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Deported Narration: On Danish Concentration Camp Testimonies in the Cultural Memory of Second World War

As in most European countries the cultural memory of the Second World War in Denmark is a battlefield. According to Nils Arne Sørensen "two conflicting narratives" (Sørensen 2005) are vying for primacy, on the one hand the notion of Denmark as a nation collaborating with the Nazi regime, on the other the notion of Denmark as a place of ideological and in some cases armed resistance. These battles aptly illustrate that cultural memory in the words of Astrid Erlls, consists of the "interplay of present and past in socio-cultural contexts" (Erll 2010).

Danish narratives from German concentration camps are almost completely absent from this battlefield of cultural memory. This is even more striking given the amount of attention such narratives have been giving internationally in many aspects of cultural and academic life during the last 20 years. The lack of visibility suffered by Danish narratives of deportation have been further accentuated by the recent years construction of what Levy and Sznajder refer to as the globalization of the Holocaust as a collective memory (Levy and Sznajder 2005).

In this paper I turn my attention towards what might be the most marginalized subset of these marginalized narratives in the form of approximately 1200 questionnaires filled out in the early 1960ies by former Danish inmates from German concentration camps. The questionnaire was made by historian Jørgen Barfoed, and it queries about facts, numbers and statistical information. Despite what appears to be an essentially anti-narrative core structure many of the filled out forms show outbursts of narration and narrativization that call for different readings than the fact-oriented.

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