

Glorifications and Simplifications in Case Studies of Danish WWII Nonviolent Resistance

Majken Jul Sørensen

University of Karlstad, Sweden and University of Wollongong, Australia

Abstract

Danish resistance to Nazi occupation during WWII is frequently used in literature on civil resistance as an example of how nonviolent resistance has been improvised. Considering the newest historical research, this study has analysed six English language texts about Danish resistance written with the explicit purpose of investigating it as nonviolent resistance. Although some of the texts are relatively accurate, others include mistakes and myths, and there is a tendency to glorify the Danes. The majority of the texts are found to simplify a complex reality, especially when it comes to the interactions between sabotage and nonviolence, as well as internal Danish differences. The craving to tell the story of the good Danes against the evil Nazis apparently makes it difficult for the authors to find room for the contradictions, internal power struggles and less flattering aspects of the resistances. These findings are problematic for the applied field of civil resistance which aspires to provide research that can be useful for present and future struggles.

Introduction

History is always interpreted and re-interpreted through the eyes of people living later. Thus, as the field of sociology of history shows, history can never be completely objective and the final account can never be written. Later generations might view past events in a new light, based on their present situation. These aspects of historiography also must be taken into consideration when it comes to the way certain historic events are used as cases for the study of nonviolent resistance. Literature on civil resistance and nonviolent action focuses on how to fight occupation, injustice and dictatorship without arms. This body of literature frequently

references aspects of Danish resistance to German occupation (1940-45) as an example of how civil resistance could be improvised against Nazism. My study explores the following questions: How does literature written from this perspective frame the Danish resistance? What is emphasized or omitted? What are the consequences of the emphasis and omissions when it comes to improving understandings of the potential of nonviolent resistance in other places and contexts?

The study analyses book chapters and database and encyclopaedia entries in light of the newest Danish research on the occupation and resistance to it. These sources were not always available to the authors of the texts due to time and language barriers, but it is important to revise the analysis of nonviolent action when new information about existing cases becomes available. Accurate accounts and analysis makes it possible for practitioners of nonviolent resistance to make informed choices about the best possible way forward. One should be aware of the limitations of what can be learned from a case,¹ but nevertheless use the benefit of hindsight to make proposals for the future.

Critical re-examination of well-known cases of nonviolent action is not new. Thomas Weber has investigated Gandhi's Salt March, and Mary King has forced the community of nonviolent researchers to revise their accounts regarding the achievements of the campaign for Dalits' right in Vykom in the 1920's. Both these campaigns have had legendary status, but later research has brought new information to light.² To my knowledge, there have not previously been any attempts to make a systematic examination of all the texts which present a certain case like my study of the Danish case.

¹ Brian Martin, "Social defence: arguments and actions", in Shelley Anderson and Janet Larmore (eds.), *Nonviolent Struggle and Social Defence* (London: War Resisters' International and the Myrtle Solomon Memorial Fund Subcommittee, 1991), pp. 89-99.

² Mary E. King, *Gandhian Nonviolent Struggle and Untouchability in South India: The 1924-25 Vykom Satyagraha and the Mechanisms of Change* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014); Thomas Weber, *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi* (New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 1997).

This article first introduces the “basic narrative” about the occupation of Denmark, followed by a presentation of the methodology and the texts which are the data for the analysis. Subsequently I introduce the case of Danish resistance to Nazi occupation in 11 points. In the analysis of the data, the study investigates to what degree these points are included and if any themes are framed in a way which does not seem reasonable when taking the historical research into account. Some of the texts still stand strong, while others include one or more problematic aspects. Especially worrisome are accounts which do not fully recognize the way that sabotage and nonviolent action reinforced each other, and those which have uncritically accepted the myth of national unity. The last part of the article discusses the reasons why some texts tend to simplify and glorify, and what consequences this has for research on nonviolent resistance.

The basic narrative and some national myths

In the book *Besættelsestiden som kollektiv erindring* (The Period of Occupation as Collective Memory), Claus Bryld and Anette Warring analyse how the occupation has been presented, understood and used politically in the 50 years following the liberation.³ They have identified the “basic narrative” as it has existed almost unchanged and unchallenged in Denmark since 1945.

The basic narrative begins with the shocking and surprising German assault on small, neutral Denmark on April 9, 1940. Unable to defend itself with military means, the Danish government sets out to negotiate the best possible arrangement which will spare the Danish people from the war. With time, the government is forced to give in to new and more far-reaching German demands. Sabotage against the Germans starts in 1942. Danish support for the resistance movement grows; with weapons and explosives smuggled in from Sweden and even more from England, the sabotage becomes more organized and effective. In August 1943 the cooperation policy with the occupiers comes to an end when the Germans demand that the Danish authorities introduce the death penalty for sabotage. Afterwards a unified Danish society stands up against the Germans before the country is eventually liberated on May 5th 1945.

³ Claus Bryld and Anette Warring, *Besættelsestiden som kollektiv erindring*, Historieformidling (Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1998).

This basic narrative has been almost completely hegemonic in Denmark, but it reflects a compromise reached between the established political parties and the resistance movement during the particular political situation that existed in the summer of 1945. Bryld and Warring find it amazing how uniform the story is across time and through various methods of dissemination.⁴ The narrative ignores internal Danish divisions, especially when it comes to how the end of the cooperation policy was reached. In the basic narrative, the break was sought by both the resistance movement and the politicians, but this is not an accurate portrayal of how the situation unfolded. It is based on a myth which both the resistance movement representatives and the politicians had an interest in upholding. The organized resistance movement is always included in the narrative although it was extremely small in terms of numbers, and accounts have focused on the violent and masculine forms of resistance, with male saboteurs as the main actors. Sometimes the policy of cooperation, social isolation of the Germans and celebration of the King and everything Danish is included in the narrative and referred to as a form of “passive resistance”. In the basic narrative there is no space for dissenting voices with other experiences of the war, and everyday life as it transpired for most people is absent. Another feature of the narrative is how it ends in May 1945, omitting the juridical process against collaborators and Nazis. For instance, the death penalty was introduced retrospectively, and harsh punishments meted out against small scale collaboration, while the bigger fish walked free. Another aspect left out of the dominant narrative, identified by Bryld and Warring, is how the occupation completely changed Denmark’s position in the world. From being neutral, the occupation experience was now used to justify Denmark’s membership in NATO and to promote increased military spending as “unavoidable”.

Methodology of the study

For this study, I have identified all the case studies of Danish WWII resistance which appear in the literature of civil/nonviolent resistance in English. It includes one monograph in which Denmark is the only case,

⁴ Ibid., p. 55.

one book of comparative history which uses many Danish examples, three book chapters in collections about nonviolent resistance and civil resistance, one encyclopaedia entry, and one database entry.⁵ Reading these, I identified the events and themes they include as important for understanding nonviolent resistance in the Danish case and grouped them into 10 main categories. Some of the events are covered only by one source. Subsequently, I analysed to what degree these accounts of resistance fit within the basic narrative identified by Bryld and Warring. In the next step, I did a preliminary coding of one text according to the 10 points, but realized I needed to be more detailed in order to do a meaningful analysis. Thus I created a number of sub-points for each main point, between two and six, which are listed in Appendix A. I then did a new preliminary coding of another text, finding that the sub-points worked quite well, but revising the sub-points a little and adding a main point 11. Next I coded all the texts to see what is included and excluded. Finally, I analysed to what degree each account and the correlations between events which they present seems reasonable considering the newest historical research. For this part, I paid special attention to how internal Danish differences are treated, since this is a central problem with the basic narrative.

