism against traditional values and history writing in the aftermath of the Vietnam War and the Watergate scandal in the United States. But the opposite is also the case. Most moviegoers are reluctant to be challenged. Instead, they want that their beliefs to be confirmed as "truths". The result is, in the worst-case scenario, that established histor-

ical interpretations are cemented and cannot be supplemented or replaced. A consequence of this slow movement is that, in order to attract as many people as possible, commercial films must include values and interpretations which are as broad and inclusive as possible. If there are few incitements in the history culture at large to confronting prevailing interpretations, this will most likely produce few filmic efforts to challenge historical master narratives (Zander 2006a).

Among the Scandinavian films dealing with the Second World War, both reactions against prevailing perspectives and defenses of old-time national identities based on heroic fights against the German enemy are to be found. The Danish *Flammen og Citronen* is an example of a film which contains references to the Holocaust, a celebration of the resistance movement but also critique of the same, all in one. The result was a commercially successful history product, not least because both contained justifications of what happened 1940–45 as well as challenges of "old truths" of this era. *Max Manus* is a more simplistic film, reflecting reluctance in Norwegian public life to revaluate the national understanding of the Second World War.

In contrast to Denmark and Norway, the public debate in Sweden about World War II have had its centre in public life, and not in the specialized historical journals (Bryld 2007: 44). Thus, the lack of Swedish films on the Second World War and the mostly negative Swedish response to *Max Manus* does not mean that there is no interest in the years 1939–45 in Sweden. Debates about World War II have raged in recent decades in all three Scandinavian countries. Strong criticism has been put forward against what have been perceived as simplifications and idealizations. But as the Swedish example shows, fundamental changes do not come easy. It is clear that concepts such as neutrality, resistance and domestic consensus are concepts that still hold huge attraction, and challenges against them still tend to result in backlashes or to inclusion of critical aspects – in order to neutralize them – into the dominating national story (Zander 2006b: 368–374). As long as this is the case, the films will most likely continue to reflect such opinions.

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