



HITLER'S SCANDINAVIAN LEGACY

EDITED BY
JOHN GILMOUR
AND JILL STEPHENSON

B L O O M S B U R Y

Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy

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The Consequences of the German Invasion
for the Scandinavian Countries,
Then and Now

Edited by
John Gilmour and Jill Stephenson

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List of Contributors

Juhana Aunesluoma is an Adjunct Professor of Political History and has worked as the director of The Network for European Studies at the University of Helsinki since January 2010. He defended his doctorate at Oxford University in 1998 and started working as a senior lecturer at the University of Helsinki in 2001. His areas of specialization include Cold War history, international trade and integration policy and Finnish, Nordic and European twentieth century history. His major publications are *Britain, Sweden and the Cold War, 1945–54* (2003), *Understanding Neutrality, The Cold War and the Politics of History* (2008) and *Finlandisation in Reverse. The CSCE and the Rise and Fall of Economic Détente, 1968–75* (2008).

Claus Bundgård Christensen is Associate Professor in the Department of Culture and Identity at the University of Roskilde. His research interests include the Second World War, the First World War, military history, the Holocaust, the *Waffen-SS*, anti-parliamentarianism, Nazism, fascism, history of the Danish police, anti-Communism, crime history, the occupation, the first post-war years and the Cold War. His published work includes *Dansk arbejdetyske befæstningsanlæg* (1997), *Under hagekors og Dannebrog* (1998), *Dagbog fra østfronten* (2005) and he jointly authored *Danmark besat – Krig og hverdag 1940–45*. (2009) His book, *Danskere på vestfronten 1914–18*, won the Danish History book of the Year Award 2009.

John Gilmour is Honorary Fellow in Scandinavian Studies at the University of Edinburgh. His research interests include Scandinavia and the Second World War, the prose literature of Harry Martinson and Björn Larsson, and cultural influences and self-image in present-day Scandinavia. His book on Sweden's experience during the Second World War, *Sweden, the Swastika and Stalin*, was published by the Edinburgh University Press in January 2010.

Ole Kristian Grimnes is currently Professor Emeritus in Modern History at the University of Oslo. In particular, he has worked on the period 1940–45 in Norwegian history. His many publications include *The Rise of a Refugee Community. Norwegians in Sweden 1940–45 (Et flyktningsamfunn vokser fram. Nordmenn i*

Sverige 1940–45 (1969), *The Norwegian Resistance Leadership (Hjemmefrontens Ledelse)* (1979), *Norway during the Occupation (Norge under okkupasjonen)* (1983), *The German Invasion of Norway (Overfall)*. Volume 1 of Magne Skodvin (ed.): *Norway at War*. (1984) and *The Road to War. The Nygaardsvold Government's War Decisions in 1940 (Veien inn i krigen. Regjeringen Nygaardsvolds krigsvedtak i 1940)* (1987). He is a member of the Norwegian Academy of Science and Letters.

Tom Kristiansen is Professor of History at the Norwegian Institute for Defence Studies. He has written extensively on Scandinavian diplomatic, naval and military history in the late nineteenth and first half of the twentieth centuries with a particular focus on the relations between Scandinavia and the great powers, and Anglo-Norwegian relations. His latest books include *Tysk trussel mot Norge? Forsvarsledelse, trusselvurderinger og militære tiltak før 1940* (2008) and *The history of the Norwegian navy 1905–60, Selvstendig og alliert i krig og fred* (2010). Kristiansen is currently working on the history of Norwegian Ministry of Defence 1814–1940.

Allan Little is both a Graduate and an Honorary Graduate of the University of Edinburgh. He is a Special Correspondent at the BBC and the winner of many awards for his reports from abroad, especially from war zones. His postings have included Moscow, Paris, Baghdad, Kuwait and Johannesburg. He spent four years in Yugoslavia in the 1990s, reporting on the Bosnian War, and is co-author of *The Death of Yugoslavia* (1996). More recently, he has reported from Afghanistan. In 2012, he received the British Journalism Review's Charles Wheeler Award for Outstanding Contribution to Broadcast Journalism.