Lennart Bergfeldt's monograph *Experiences of Civilian Resistance: The Case of Denmark 1940-1945* holds a special place in this study.⁶ This is a thorough investigation of resistance in Denmark, written from the explicit perspective of investigating civil resistance. It is Bergfeldt's PhD dissertation, and with 451 pages it is no problem to cover all the 11 points, some of them extensively. It investigates both the violent and nonviolent aspects of resistance, and how these two forms interacted. Much attention is also given to internal Danish and German differences. At first Bergfeldt's thesis was treated as one of the texts to be analysed, but since it is the only major work on nonviolent resistance in Denmark and

⁵ For some reason, there are no journal articles in English covering this case study. One of the book chapters has a corresponding 30 minute film which I have not included because of lack of space and because analysis of pictures differs considerably from analysis of written text.

⁶ Lennart Bergfeldt, *Experiences of Civilian Resistance: The Case of Denmark 1940-1945* (Uppsala 1993).

very thorough in itself, I instead used it as a source of information for the 11 point account below.

11 essential points in the analysis of Danish nonviolent resistance

As described above, the 11 themes included here were picked from the texts I analyse in this study. However, facts in the following account are based on Bundgård Christensen et. al's book *Danmark Besat* (Denmark Occupied). This is a book of almost 1000 pages written by four historians and covering all aspects of the occupation. Resistance is treated as one theme among others, together with e.g. aspects of everyday life and the development in the war elsewhere. Information from Bergfeldt's thesis has been used as a supplement source when it comes to nonviolent resistance and specialist accounts for certain central events.

1. Context of the war

An analysis of resistance to the occupation of Denmark only makes sense in the context of WWII. During WWI Denmark had remained neutral, and when the warnings of war started to sound during the 1930's and other countries increased their military spending, Denmark instead disarmed considerably in an attempt to appease the big German neighbour to the south.

Events in Denmark and the development of the resistance were influenced by the broader war. It is especially important to keep in mind that until 1943 and the German loss at Stalingrad, Hitler seemed invincible and, as one of the texts in this study put it, "Europe seemed to have become German for a long time to come. The future seemed Nazi."⁷

Equally important is to understand Hitler's intentions for Denmark. In sharp contrast to the situation in Eastern Europe, the destiny of the Danes was to become good Nazis once the war was won. In the meantime, Hitler wanted Denmark to be a model protectorate. The fewer German soldiers and administrators which were required, the better. Danish

⁷ Jacques Semelin, *Unarmed against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939-1943* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993), p. 33.

industry and especially food production were important as the war went on.

2. The German memorandum and the policy of cooperation

The basic narrative of the Danish occupation is correct in its claim that to most Danes, the occupation came as a complete surprise. The majority of the population woke up one morning to an occupation which was already complete. Most Danish troops surrendered without any struggle, which was also ordered by the government. The Danish government was presented with a peculiar memorandum from the occupier, which stated that German troops were in Denmark to protect its neutrality. Thus, in contrast to all other occupied countries, the Danish parliament and government continued to function, the King remained the constitutional head of state, and the armed forces and police were still under Danish control. At the time of occupation, the government was led by the Social Democrats, but on the same day three non-extremist political parties were invited to join a broad coalition government. Both the small Nazi party and the Communists were kept in the dark. This was the beginning of what has been called the *negotiation policy*, the *cooperation policy* and the *collaboration*, depending on political attitude to the path chosen by the Danish government. I use the most neutral term: the cooperation policy.

A basic characteristic of the cooperation policy was to negotiate, delay and drag out decisions for as long as possible. Formally, it was an equal relationship between two independent countries, and the negotiations were carried out by representatives of the two ministries of foreign affairs. However, everyone involved knew that if the Danish government did not do as it was told, the occupier could always establish its own administration. However, until 1943, there was a mutual interest in letting the Danish government administer Denmark's affairs. However, some concessions made in 1941 were especially problematic in relation to the Danish constitution and Denmark's reputation in the allied countries. On June 22, after war broke out between Germany and the Soviet Union, German authorities in Denmark demanded that all major Communists in Denmark be interned. Two months later

the Danish parliament unanimously passed an unconstitutional law which outlawed the Communist party⁸. The Danish government also had to give its permission for the establishment of *Frikorps Danmark* (Free Corps Denmark), which was to be included in the German army and fight the Soviet Union. Although the Danish government never encouraged anyone to fight for Germany, Danish soldiers could join and the recruitment efforts were legitimized through promotions on the national Danish radio broadcasts.⁹ 5500 Danish men fought in the corps.¹⁰ In November 1941, German authorities also succeeded in getting the Danish government to sign the Anti-comintern pact and officially become an ally of Germany, Italy and Japan, although Denmark did not participate in the war.

An important figure for the cooperation policy was Erik Scavenius, who became foreign minister in July 1940 as one of the non-elected members to facilitate the relations with the Germans. When the prime minister was forced to resign in 1942, Scavenius became the new prime minister. Many of the elected politicians in the government thought that Scavenius gave too many concessions too easily, but he often managed to get things the way he wanted by threatening to resign.¹¹ Likewise, he could also use the same threat to make the Germans give in. Both the Germans and the other members of the government knew that it would be difficult to maintain the cooperation policy without Scavenius.

The parliamentary election, held on March 1943, was a peculiar event in the Danish occupation history. For the Danish politicians it was important to follow the constitution, to show that the population supported the cooperation policy, and to marginalize the Danish Nazi party. They also used the election campaign to distance themselves from Scavenius' line in the cooperation with the occupiers. For Hitler

⁸ Claus Bundgård Christensen et al., *Danmark besat: Krig og hverdag 1940-45*, 3. reviderede udgave (København: Information, 2009), p. 270-76.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 182.

¹⁰ Peter Scharff Smith, Niels Bo Poulsen, and Claus Bundgård Christensen, "The Danish Volunteers in the Waffen SS and German Warfare at the Eastern Front," *Contemporary European History* 8, no. 1 (1999).

¹¹ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 292.

and Werner Best, the German plenipotentiary and the highest ranked German in Denmark, the election was part of the propaganda about the model protectorate, and they did not interfere in the electoral process.

The small resistance movement which had emerged was split in the recommendations it was making to the voters. The national-conservative part recommended to vote for particular candidates who had remained within the governing coalition, while the part of the illegal press dominated by the Communists urged people to vote with blank ballots. Voter turnout was almost 90 %, and parties in the coalition government received 95 % of the votes. Despite economic and political support from Berlin, the Nazi party was humiliated¹² and only gained three seats in the parliament, the same number it had won in the last election before the war. Only 0,5 % followed the recommendation to vote blank, and the result has been interpreted both as a defeat of Nazism and as substantive support for the cooperation policy.¹³ However, just a few months later much of this support had vanished, as the events of the summer 1943 showed (see point 6).

3. Early protests and national symbols

Although the large majority of the Danish population followed the government's request to remain calm and refrain from activities that could provoke the Germans, there were some early incidents of protest. One of the most famous is the "10 Commandments to the Danes" that the high school boy Arne Sejr claimed to have distributed already in the evening of April 9 in his hometown Slagelse. Different versions of the text circulated during the occupation, commanding Danes to do bad work for the Germans, to destroy what was important for the Germans, not shop in Nazi shops and "treat traitors as they deserve".¹⁴ Another phenomenon was *den kolde skulder*, literally "the cold shoulder", an attitude of distance and turning one's back on the Germans. Although the impact of this attitude should not be exaggerated, it annoyed the Germans enough for

¹² Ibid., p. 418.