Niels Wium Olesen is Associate Professor in Danish and European twentieth Century History in the Department of Culture and Society, University of Aarhus. He has written widely about the interwar years, the era of the Second World War and the early Cold War. He has participated in several European research projects, the latest being a project about social movements in Europe and the transition from war to peace in 1944–47. He jointly authored *Danmark besat Krig og hverdag 1940–45* (2009) and is currently working on a book on Danish politics in the interwar years. Dr Olesen has made many media contributions in Denmark on both historical issues and current affairs.

Richard Overy is Professor of History at the University of Exeter. He is the author of more than twenty-five books, on the Second World War, the European dictatorships and the history of air power. These include *Why the Allies Won*, *The*

Air War 1939–45, and *The Dictators: Stalin's Russia and Hitler's Germany* (winner of the 2004 Wolfson Prize for History). His most recent publication was *1939: Countdown to War*. His study of the European bombing war will be published in 2013, and he is currently writing a general history of the Second World War. He was elected to the British Academy in 2000 and to the European Academy of Sciences and Arts in 2012.

Johan Östling is a Pro-Futura Scientia Fellow at the Department of History, Lund University, and the Swedish Collegium for Advanced Study (SCAS), Uppsala. He has written extensively on modern Swedish and German history, National Socialism and narratives of the Second World War, historiography and history culture. His dissertation, *Nazismens sensmoral: Svenska erfarenheter i andra världskrigets efterdyning* (2008), was awarded several prizes, including the Clio Prize and the Nils Klim Prize. Östling is joint editor of *Nordic Narratives of the Second World War: National Historiographies Revisited* (2011). He is currently working on a project on the transformation of the Humboldtian tradition and the idea of the university in twentieth-century Germany.

Patrick Salmon is Chief Historian at the Foreign and Commonwealth Office, and Visiting Professor at the University of Newcastle. He is the author of a number of books, including *Scandinavia and the Great Powers 1890–1940* and (with the late John Hiden) *The Baltic Nations and Europe*. He is the editor of *Britain and Norway in the Second World War*. Most recently, he is co-editor of volumes of documents on *Britain and German Unification, 1989–90*, and on *The Nordic Countries: From War to Cold War, 1944–51*.

Oula Silvennoinen is a Postdoctoral Research Fellow at the Department of World Cultures, University of Helsinki. Silvennoinen completed his PhD in 2008 on the subject: *Secret Comrades in Arms: The Finnish and German Security Police Cooperation 1933–44*. The work documents the establishment of a previously unknown SS-Einsatzkommando within the operational area of northern Norway and Finland. He argues that the Finnish Security Police collaborated with the Germans in interrogating Red Army POWs and identifying communists and Jews, whom they turned over to the Einsatzkommando for execution.

Jill Stephenson is Professor Emeritus and Honorary Fellow of the School of History, Classics and Archaeology at the University of Edinburgh. Her research interests include society and politics in modern Germany to 1945. Her

publications include *Hitler's Home Front: Württemberg under the Nazis* (2006), *The Third Reich in Colour* (2002), *Women in Nazi Germany* (2001), *The Nazi Organisation of Women* (1981) and *Women in Nazi Society* (1975). She is a Fellow of the Royal Historical Society.

Kent Zetterberg is Professor Emeritus in the Military History Division of the Swedish National Defence College. He has published widely on Sweden during the Second World War and in the post-war period, including *Liberalism in Crisis: People's Party 1939–45*. He has a particular interest in security policy.