¹³ Ibid., p. 408-22.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 167.

them to mention these incidents in reports to Berlin.¹⁵ Another response to the occupation was that many people rallied around national symbols and cultural events. In the summer of 1940, song festivals were arranged around the country with thousands of participants collectively singing Danish songs, including the national anthem.¹⁶ The King, Christian X, who had never been particularly popular, also became a symbol of Danish unity. Although he himself would have preferred a quiet celebration of his 70th birthday in September 1940, “a sea of people” greeted him during this car journey through Copenhagen. Throughout the war he remained an important figure for many people.¹⁷ During the first summer of the occupation, new organisations working on various aspects of national unity were also established; especially important were the *Danish Youth League* and *The Council of Elders*.¹⁸

The first public mass protest against the government policy of cooperation occurred in November 1941 when Scavenius, the Danish foreign minister, signed the Anti-Comintern Pact on behalf of Denmark. The protest was initiated by students, but it is not clear how many people participated. 169 people were arrested, and unrest and fist fights between Danish civilians and German soldiers continued for five days, although on a lesser scale than on the first day.¹⁹

4. Organised resistance

The first organized resistance in Denmark was initiated by children of high school age, the most famous being the seven boys from the “Churchill Club” in Aalborg, who stole weapons and sabotaged the Germans with arson and vandalism during the first half of 1942 before being caught and sent to prison.²⁰ Larger scale organized resistance began when escaped Communists started to organise. Other early recruits to the resistance movement came from the conservative-nationalistic side

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 168.

¹⁶ Ibid., p. 196.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 198-99.

¹⁸ Bergfeldt, p. 107.

¹⁹ Ibid., p. 115; Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 296.

²⁰ , p. 359-60.

of the political spectrum. For organized resistance, contact with England was important and the British “Special Operations Executive” (SOE) operating underground all over occupied Europe had a Danish division which focused on providing training and explosives for industrial and railway sabotage.

The resistance movement in Denmark must be understood as a development over time. It does not make sense to talk about the resistance as though it was undertaken by one unified organisation. At first, resistance was only carried out by a tiny minority on the extreme ends of the political spectrum. It never became a mass movement (although Danish self-consciousness imagines otherwise), but over the years people with more moderate ideologies also became active. After the election in 1943, different parts of the organized resistance movement began to see a need for better coordination and the first contacts were made, but it was not until the collapse of the cooperation policy in 1943 that the “Freedom Council” was established. It consisted of representatives from some of the biggest and most influential groups when it came to sabotage and the illegal press, and after the people’s strike in 1944 contact was established with the politicians. After the armed forces were disarmed in 1943, officers in cooperation with politicians started to organize armed groups of “reliable” men who were ready to support the British troops in the case of armed conflict in Denmark. In this instance, “reliable” meant non-communist. After the war, it was discovered that these groups had been given more weapons than the active sabotage groups because the political elites did not trust the Communists (who dominated much of the resistance movement) and thought they might use the liberation as an opportunity to try to take political control.

5. Sabotage and violence

The resistance movement is the part of the occupation that has been covered most extensively by Danish historians, but usually the focus is restricted to the type of resistance involving sabotage aimed at industrial targets or transportations that benefited the Germans. Sabotage was strongly condemned by the government behind the cooperation policy, and for the first two years the police eagerly pursued all resistance activities. From the summer of 1942 to August 1943 the eagerness declined, and after the

collapse of the cooperation policy the Germans themselves investigated the resistance movement.²¹ Sabotage was met with heavy reprisals from the Germans when hostages were killed, and Danish cultural institutions were sabotaged as revenge. An important aspect of the sabotage, though difficult to quantify, is the influence on Danish and German morale and its impact on gaining the respect of the Allies.

6. Summer 1943 – strikes and the end of the cooperation policy

Sabotage increased during July and August 1943, but from a nonviolent resistance perspective this period is important due to the wave of strikes that swept over many provincial towns. The development varied from place to place. Sometimes it was Danish provocations of German soldiers who ignited the unrest, other times sabotage and riots played varying roles before strikes were organized. An important aspect of the uprising was the harassment of local Nazis, collaborators and girls who were socializing with the German soldiers. Windows were broken, shops and apartments set on fire, and the girls had their hair cut off. Historian Hans Kirchhoff has documented the developments in August in detail and shown how support for such activities seemed to be widespread, although only a limited number of people were organizing it and actively carrying out vandalism.²² Part of the background to the uprising was the changing situation at the war front. When Italy surrendered in July 1943, many people thought the war was nearing an end.²³

An important early event happened on the shipyard in the town Odense on July 28th 1943, when an almost completed minelayer which had been built for the German navy was sabotaged. The Germans responded by posting armed guards on the ship, which provoked the workers to immediately stop working. Other workers within the iron

²¹ Bergfeldt, p. 277.

²² Hans Kirchhoff, "Augustoprøret 1943: Samarbejdspolitikens fald: Forudsætninger og forløb: En studie i kollaboration og modstand" (PhD thesis 1978, Gyldendal, 1979).

²³ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 454.

and metal industries also went on strike in sympathy, and in the end the Germans had to give in and remove the guards. A week later, another act of sabotage triggered events in the fishing town Esbjerg, when a store house was set on fire by a local Communist sabotage group. The Germans imposed a curfew that generated substantial unrest, and some days later a workers meeting called for a general strike until the curfew was lifted. The workers also asked the shop owners to join in the strike and keep their shops closed, resulting in a “town strike”. These two rounds of strikes and unrest in Odense and Esbjerg were provoked by sabotage, but in Copenhagen and Århus (the two largest cities) where even more acts of sabotage took place, there were no similar uprisings. Thus, the sabotage can only be understood as one factor in the events.²⁴ The most intensive period of the strikes in the provincial towns started in the middle of August, involving about 10 % of the workforce.²⁵

In the end, continued unrest caused the Germans to give the Danish politicians an ultimatum: Either you agree to several non-negotiable conditions, or we take control. The ultimatum demanded that the government immediately declare a state of emergency, forbid strikes, and introduce the death penalty for sabotage and weapon possession. The government turned down the ultimatum, and on August 29th it ceased to function. The Germans disarmed the Danish armed forces and declared a state of emergency.

Kirchhoff's most important finding for revising history-writing in Denmark was his documentation of how the collapse of the cooperation policy was a result of pressure from below. Contrary to what had been claimed in the consensus myth that had dominated for more than 30 years, the government had not sought this break, but tried to find solutions to continue to govern.

7. Rescuing the Danish Jews

In 1943, the Jewish community in Denmark consisted of a little less than 7700 people. Most of these had lived in Denmark for generations and were well integrated into society. In the first period of the occupation

²⁴ Kirchhoff, p. 225.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 190.

they had been protected by the Danish government, which had refused all attempts to introduce any kind of discrimination. The German authorities seemed to be aware that if they wanted the cooperation policy to continue, this was a subject which was off limits. After the collapse of the cooperation policy in August 1943, the German plenipotentiary in Denmark, Werner Best, initiated the deportation of the Danish Jews as an attempt to improve his own position in the internal German struggle for power.²⁶

The arrest was planned for October 2, but the shipping expert at the German embassy, Duckwitz, informed several Danish politicians about the plans, and they in turn spread the word to the Jewish community. Thus, only 202 Jews could be found in their homes on October 2nd. The rest were in hiding, waiting to escape across the narrow sound which separates the area around Copenhagen from Sweden. People stood up for neighbours and co-workers: Jews were hidden in hospitals, old people's homes and private houses and transported in taxis and ambulances. For many Danish participants in the organized resistance movement, participation in the rescue operation became their entry point. There is no doubt that many Danes carried out courageous acts during these days, fearing for their lives. However, it is also part of the story that many fishermen demanded large sums for smuggling people in their fishing boats, the price depending on supply and demand.²⁷ In addition, several organisers of the transports were aware that it was much less risky to assist the Jews than to help saboteurs to Sweden. The Danish police and coast guard looked the other way, or actively participated in the rescue operations. Additionally, the German effort to capture the Jews was not well organized and internally divided. The result was that 7.220 Jews were rescued, 474 were deported, and of these 53 died.²⁸

²⁶ Rasmus Kreth and Michael Mogensen, *Flugten til Sverige: Aktionen mod de danske jøder oktober 1943* (København: Gyldendal, 1995), p. 16-19.

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

²⁸ The numbers vary slightly between sources, these numbers are from Kreth & Mogensen p. 36.