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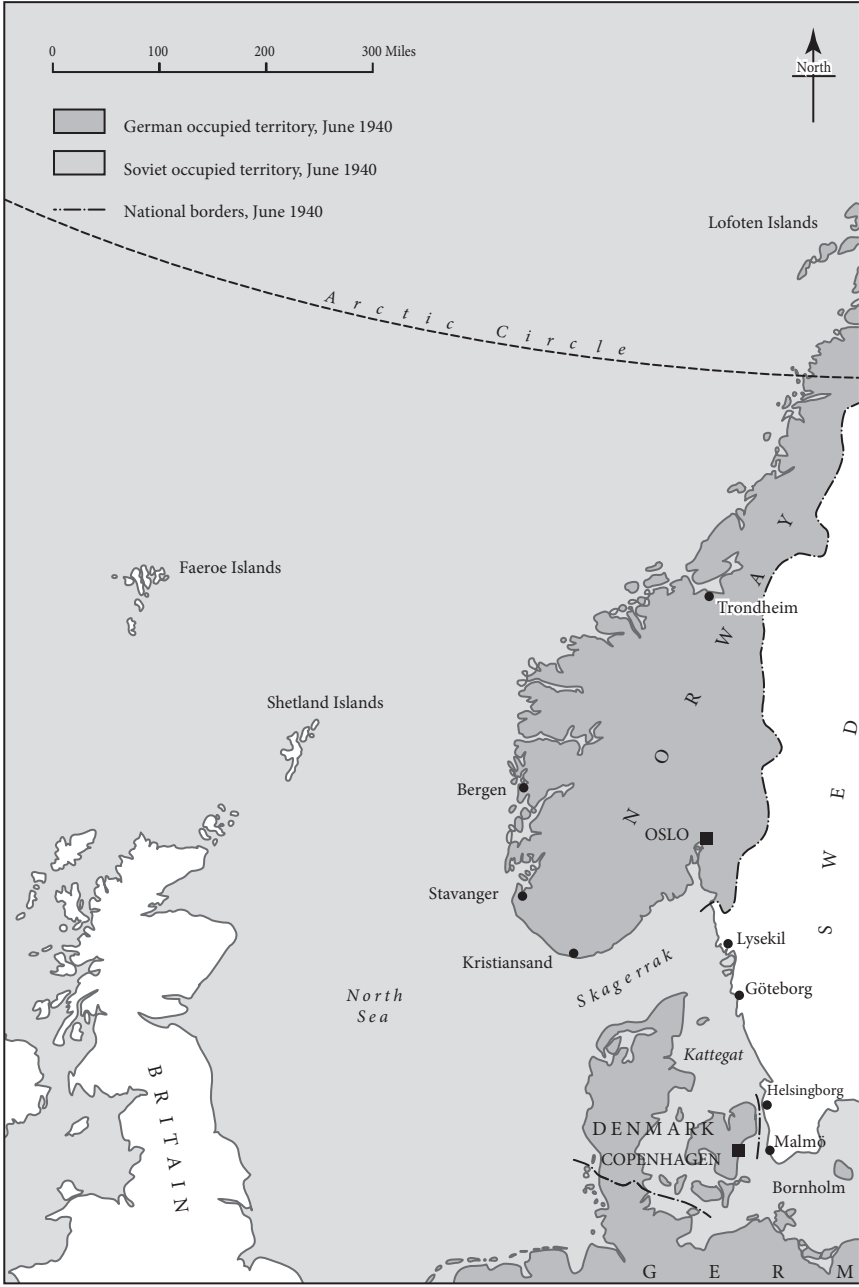
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Jill Stephenson
John Gilmour
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Map 1 The Nordic region, 1939-45.



Figure 1 The Danish crime series ‘The Killing II’ reaches back to Second World War events familiar to many of its Danish viewers in order to contextualize current issues of violence, freedom and legality. [With kind permission of *DR*, Photo: Rasmus Arrildt, *DR*.]

Editors' Introduction

John Gilmour and Jill Stephenson

Readers may wonder why a stark image from one of television's most successful recent crime drama series, 'The Killing II' appears opposite this page in a book about the legacy of the Second World War in Scandinavia. This picture is no ordinary 'film noir' crime scene setting. It is located in Copenhagen's Ryvang Memorial Park, established in 1945. Here, during the occupation, the Germans tied members of the Danish resistance movement to wooden stakes and executed them by firing squad. They also buried the dead temporarily in this place. Søren Sveistrup, author of 'The Killing II', uses the setting to inject strong imagery linking contemporary violence in Danish society with World War II. In the opening scene, the camera pans over the now-permanent graves of the fallen heroes and flits across Axel Poulsen's monument 'For Denmark: Mother with Her Fallen Son'. The first murder victim is discovered bound to one of the three replica execution stakes.

Sveistrup continues to load this episode with further significant references to the occupation and Denmark's conduct then. In a later scene, the fictional newly appointed leftist Justice Minister, Thomas Buch, is given a 'welcome present' by the right-wing, anti-Islamist People's Party. It is a framed photo, showing German tanks in the streets of Copenhagen, taken during the invasion of 9 April, 1940 which led to the Danish Government reaching an accommodation with Nazi Germany. Their attached message is 'Never again 9th April', meaning that there should be no compromise with the Islamists. The People's Party's fictional leader, Erling Krabbe, is pressing for stronger anti-terrorist legislation to ban lawful Islamist associations. He is accused by Buch of scaremongering. Krabbe responds by emphasizing his democratic credentials using a further reference to World War II: 'My grandfather was in the resistance. He fought for freedom. He ended up in Neuengamme [a concentration camp in Hamburg].'