8. Uncensored information

During the occupation access to uncensored information was restricted, but one option was to get foreign news. The BBC in London broadcast 15 minutes daily in Danish, with the latest news about the development of the war and the resistance movement in Denmark. Another source of information was illegal pamphlets, newspapers and books distributed in Denmark. The first major magazine was published in September 1941 by the Communists after they had been outlawed. They also initiated one of the leading papers called “Frit Danmark” (Free Denmark) which was a collaboration between people from the whole political spectrum distributed all over the country with local editions.²⁹

In the summer of 1943, illegal local magazines were essential for spreading information about the strikes, negotiations and agreements about continuation of the strikes. They were much better informed about local events than the BBC broadcasts, which were sometimes incorrect and not very up to date as they depended on information smuggled out of the country.³⁰

Bergfeldt emphasizes that the illegal press over the years played a decisive propaganda role in creating an atmosphere of defiance towards the Germans, and convinced a large proportion of the population that the means used by the resistance movement were justified.³¹

9. Copenhagen “people’s strike” 1944

In the summer of 1944, there was another strike which showed that a large proportion of the Danish population was prepared to defy the Germans. Just like the previous summer, the development of the war in Europe with the allied invasion of France on June 6th raised the hope that the end of the war was in sight. In the area around Copenhagen, sabotage groups succeeded with several large attacks against factories producing arms for the Germans. As revenge, the Germans responded by executing some saboteurs who had been convicted earlier, and by

²⁹ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 353-59.

³⁰ Kirchhoff, vol. II p. 206-16.

³¹ Bergfeldt, p. 290.

setting of an explosion in the popular Tivoli amusement park. A curfew was also introduced, forcing people to stay indoors after 8 pm on the warm summer nights. The workers at Burmeister & Wain (B &W, a large shipyard in Copenhagen) responded with a creative action – they stopped working at noon, in order to get their 8 hours of rest before the curfew started. Officially this was not a strike, the workers simply just made sure to have the time to attend to their allotments, which produce was essential because of the food shortage the war was causing. This form of strike soon spread, with around 80.000 workers going home early on the third day of the action.³²

In the evenings many people were defying the curfew; there were street fights with German soldiers and 12 people were killed just during the first two days. On the fourth day, the German authorities conceded by moving the curfew time to 11pm, but they sent mixed signals when the soldiers were still behaving brutally on the streets. By then it was too late to quell the unrest. When the occupier announced that eight saboteurs had been executed, the people of Copenhagen responded with a general strike.

The Germans tried to stop the general strike by cutting off water, gas and electricity, but the Freedom Council urged people to continue to strike. The Council had not played a role in instigating the strikes and seemed to have been confused about what to do when the spontaneous actions to leave work early began. But now it came to play an important role in the negotiations that eventually ended the strike.

In terms of internal Danish differences, the people's strike was an important event for the Freedom Council to show its strength, and to draw the politicians and Freedom Council into dialogue. It was also important in terms of the relationship between violence and nonviolence.

Bergfeldt has shown how the Freedom Council was aware that the strike was doing more damage to the Germans than sabotage and the unrest in the streets. He summarises that “The strike weapon had been very effective in a number of ways, the Council concluded in an analysis: economically, military and psychologically – superior to sabotage”.³³ The

³² Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 555.

³³ Bergfeldt, p. 197.

report which included the council's analysis was written immediately after the events, and the council wrote that "First, the People's Strike was, the largest act of sabotage ever in Denmark. No single deed of sabotage has cost the Germans so many lost working hours."³⁴ The council also found that the strike had been important for the relations with the Allies and for building solidarity within the Danish population.

The casualties of the people's strike had been relatively high: 97 people lost their lives and 600 were wounded, especially due to the unrest in the streets. Thus, the Freedom Council was aware that the strike weapon had to be used with extreme care. When the B & W workers initiated a new strike in August, the Freedom council quickly followed up and declared a 24 hour strike the following day. In addition to the time limit, it was also accompanied by an appeal to the citizens to stay calm and avoid demonstrations. During the next ten days, 34 towns participated in the limited strikes, which were all highly disciplined.³⁵ On three occasions, the Council also initiated 2 minute demonstrations of complete standstill, which were all very successful.³⁶ As requested by the Freedom Council, the strikes that occurred during the rest of the war were all much more controlled and disciplined than the people's strike. A good example of how much control the Freedom Council now had was demonstrated when the railway workers went on strike in response to the deportation of Danish prisoners on September 14th. When the Germans threatened heavy reprisals, a national general strike was called for, but it explicitly exempted the railway workers.³⁷ Thus, the reprisals could be avoided but the Council showed how easily more strikes could be organized.

10. Rule by department heads

After the uprising in August 1943, the Danish government ceased to function. In the unprecedented constitutional situation, the highest civil

³⁴ The Freedom Council, as quoted in *ibid.*, p. 411.

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 199; Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 553-65.

³⁶ Bergfeldt, p. 198-99.

³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 199-200.

servants in the ministries became the ones to remain in contact with the occupier. The politicians continued to have some influence behind the scenes, and Danish affairs generally remained under Danish control. However, direct censorship was introduced and German police controlled the investigations of resistance activities.

The resistance movement was very critical of how the administration of the civil servants continued cooperation with the occupation force. However, the civil servants played an important role in keeping Danes in German captivity relatively safe – the Communists, the Jews which had been caught, and the police officers who were interned in September 1944. They also played a role in not disclosing the correct amounts for food production in Denmark, meaning that more food remained in Denmark instead of being exported to Germany. In addition, they were able to channel resources to the resistance movement, although it was later discovered (and heavily criticised) that most of the weapons went to the armed groups on stand-by in case of a British invasion, rather than to the mistrusted communist-dominated resistance movement.³⁸

11. Dynamics of nonviolence

Acts of sabotage have an ambivalent position within the study of nonviolent action because some forms of sabotage are so closely associated with violence. Disarming weapons with hammers and pouring sugar into petrol tanks are usually included as forms of nonviolent action, although many activists consider them extremely problematic for strategic reasons. However, uncontrollable forms of sabotage involving explosions and arson is usually considered a violent form of resistance. Although the sabotage of industrial and military facilities in the Danish case aimed to avoid any harm to human beings and could theoretically be part of the repertoire of nonviolent action, in this context it must be considered part of a militarised struggle which also involved guns, the establishment of an underground army and the assassination of informers. Bergfeldt includes sabotage as a violent form of resistance,³⁹ and this is consistent with how the sabotage has been framed and perceived by the Danish public. Any study of Danish nonviolent resistance cannot avoid elaborating on how

³⁸ Bryld and Warring, p. 190-91.

³⁹ Bergfeldt, p. 297.

violent and nonviolent forms of resistance interacted with and influenced each other.

One of the main differences between violent and nonviolent forms of resistance is that nonviolent action allows for much broader participation than violent resistance. Everyone has the possibility to partake in a 2-minute general strike, and when the whole workplace is on strike it is relatively safe for everyone to join in the action. In contrast, sabotage activities are limited to small groups with access to explosives and the knowledge of how to handle them, and those who are able to live with a false identity. Many of the organised Danish resistance groups were primarily concerned with trying to do as much military damage to the Germans as possible. However, an organisation called “Ringens” (the ring), positioned in the middle of the political spectrum and popular among social democrats supporting the resistance, focused on broader civil mobilization. Its leader preferred 1000 participants to 10, even if they managed to achieve the same outcomes, because numbers were important when it came to shaping the character of the people.⁴⁰

An account of the Danish resistance to Nazi occupation which is especially interested in the nonviolent aspect also ought to include a perspective concerning the “paradox of repression”. This notion is used to describe the fact that sometimes repression leads to increased resistance, while at other times it succeeds in suppressing resistance. Sometimes German repression managed to subdue resistance, while at other times, such as in August 1943 and June 1944, outrage over repressive measures like curfews ignited massive protest. In the Danish case, it is also essential to consider how nonviolent and violent methods interacted with each other, as the strikes cannot be analysed without considering the sabotage and vice-versa.

Nonviolent resistance texts and their coverage of the 11 points

The texts that use the Danish resistance as a case study of nonviolent resistance are highly varied, both in terms of length, date of origin, and the purpose with which they were produced. Analysing them in relation

⁴⁰ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 646.

to the 11 points introduced above reveals a considerable variation both in terms of how they treat historical facts and how they frame the narrative of Danish resistance.

All the accounts fit well within the basic narrative about the occupation of Denmark identified by Bryld and Warring. The stories begin with the attack on Denmark, focus on the resistance and end with the liberation. Only one book chapter deviates from this when it says: “The most significant long-term change resulting from occupation by Nazi Germany was the reversal of Denmark’s historic policy of neutrality.”⁴¹ Apart from this exception, the variation to the basic narrative is the explicit focus on nonviolent and civilian forms of resistance.

Denmark is analyzed as a case and has its own chapter in three books. The first was published in 1967 in the book *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-violent Resistance to Aggression*, edited by Adam Roberts.⁴² The focus of the book is what potential nonviolent resistance can have against foreign invasions, coup d’état and totalitarian states. The chapter is written by Jeremy Bennett and is based on both English and Danish accounts of the occupation.

Bennett’s chapter is very close to the organized resistance movement’s interpretation of events. Much space and credit is given to discussing sabotage and how sabotage served as a motivation for strikes and unrest and a way to motivating people to engage in greater resistance. Bennett mentions the context of the war, but does not talk about the potential benefits of the cooperation policy, not even the widespread protection of the Jews until 1943. Otherwise the rescue of the Jews is treated as one of three events which deserve special attention.

In Bennett’s interpretation of events, there were no resistance during the first year of occupation. He does not mention the early leaflets or the national summer of 1940. However, he does cover the King, the first mass protest in November 1941 and some symbolic protests. From Bennett’s

⁴¹ Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler, *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994), p. 240.

⁴² Adam Roberts, *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-Violent Resistance to Aggression* (London: Faber, 1967).

account, it is unclear how much the organized resistance changed with time, and in his chapter the strikes and uprisings in 1943 and 1944 are treated as a supplement to the sabotage.

Writing in the 1960's, Bennet had no opportunity to include findings from Danish historians who published later. Bennet gives much strategic importance to the railway sabotage, in line with what was believed at the time. This sabotage, done in the winter of 1944-45, targeted trains bringing German troops from Norway through Jutland in Denmark to defend Germany. Bennet writes of the sabotage that "A highly organized guerrilla campaign against the Jutland transport system was mounted. Trains were either destroyed by saboteurs or were delayed for days on end"⁴³. This is simply not correct. As documented by Aage Trommer in 1971, the maximum delay of a German division was two days, and most acts of railway sabotage directed towards German troop movements resulted in a delay less than 24 hours or no delay at all.⁴⁴ However, a severe limitation of Trommer's study is that he focused exclusively on the military-strategic importance of the sabotage and did not include an analysis of the psychological/demoralizing effects on the Germans, or the influence the sabotage had on creating and sustaining a cultures of resistance among the Danish population.

A problem with Bennett's chapter, which reoccurs through all the other texts, is the way that internal Danish divisions are portrayed. Bennett does mention differences, but as exemplified in a quote about changes in 1942 it seems as though all Danes were convinced with time, which was not the case:

"The view was expressed that it might be necessary to provoke 'Norwegian conditions' in Denmark, i.e. open war with the Germans, the collapse of the Danish Government, and acceptance that German violence would have to be met with Danish violence. This view was by

⁴³ Jeremy Bennet, "The Resistance against the German Occupation of Denmark 1940-5," in *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-Violent Resistance to Aggression*, ed. Adam Roberts (London: Faber, 1967), p. 171.

⁴⁴ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 626.

no means universal, and there were many who opposed it. It took some time before there was support for it.”⁴⁵

The last part of the quote gives the impression that everyone eventually came around to view Danish violence as a good idea, which was not the case.

That Bennet is aware of internal Danish differences is clear when he talks about how the army was suspicious of the long-term intentions of the left-wing resistance groups.⁴⁶ Nevertheless, he glosses over these differences when he concludes that:

“A deeply divided country will never resist anything successfully. The Freedom Council was responsible for the fact that internal strife never threatened resistance in Denmark as seriously as it did in other German-occupied countries.”⁴⁷

Semelin’s book *Unarmed Against Hitler* was published in English in 1993. His interest is civilian resistance and he uses a methodology of comparative history, investigating only the time between 1939 and 1943. Semelin finds that in the documentation of WWII, civilian resistance is often considered a supplement to armed guerrilla warfare, wherein the focus is the military goals. Thus, the objectives of maintaining the integrity of civil society have been neglected in the study of resistances. These forms of resistances aimed at preserving institutions and protecting people who were prosecuted. Bennett’s chapter discussed above is a typical example of the emphasis on violence and disinterest in civilian institutions. Semelin does not aim to write a coherent narrative focusing on Denmark, but uses examples from Denmark to compare with other cases from occupied Europe. Altogether there are about nine pages specifically about Denmark in the book of almost 200 pages.

Because Semelin is especially interested in how civil resistance can preserve institutions that are civilian in nature and remain outside the occupier’s control, the cooperation policy plays an important role in his

⁴⁵ Bennett, p. 162.

⁴⁶ Ibid., p. 166.

⁴⁷ Ibid., p. 172.

coverage of the Danish case. Semelin does a good job in explaining the position of the Danish government and how it tried to do what was best for the population. However, although he explicitly says that it is difficult to know to what degree the government succeeded in protecting the Danish people, he devotes more space to the potential benefits than to the problems with the cooperation policy. Semelin is the only author in the dataset to point out that the Danish government actually protected the Jews for the three years that the cooperation policy lasted, something which is usually forgotten in the accounts of how the Danish people heroically rescued the Jews. However, when he describes an incident in which the Danish government handed over eight torpedo boats in 1941, he focuses on how the government tried to resist, whereas Bundgård et. al only mention how the Danish government had to make a major concession.⁴⁸

Semelin also makes a comparison between the situation in Denmark and the Vichy government under General Petain in the south of France. According to Semelin, the Danish government was never a willing collaborator, and did not take initiatives in the hope of making itself look more favourable in the eyes of the occupier.⁴⁹ Although the Danish government did indeed act very differently from the Vichy government, there were (and are) many people in Denmark who thought that Scavenius, when Foreign Minister, was too forthcoming in his dealings with the Germans.⁵⁰

Although it is perfectly fair to explicitly focus on resistance that is civilian in nature, it becomes troublesome in Semelin's case when he does not discuss how civilian resistance and sabotage influenced each other in the summer of 1943. He does mention sabotage and how it was difficult for the Danish government to figure out how to handle it, but he does not investigate the special dynamic that arose when the two types of resistance were combined.

Peter Ackerman and Christopher Kruegler's *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century* was

⁴⁸ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 255.

⁴⁹ Semelin, p. 19.

⁵⁰ Bundgård Christensen et al., 292.

published in 1994.⁵¹ The book includes six cases which are all analysed systematically in relation to 12 principles of strategic nonviolent conflict. The case about Denmark is written in consultation with Bergfeldt, so it is no surprise that this chapter is by far the best among the texts in the dataset, and a very good introduction to the Danish case. It includes all the 11 main points and almost all of the sub-points. Only some minor themes on the list are not mentioned, like the relatively high level of integration of the Jewish community in Denmark. Nevertheless, there are a few problematic aspects of this text, especially in the analysis. Regarding the election in 1943, Ackerman and Kruegler write in their application of the 12 strategic principles to the Danish case:

“Still, the Germans had to wonder whether certain Danes were really collaborating with them or distracting them from achieving better control. This conundrum set the Germans up for a mistake in their control strategy: they allowed the election of 1942 [sic] to take place. They failed to realize that the results would lead to a consolidation of relatively nonpartisan leadership for the Danes, leading to more effective and unified Danish decisions as the fight went forward.”⁵²

The election, in fact, took place in March 1943 but their interpretation of its importance for Danish leadership and decisions is more problematic than getting the year wrong. Bergfeldt’s research concludes that the election was a “...grand manifestation of the unity of the Danish people against Nazism”⁵³, but as discussed above, both Best and the Danish government were satisfied with the result, although for different reasons. People might have been dissatisfied with Scavenius’ line, but such an election result would not have been possible if people had not trusted the government.⁵⁴ In my reading of events in 1943, it does not make sense to draw a correlation between the election result and the development of the resistance as Ackerman and Kruegler have done, simply because there is a correlation in the timing of events. Their

⁵¹ Ackerman and Kruegler.

⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁵³ Bergfeldt, p. 136.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

reasoning contributes to a coherent narrative about the development of resistance in Denmark, but standing united against Nazism in an election and organizing resistance are two different processes expressing different logics. While the election result was a defeat for Nazism in Denmark, expressed by a large majority of the population, the break between the Danish government and the occupation forces was driven by a minority of people. Although public opinion might have been moving in this direction, it did take several months and a turn in the broader war (the fall of Mussolini) before the sabotage, strikes and unrest in August forced the politicians to give in.

Another aspect of Ackerman and Kruegler's text that lacks nuance is their treatment of internal Danish differences. Early in the chapter they warn that "The reader expecting to find a single, coherent fighting organization like the Indian National Congress or Poland's Solidarity in charge of an easily identifiable strategy will be disappointed."⁵⁵ Early in the analysis section they also state that: "Internal struggle among advocates of different policies, however, consumed a great deal of time and energy."⁵⁶ Nevertheless, several places in the text exaggerate the coherence within the resistances. For instance, regarding the collapse of the cooperation policy in August 1943 they claim that:

"Best tried to establish a new, more cooperative Danish government and threatened direct German rule as the alternative. The Danes refused. After all, they had been looking for and had finally received an out from the negotiations policy."⁵⁷

As discussed previously, the government had not been looking for "an out from the negotiation policy". The collapse of the cooperation policy was driven from below, something they neglect to mention.

Another problematic aspect of this text is when the authors try to identify actors who can represent a clear strategy. The Freedom Council is given this position in connection with the 1944 people's strike in Copenhagen which they call "... a tremendous victory for the Freedom

⁵⁵ Ackerman and Kruegler, p. 214.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 227-28.

Council”.⁵⁸ Although the strike was undoubtedly a time for the Freedom Council to consolidate its power and become the informal government, the authors neglect to mention that the strikes were not initiated by the Council, but started quite spontaneously (although Communists at the work places did play a role in instigating them) when the workers at B & W decided to go home early to attend to their allotments. According to Bundgård et. al, the Freedom Council was “disoriented” by events and it was not until the sixth day of the strike that the Council finally published a statement calling for continued strikes.⁵⁹

Even if this is the best of the shorter text, the authors nevertheless seem to be caught in the need for “a good story” that juxtaposes the good Danes against the evil Germans. Thus the authors construct more coherence in a Danish “strategy” than what can be reasonably concluded from an analysis of events.

This is evidenced in one of Ackerman and Kruegler’s assertions that “Denmark’s Freedom Council was created on 16 September 1943 to fill the vacuum left by the government’s withdrawal and to coordinate the new groundswell of resistance actions.”⁶⁰ The Freedom Council was initially formed to establish contact between the different parts of the resistance movement, and the first contacts had been made already in early June before the August uprising in 1943.⁶¹ The Freedom Council was not immediately ready to coordinate actions, and although certain members might have had ambitions regarding filling the vacuum of the government early on after August, others certainly did not.⁶² Much resistance continued to take place outside the Freedom Council’s control, and it was only in 1944 when it started to also cooperate with some of the politicians that it makes sense to talk about it as an informal government filling a vacuum.

Thus to some degree Ackerman and Kruegler’s account glosses over the fact that before and after August 1943 there existed two different

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

⁵⁹ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 555-57.

⁶⁰ Ackerman and Kruegler, p. 229.

⁶¹ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 508.

⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 514.

processes which worked against each other. It was not one resistance movement which used two different strategies as one might understand from their text. It was rather two different strategies for dealing with the occupation, which dominated at different times. First there was the cooperation policy, pursued eagerly by the elite, and later came the sabotage and nonviolent resistance pursued by the resistance movement. However, the two main Danish actors were competing with and actively undermining each other throughout the duration of the war. Although both sides saw the potential benefit of cooperation with each other towards the end of the war, they fought each other furiously until that point.

The most recent book chapter covering Danish nonviolent resistance was published 2000 in Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall's collection of cases called *A Force More Powerful*.⁶³ Denmark is the main case in a chapter covering Denmark, the Netherlands and resistance to the deportation of Jews in Berlin. Most of the chapter (24 pages) is devoted to the situation in Denmark. The style of writing is journalistic, and this is by far the most exiting account in the dataset. The majority of the references in the text are to two journalistic English language accounts of resistance in Denmark⁶⁴, although other sources are used as well.

This text covers almost all of the 11 main points; the only thing which is not discussed at all is the rule by the department heads. The large majority of the subpoints are covered, some of them extensively. For instance, there are many stories about the King and symbolic protest. The engaging style makes it a good chapter for motivating students for learning more about nonviolent resistance, and it covers how the Freedom Council came to focus more on strikes and less on sabotage towards the end of the war. Nevertheless, the chapter has its limitations when it comes to advancing our understanding of the more complex issues involved in

⁶³ Peter Ackerman and Jack DuVall, *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000).

⁶⁴ John Oram Thomas, *The Giant-Killers: The Story of the Danish Resistance Movement, 1940-1945* (New York: Taplinger, 1976); Richard Petrow, *The Bitter Years: The Invasion and Occupation of Denmark and Norway, April 1940-May 1945* (New York: Morrow, 1974).

nonviolent struggle, and issues related to internal Danish differences are especially problematic.

While it is reasonable to explain Denmark's position as the small neighbour with no chance for military struggle, the authors go quite far in justifying the cooperation policy without explaining the extent to which some of the actions undertaken to maintain good relations with the Germans were highly problematic. This goes for the Danish government's internment of the Communists, the establishment of Frikorp's Danmark and the signing of the Anti-comintern pact. All incidents are framed as if the authorities had no choice, without mentioning how troublesome it was in relation to the constitution (regarding the Communists) and neutrality (regarding the Anti-comintern pact). However, the subjects are mentioned so the problem is not complete omission, but the framing. For instance, regarding Frikorps Danmark they write that "Little was done to stop German enlistment of Danish soldiers".⁶⁵ However, the problem was not just that the Danish authorities did not do anything to stop it, but that they were legitimising it.⁶⁶

When it comes to the election in 1943, the authors write that it was one of Best's "biggest blunders".⁶⁷ Such framing does not take into consideration that Best arguably knew very well what he did, and was perfectly aware that the Danish Nazis would not stand a chance. In spite of this, Best considered the fact that the election took place a public relation victory for Germany which could claim that Denmark was indeed managing its own affairs.

When recounting the events surrounding the internment of the Danish police after the People's strike in 1944 Ackerman and Duvall also include a myth about the king:

"To the Germans, the Danish police had become undependable by turning a blind eye to sabotage and disorder. By the end of the day, close to 10,000 policemen had been arrested and disarmed. At Amalienborg Castle, the king's police entourage was taken into custody.

⁶⁵ Ackerman and DuVall, p. 215.

⁶⁶ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 182.

⁶⁷ Ackerman and DuVall, p. 218.