Buch retaliates in a similar vein in a later scene by insisting that he will not compromise on 'democratic values' and also draws on Second World War events in Denmark as a metaphor. He goes on to tell Krabbe, '... as far as I know, a Danish Government has only once before prohibited a legal association.' To emphasize the connection, he then hands Krabbe several photos of the German occupation forces on the streets of Denmark and continues, 'In 1941. The Communist Party. At the time, they (the Government) were being pressurized by the *Wehrmacht*.' When Krabbe retorts that this is not a valid comparison, Buch asks him, 'Do you want ... to stand alone with an opinion that hasn't been expressed since the Nazis?'

The broader significance of these fictional events and interchanges is that today's Denmark still employs real events and conduct from World War II as reference points for contemporary issues. As we shall see, that characteristic also extends to Norway, Sweden and Finland.

The countries of Scandinavia (in this book conceived as Norway, Denmark, Sweden and Finland) have been regarded generally as backwaters of World War II while gigantic struggles and terrible cruelties took place elsewhere. After 1940, no large-scale military actions occurred there, other than in Finland, but in a European context the Finnish battles of 1944 were slight and not significant. The occupations of Denmark and Norway lasted from April and June 1940, respectively, until the surrender of the German forces on 4 and 7 May 1945, and were characterized by both resistance and collaboration in both countries. Their common neighbour, Sweden, retained its neutral status which the other three countries had unwillingly been forced to abandon by Germany and Russia, but it was subjected to pressures by the belligerents that caused it to flex its neutrality in favour of one side and then the other.

During the German invasion of April 1940, the Danish forces were ordered to surrender before they could offer much resistance, while the Norwegians held out until their inept allies withdrew in June. Increasing resistance in each country was matched by repression against civilians by the occupier. Finnish hostilities were in three phases: a defensive war against the Soviet Union, an offensive war against that country and finally, a reluctant expulsion of the former German brothers-in-arms. Sweden maintained a large conscript army in readiness to repel attack from whichever quarter; Germany, Russia and the western Allies were seen as potential threats to neutrality throughout. On the home fronts in each country, in addition to military considerations, economic and social conditions were characterized by shortages of all kinds of food and materials, and, while hardship was on a lower scale than in the occupied and

war-torn territories to the south and east, it nevertheless shaped policies in the Scandinavian countries for occupier and native governments alike.

From these observations, a picture begins to emerge which shows that, for most of the populations of the Scandinavian countries, their position in World War II seemed anything but a backwater. As the 11 authors in this volume demonstrate, the events of the war years were so influential in the development of the respective national psyches that their meaning and importance remain as warmly debated issues today, pervading national politics and media discourse to an extent that might surprise a non-Scandinavian observer drawing his or her knowledge from English-language historiography. That aspect is discussed by *Patrick Salmon* in the context of his survey of current historiography, with additional comments by *Richard Overy* in his review of the war in Scandinavia.

An unfortunate but effective combination of language barriers and Scandinavian reticence have conspired to conceal the importance of the war years for our overall understanding of today's Scandinavia which, at the time of writing, is most famous for *film noir* crime fiction and terrorist outrages. Regarding the latter, Anders Breivik, in his perverted 'Manifesto', even sought to draw in some aspects of Sweden's wartime national narrative.¹ That feature links the concerns of the historian to those of the politician and makes the contents of this book even more relevant to today's discourse about societal consensus, culture and cohesion. The questions remain, however, as to what happened in Scandinavia during the war and what resulted from it – and it is this that the contributors attempt to address. Their essays reveal that a post-war reorientation of political and social self-image evolved which continues today. This was primarily due to the nature and intensity of the wartime experience and the conduct of the politicians, the military, civil authorities, businessmen and civilians, not to mention collaborators and resisters. All were faced with difficult choices due to the unwelcome attentions of the great powers. Pre-war circumstances, as *Richard Overy* explains, were hardly conducive to the maintenance of an optimistic neutrality, and his survey reveals how the events of late 1939 and early 1940 brought the region fleetingly from the periphery to the centre of the stuttering war in Europe. *Oula Silvenmoinen* traces the long shadow that the 1918 Finnish civil war cast over the mindset of the leadership during 1940–44. *Niels Wium Olesen* ascribes wartime political continuity in Denmark partly to national stability and homogeneity in the interwar years. In Norway on the other hand, *Tom Kristiansen* reveals the surprising level of pre-war German influence on Norwegian economic, intellectual and cultural life. *Kent Zetterberg* emphasizes the pre-war thinking of a Swedish leadership determined to remain

neutral but, if that were not possible, equally determined to come into the war 'on the right side.'

The Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact foreshadowed the beginning of the war for Scandinavia, suspending the traditional balance of power that had offered the region a modicum of security from the predations of its powerful, totalitarian neighbours. *Richard Overy* argues that their actions in Scandinavia were primarily driven by security considerations but that the eventual results of this search for security were poor recompense. The issue was more immediate for Finland. *Oula Silvennoinen* shows how the disillusionment over receiving warm words from the western powers but little concrete assistance during the Winter War against Russia drove the Finnish leadership into the arms of Germany. This unhappy relationship initially delivered Finnish security and recovery of its lost territory from Russia but ultimately led to national participation in a brutal, genocidal conflict that associated Finland with Nazism, despite somewhat naïve protestations to the contrary. In addition, there was an underlying expansionist tendency in Finnish policy which translated into a 'Greater Finland' war aim with associated preparation for 'ethnic cleansing'. *Oula Silvennoinen* delves into previously untouched areas of Finnish wartime history and by thorough research draws attention to previous ambiguities and inconsistencies.

If Finland experienced extensive hostilities and associated casualties, Denmark's armed struggle against Germany's 'protective occupation' could be measured in hours rather than in months, while the 5 years of German presence were characterized by an accommodation with the occupying power that was eventually displaced by increasing resistance to the occupation. *Niels Wium Olesen* details the political and judicial mechanisms and manoeuvres of the accommodation – a constitutional construct that protected all Danes (including Jews) up to the imposition of direct German rule in August 1943 by maintaining Danish domestic sovereignty – but whose anti-constitutional ambiguities contained the essence of its eventual failure and tainted all those associated with it.

Norway fared considerably worse than Denmark due to hostilities on its territory in 1940 and 1944. This was a more brutal occupation, with direct German rule from the outset and a markedly higher level of active resistance both in Norway itself and also by the overseas armed forces. This arose initially from the attempted imposition of Nazism on the country's institutions with the connivance of the right-wing extremist Norwegian collaborationist party, the *Nasjonal Samling*. *Tom Kristiansen's* wide-ranging essay sets out how the 10,000

Norwegians who lost their lives at home and abroad were a part of the support for the overall Allied war effort from an early stage of an invasion whose success for Germany and *débauche* for the Allies led to the formation of the Norwegian government-in-exile and a rejection of any accommodation with the occupiers. While resistance had its successes, the movement's passivity was criticized in London and, unlike Denmark, Norway lost a high percentage of its Jews to extermination without much difficulty for the Germans. The war ended with a country divided by collaboration but vindicated by heroic resistance while abandoning its Germanic associations and neutral posture in favour of the west and NATO.

Neutral Sweden, despite misgivings, remained neutral until the end of the war, but *Kent Zetterberg* demonstrates that its policy of adaptive neutrality was backed up by stronger defences than those of Denmark and Norway, the use of trading advantages to sustain itself and nimble if occasionally unheroic diplomacy to avoid confrontation with the watchful and suspicious belligerents. Sweden faced repeated political and diplomatic crises caused by its adherence to a neutral stance when under pressure to favour now one, then the other belligerent. Yet, the *Realpolitik* which contributed to Sweden's survival as an independent state implied an indifference to the outcome of the war that belied the widespread sentiment among its leadership and electorate in favour of an Allied victory against Nazism while fearing the Soviet Union.

With 1945 and the defeat of the Axis, all the Scandinavian countries discovered, as *Richard Overy* puts it, 'a need to find culprits.' The immediate post-war adjustments and settlements set the tone for the following period well into the 1990s. For Finland, *Juhana Aunesluoma* reviews the trials of Finland's wartime military and political leadership at the instigation of the Soviet Union as self-defeating – if they were intended to demonize – the result being to provide a platform for defence of their policies as legitimate and a basis for their lionization as national heroes. *Claus Bundgård Christensen* recounts that in Denmark, alongside the trials of volunteers for German service, paramilitary groups and collaborators leading to executions and imprisonment, the cohabiting politicians and their parties put out a series of publications intended to exculpate them from any wrongdoing and to justify their wartime policies. These publications led to the so-called 'consensual myth' stressing that politicians and resistance each played their patriotic parts. Norway experienced a tense post-war period of solidarity and strong feelings among those who could castigate the traitors, 'quislings' and collaborators, according to *Ole Kristian Grimnes*. Trials, executions, fines and

imprisonment were also meted out legally, as in Denmark, and both countries avoided the lawlessness that had characterized liberation settlements elsewhere in Europe, notably in France. While these prosecutions included passive as well as active *Nasjonal Samling* members, this settlement process (*landssvikoppgjør*) placed the mainstream population in the 'home front' (thus paradoxically recognizing passive resistance) to form the basis for the collective memory. *Johan Östling* indicates that only a small number of trials and enquiries took place in post-war Sweden in pursuit of closet and real Nazis in the media and the civil service. This assisted in a rapid return to normality, with the government rather than any resistance movement setting the tone for the interpretation of wartime events.

With the onset of the Cold War and Churchill locating the northern end of his symbolic 'iron curtain' just over 100 miles from Sweden ('From Stettin in the Baltic. . .'), Scandinavian portrayal of wartime events adopted a more purposeful approach to reinforce an impression of post-war national unity in the face of a new threat, this time from the Soviet Union. *Juhana Aunesluoma* outlines how official Finland built on the post-war trials to establish a defensible explanation of Finnish conduct that relied on equating both wartime dictators, distancing Finland from the wider conflict and asserting that the nation lacked 'agency' but instead was 'driftwood' in a torrent of totalitarianism. This narrative has also been the most persistent and deep-rooted in Finnish popular culture. Denmark also quickly adopted a core narrative based on the 'consensual myth' that proved to be remarkably enduring, according to *Claus Bundgård Christensen*. The wartime politicians provided the 'shields' for the resistance to wield the 'swords', but in the late 1950s it emerged that not every resistance group had been given access to a share of the swords; the communists had been undersupplied deliberately. In Norway also, *Ole Kristian Grimnes* identifies the communists as a complicating factor in post-war representations of national unity in wartime. Their reluctance to engage in resistance during the Nazi-Soviet Pact years until June 1941 contrasted with their keenness for sabotage thereafter, an enthusiasm that was not shared by a population fearful of reprisals. The post-war 'master narrative' that quickly took root was based on the concept of national mass resistance in a Manichean struggle that included sabotage and armed interventions.

Sweden's post-war interpretation of its concessionary adaptive neutrality, while it lacked a resistance element, was no less hegemonic than the other countries' narratives. The interpretation, described by *Johan Östling* as 'small-state realistic narrative', was seen as bestowing benefits on Sweden, her neighbours

and European peace while avoiding the horrors of war and occupation. Here, too, the Swedish communists had been a complication due to their potential for treachery against Swedish neutrality – ranking alongside the Nazis – but mainstream ‘liberal’ wartime opponents of the government policy of concessions and engagement were also criticized for rocking the boat at a time when the government was struggling to avoid confrontations with Germany in particular. National unity was paramount.

For most of the period of the Cold War, each country’s version of its patriotic narrative was maintained with increasing challenge from new research and assessments. In Finland, *Juhana Aunesluoma* describes how President Kekkonen seized on the rejection of the ‘driftwood’ theory in the 1970s to emphasize the benefits of his own policy of active neutrality with the Soviet Union, an approach that he believed had been rejected by his predecessors, leading to an unnecessary and disastrous Winter War for Finland. Similarly, Denmark’s DNH research project in the 1970s produced two outputs that challenged the unity and effectiveness implied by the ‘sword and shield’ interpretation, but *Claus Bundgård Christensen* notes that the absence of any resulting alteration to Danish wartime commemoration was ‘evidence of the distance between historians and large parts of the population’ – something that is not, of course, peculiar to Denmark.