When a German officer informed the king that he had orders to raise the swastika over the castle, the king refused and exclaimed, “If this happens, a Danish soldier will go and take it down.” “That Danish soldier will be shot,” the officer replied. “That Danish soldier will be myself,” the king responded. The swastika never flew over the castle.”⁶⁸

First of all, the number of arrested police officers is wrong, only around 2000 police officers were interned on September 19th 1944.⁶⁹ Even more problematic than a wrong number is the fact that the story about the King is simply not true.⁷⁰

In Ackerman and Duvall’s text, the story about Denmark is told in a way that makes it sound as if a united Danish people first decided to try the cooperation policy, but then together moved towards more active resistance and ended the cooperation policy. This is similar to the problem with Ackerman and Kruegler’s chapter. In addition, the newest text also exaggerates Danish unity with a phrase like: “Hardly a corner of Denmark was left untouched by the impulse to embrace and dramatize Danish identity, if not confront the occupiers.”⁷¹ Regarding Sejr’s leaflet, they claim that “Before long his Ten Commandments would be passed from hand to hand and eventually become sacred to the Danes as they waged their national resistance”.⁷² In contrast, Semelin says Sejr’s ten commandments did not have any effect.⁷³ Such exaggerations of unity might make a story more “readable”, but are done at the expense of accuracy.

The two last texts included in this study are much shorter than the book chapters. First there is the entry in the *Global Nonviolent Action*

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁶⁹ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 571.

⁷⁰ If it had been based on facts, one would have expected such a marvelous story to be included in the official biography about the King, which it is not. See Knud J. V. Jespersen, *Rytterkongen: Et portræt af Christian 10.* (Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2007). The events are covered on pages 498-501.

⁷¹ Ackerman and DuVall, p. 213.

⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 212.

⁷³ Semelin, p. 37.

Database called “Danish citizens resist the Nazis, 1940-1945”.⁷⁴ The database is an online collection of more than 1000 cases of nonviolent action which can be searched according to various criteria. The case of Denmark consists of a couple of pages with coding and approximately 1 ½ pages with a narrative. Unfortunately, the entry which was last edited in September 2011 has several flaws. Looking at the coding section it seems completely random which resistance groups get mentioned, and there are many mistakes in the narrative. Of course one cannot expect a short text to cover all the sub-points in detail, but here only 12 out of 55 items get mentioned. For instance, the whole concept of the cooperation policy with its benefits and problems is left out, which also means that what is included about the strikes and uprising of 1943 does not make much sense. When it comes to what is actually included, there are several problems. The gravest mistake is the causal link between the election in 1943 and increased resistance and sabotage: “This [the election] showed all Danes that they had an opportunity to make a difference. The voting action empowered Danes and encouraged resistance against the Nazis. As a result, sabotage increased and workers began to strike.”⁷⁵

It appears as if the author of the entry has been relying heavily on Ackerman and Duvall’s chapter, and what was a problem in their text has now been twisted further and gotten completely wrong. The quote demonstrates a complete lack of understanding of the internal differences between the politicians who supported the cooperation policy and the resistance movement which was behind the sabotage. In the literature list, one source listed is Berry Clemson’s “Denmark rising”.⁷⁶ This is a very interesting book, but it is a novel written as a counterfactual history regarding what could have happened if Denmark had had a plan for civilian based defence and all sectors of society had prepared how to resist an invasion with nonviolent means. Although the book is listed as “not read”, there is no indication that it is not a reliable source.

⁷⁴ Global Nonviolent Action Database, “Danish Citizens Resist the Nazis, 1940-1945,” (2009), <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/danish-citizens-resist-nazis-1940-1945>.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶ Berry Clemson, *Denmark Rising* (Norfolk: Cybernetica Press 2009).

That it is possible to write a sensible short text about the case is clear from the encyclopaedia called *Protest, Power and Change* where Bergfeldt has written an entry of a little more than two pages called “Denmark, Resistance to Nazi occupation”.⁷⁷ The rescue of the Jews has its own entry in the encyclopaedia and is only mentioned in passing. Bergfeldt manages to cover 23 of the 55 possible points, and although another author might have chosen to include other aspects, the overall impression is that he has summarized a complicated case quite well. Instead of dwelling on the details of the early protests, the August 1943 uprising and the people’s strike in 1944, Bergfeldt focuses on the broader picture of the context of the war and the different types of nonviolent methods which were used. Sabotage is given due credit, and internal differences both within the Danish and German camp is explained. The accomplishments of both the cooperation policy and the organized resistance movement is covered in a reasonable way. The main limitation of the entry is that the concessions granted to the occupation power because of the cooperation are not mentioned at all.

In all the book chapters and shorter texts, there is either a complete lack of attention to problematic aspects of the resistances, or a brief mention in the best cases. Thus, it is only Semelin who notes that the Jews who escaped to Sweden had to pay for the boat trip across Øresund, but he frames it positively in the context of how many people contributed to raising the money:

“Even the Danish police took part in the rescue, guiding people in the right direction. Private citizens and even banks advanced large sums of money to cover costs, since many people did not have the money to pay for their trip.”⁷⁸

Although it was only in 1995 that the payments to the fishermen became problematized in Rasmus Kreth and Michael Mogensen’s research on the rescue operation, it was not completely new information.

⁷⁷ Roger S. Powers et al., *Protest, Power, and Change: An Encyclopedia of Nonviolent Action from Act-up to Women’s Suffrage*, Garland Reference Library of the Humanities ; Vol. 1625 (New York: Garland Pub., 1997).

⁷⁸ Semelin, p. 153.

For instance, a book written for the general public about the occupation time with eye witness accounts published in 1969 first calculates that the average price was 1700 crowns, and then continues:

“Most of the money went into the fishermen’s pockets. They earned fortunes in the hectic October days and the risk they ran was modest. It could go wrong, but it rarely did. Jew castles, one called the new houses that many fishermen could afford to build in time following”.⁷⁹

“Jew castles” is a quite derogatory word, and says something about the contempt for (or maybe jealousy of) those who profited from the refugees.

Another aspect of the resistance movement which can be problematized is the liquidation of the informers which took place towards the end of the war. This happened without any form of trial, often with little or no evidence, and although many people might find the actions justifiable because of the situation, it was nevertheless an illegal practice which ought to raise many questions. In the book chapters and short texts, it is only Ackerman and Kruegler’s text which mentions it when discussing sabotage in 1943:

“Under the aegis of the Freedom Council, sabotage groups began trying suspected traitors or stikkere, and eleven were convicted and executed in December. A total of 350 “liquidations” took place before the end of the war, carried out by special execution squads.”

There are several incorrect claims in this quote: First of all, Bundgård Christensen et al write that 409 killings took place between May 1943 and the beginning of June 1945. They also explain that not all executions were sanctioned by the Freedom Council and although some groups specialized in executions, many were carried out by ordinary sabotage groups.⁸⁰ They point out that many murders which were called executions of informers were connected to ordinary crimes, and that

⁷⁹ Per Eilstrup and Lars Lindeberg, *De så det ske under besættelsen. “Gå til modstand”*, vol. 2 (København: Forlaget Union, 1969), p. 100.

⁸⁰ Bundgård Christensen et al., p. 621.

sometimes others who happened to be present were killed as well.⁸¹

A book chapter cannot be expected to cover every single aspect of the resistance, but it is nevertheless telling that problematic aspects are so systematically absent. One possible explanation is that these elements don't fit within a simple narrative of the good guys against the bad guys, but rather require nuances that are often omitted for the sake of a positive narrative.

Appropriating history to promote nonviolent resistance?

Summing up the findings of this analysis of six texts, it is evident that these different texts have different problems. Whereas Bennet was found to exaggerate sabotage, Semelin can be accused of neglecting it, even if his focus is limited to civilian resistances. All the texts simplify the Danish resistance, especially when it comes to the complexity of internal Danish differences. Apparently they are all caught in the need to tell a “good story”, but there are degrees of simplification concerning how much internal differences are glossed over. I found the gravest mistakes in the entry in the Global Nonviolent Action Database, but have no possibility to judge if similar shortcomings appear in some of the other entries in the database. What can be concluded, however, is a very basic rule – stay as close to original sources as possible. The database entry was primarily based on a book chapter in *A Force More Powerful*, which itself was written to popularise the knowledge of nonviolent resistance and included a fictitious story about the King. This book chapter was itself primarily based on two books written in English by journalists for the general public. Thus, the database entry was several “generations” away from original sources, and it is an obvious, but nevertheless extremely important conclusion, that such distance increases the risk of mistakes.