For Norway, *Ole Kristian Grimnes* identifies challenges to the dominance of the master narrative of ‘a nation-in-resistance’ as coming from the previously stigmatized collaborationists who have more recently been clamouring for an increased share of attention which has struck a responsive chord with those who were uneasy about the ‘all-too pervasive character’ of that narrative. Shades of grey began to be admitted to the discourse. Sweden also launched a national research project in the 1970s (SUAV) whose outputs *Johan Östling* characterizes as narrow, technical and dominated by ‘small-state realism’ with the result ‘that broad questions concerning Sweden’s policy were not addressed in depth’. This missed opportunity created a historiographical lacuna that was to be filled later.

Only in the post-Soviet Union era have the master narratives been tested to destruction, but not always by historians. Journalists and commentators have seized the initiative across Scandinavia and challenged the historians’ self-imposed role as custodians of the narrative. Their earlier disregard for the moral implications of the Holocaust has been their undoing in an age where the images of Auschwitz easily displace balanced arguments in the popular mind. *Juhana Aunesluoma* appropriately refers to Auschwitz now being ‘the keyhole from

which everything else is seen, which challenges the wisdom of Finland's choice in 1941, the somewhat triumphalist view that the ends justified the means and the proclaimed heroism of the national sacrifice. The response to this challenge has been further to attempt to distance Finland's war(s) from World War II. This isolation and distancing has contributed to the maintenance of a strong popular commemoration of the shared heroic past, regardless of the more recent intellectual preoccupation with attributing responsibility for and implication in the Holocaust ever more widely.

The more recently contested interpretation of the wartime years has taken on contemporary political significance in Denmark. *Claus Bundgård Christensen* identifies this as relevant to debates on immigration and foreign military intervention by Denmark, with the policy of cohabitation being closely compared with the acceptance of non-Danish cultures and a failure to intervene against abusive regimes. In 2003, Prime Minister Anders Fogh Rasmussen reversed a 50-year political consensus by rejecting his wartime predecessors' actions as 'a moral betrayal'.

Morality has also intruded into the Norwegian public debate, which *Ole Kristian Grimnes* finds surprising but explicable due to the moral emphasis in the national narrative. He further selects fresh challenges for reinterpretation in the topics of Norwegian collaboration, police, Jews and communists, while he finds that claims of victimization of the collaborationists now challenge the durable heroic image of national adaptation and inclusion. In Sweden, a moral interpretation emerged, according to *Johan Östling*, in the 1990s as part of a larger European change moving from patriotism to universalism with the Holocaust as the catalyst for the shift. This resonated with a political class that wanted no wartime associations to complicate the Swedish position in the EU and so launched a 'warts and all' research project to root out anything previously concealed or overlooked. 'Small state realism' had been eclipsed by researchers taking the Holocaust as their starting point for an account of the war years when Sweden was neutral and unoccupied and did not surrender or lose any Jews to the Nazi extermination programme. On the contrary, Sweden did more than probably any other country to rescue Jews from the Germans' clutches.

Allan Little takes a concluding and uncompromising 'long view' of the entire experience of World War II and its aftermath for the four countries. In his essay, he construes that experience as being in part a moral test. For each country, he explores culpability, mitigation and redemption to reveal a troubling pattern of moral abdication emerging within these countries that had been neutral before the war. The mirror that we as historians and others hold up to national character

is problematic in its reflection, redolent of the biblical phrase 'For now we see through a glass, darkly.'

Regrettably, the loss of the historians' role as custodians of narrative for the wartime period has been paralleled by a drift away from balance towards sensationalism, poorly researched articles and programmes where sources are replaced by innuendo and assertion, and where regurgitated half-truths are peddled as a matter of record. Increasingly, this *mélange* forms a 'virtual history' which, while unchallenged, shapes popular perceptions and substitutes itself like a cuckoo in the nest of the source-based national narrative. In sharp contrast to the prevailing trend, this book contributes a valuable riposte to such distortions in which authoritative and leading-edge scholarship by the contributors shines a searching beam into the wartime events and their commemoration, using deep understanding to guide the reader confidently through an apparent maze of fact and ambiguity to present a commanding assessment of this enduring feature, 'Hitler's Scandinavian Legacy'.

Note

- 1 For example, 'The Swedish Social Democrats were pro-Fascist and pro-Nazi during the 1930s and 40s . . .' <https://publicintelligence.net/anders-behring-breiviks-complete-manifesto-2083-a-european-declaration-of-independence/> accessed 5 October 2012.