The study of nonviolent struggle/civil resistance uses historic cases in order to generalise knowledge about unarmed forms of struggle, with the specific purpose of producing insights which are useful to those involved in struggles for peace and justice, both presently and in the future. Thus, scholars of nonviolence using historic cases are actively engaged in

⁸¹ Ibid., p. 621, 25.

rewriting history, an endeavour which should be done carefully, and with a good understanding of how history is produced. A nonviolent scholar relying on historical material must consider when the sources he/she is relying on were written, for what purpose, and with what audience in mind. What might have been emphasised, and what might have been left out? Who has an interest in what perspective? Instead of blindly picking out the episodes of unarmed resistance and de-emphasising the rest, it should be a goal to actively look for conflicting facts and perspectives, and giving all of them due attention.

Some degree of simplification and black/white narratives with heroes and villains might be justified when the purpose is to raise interest in the neglected topic of nonviolent resistance or in a comparison of many cases. However, such simplifications must accurately and faithfully capture the features relevant to the purpose involved. Thus, stories about Danish resistance which omitted the crucial element of internal differences do not contribute anything for more advanced understandings of the dynamics of nonviolent struggles and have no place in a research context. If scholars of nonviolent resistance ignore internal differences in their attempt to create a coherent narrative, there is a high risk of ending up with simplified conclusions, which result in simplified models and theories. The consequences for the field as such might not be too far reaching if this happens with one case, but if this is a recurring trend, it will impact the whole field of study of civil resistance. I cannot judge to what degree the same simplifications and glorifications have been made in other case studies of nonviolent struggles. My study concerns one particular case where I have the language skills to access material that few other researchers with an interest in nonviolent resistance can. However, the shortcomings in the Danish material shown here indicate that an important future study will be to re-examine more case studies in light of the newest historical research. This might be particularly necessary for cases where the study of civil resistance as a field has relied on data from only a few scholars, or where the original material is in a language that few people speak. The methodology used here might serve as an inspiration for others.

Mistakes and inaccurate simplifications are a shortcoming in all academic fields, but for an applied field such as civil resistance, flaws

in theories and models can have consequences for ongoing and future struggles. Thus, buying into myths about national unity and the evil nature of the enemy which was a systematic problem in all texts covering the Danish case will not make it easier for future generations of nonviolent organisers to navigate in their own struggles. Accepting complexity about actors, motives and events is the only way to increase our understanding of nonviolent resistance. We need studies that fully acknowledge internal differences, distrust, and power struggles within resistance movements. Only then will we have scholarship on nonviolent resistance which can truly bring new insights and contribute to developing both the practice and research on nonviolent action.

References

- Ackerman, Peter, and Jack DuVall. *A Force More Powerful: A Century of Nonviolent Conflict*. New York: St. Martin's Press, 2000.
- Ackerman, Peter, and Christopher Kruegler. *Strategic Nonviolent Conflict: The Dynamics of People Power in the Twentieth Century*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1994.
- Bennett, Jeremy. "The Resistance against the German Occupation of Denmark 1940-5." Chap. 7 In *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-Violent Resistance to Aggression*, edited by Adam Roberts, 154-72. London: Faber, 1967.
- Bergfeldt, Lennart. *Experiences of Civilian Resistance: The Case of Denmark 1940-1945*. Uppsala 1993.
- Bryld, Claus, and Anette Warring. *Besættelsestiden som kollektiv erindring. Historieformidling*. Roskilde: Roskilde Universitetsforlag, 1998.
- Bundgård Christensen, Claus, Joachim Lund, Niels Wium Olesen, and Jakob Sørensen. *Danmark besat: Krig og hverdag 1940-45*. 3. reviderede udgave. København: Information, 2009.
- Clemson, Barry. *Denmark Rising*. Norfolk: Cybernetica Press 2009.
- Eilstrup, Per, and Lars Lindeberg. *De så det ske under besættelsen. "Gå til modstand"*. Vol. 2, København: Forlaget Union, 1969.

Global Nonviolent Action Database. "Danish Citizens Resist the Nazis, 1940-1945." (2009). <https://nvdatabase.swarthmore.edu/content/danish-citizens-resist-nazis-1940-1945>.

Jespersen, Knud J. V. *Rytterkongen: Et portræt af Christian 10*. Copenhagen: Gyldendal, 2007.

King, Mary E. *Gandhian Nonviolent Struggle and Untouchability in South India: The 1924-25 Vykam Satyagraha and the Mechanisms of Change*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014.

Kirchhoff, Hans. "Augustoprøret 1943: Samarbejdspolitikens fald: Forudsætninger og forløb: En studie i kollaboration og modstand." PhD thesis 1978, Gyldendal, 1979.

Kreth, Rasmus, and Michael Mogensen. *Flugten til Sverige: Aktionen mod de danske jøder oktober 1943*. København: Gyldendal, 1995.

Peter Scharff Smith, Niels Bo Poulsen, and Claus Bundgård Christensen. "The Danish Volunteers in the Waffen SS and German Warfare at the Eastern Front." *Contemporary European History* 8, no. 1 (1999): 73-96.

Petrow, Richard. *The Bitter Years: The Invasion and Occupation of Denmark and Norway, April 1940-May 1945*. New York: Morrow, 1974.

Powers, Roger S., William B. Voegelé, Christopher Kruegler, and Ronald M. McCarthy. *Protest, Power, and Change: An Encyclopedia of Nonviolent Action from Act-up to Women's Suffrage*. Garland Reference Library of the Humanities ; Vol. 1625. New York: Garland Pub., 1997.

Roberts, Adam. *The Strategy of Civilian Defence: Non-Violent Resistance to Aggression*. London: Faber, 1967.

Semelin, Jacques. *Unarmed against Hitler: Civilian Resistance in Europe, 1939-1943*. Westport, CT: Praeger, 1993.

Thomas, John Oram. *The Giant-Killers: The Story of the Danish Resistance Movement, 1940-1945*. New York: Taplinger, 1976.

Weber, Thomas. *On the Salt March: The Historiography of Gandhi's March to Dandi*. New Delhi: HarperCollins Publishers India, 1997.

Appendix A

11 essential points in the analysis of Danish nonviolent resistance and their subpoints

1. Context of the war

- 1.1. Danish neutrality
- 1.2. Military intentions with occupation of Denmark
- 1.3. Food and industrial export to Germany
- 1.4. Development of the war influenced motivation for resistance

2. The German memorandum and the policy of cooperation

- 2.1. The German memorandum
- 2.2. The cooperation policy
- 2.3. Benefits of cooperation policy
- 2.4. Problems with cooperation policy (anti-comintern pact, internment of communists, Frikorps Danmark)
- 2.5. Election 1943

3. Early protests and national symbols

- 3.1. The King
- 3.2. Song festivals/national pride
- 3.3. First mass protest November 1941
- 3.4. Work slow and do bad work for Germans
- 3.5. Early leaflets
- 3.6. Symbolic protest

4. Organised resistance

- 4.1. First initiatives from children, communists and conservative nationalists
- 4.2. Support from SOE
- 4.3. Development over time from political extremes to broader movement
- 4.4. Freedom council after 1943

5. Sabotage and violence

- 5.1. The military/psychological effect of sabotage
- 5.2. Glorification of masculine violence
- 5.3. Extra-judicial execution of informers

6. Summer 1943 – strikes and the end of the cooperation policy

- 6.1. The origins of uprising
- 6.2. Strike element
- 6.3. Social unrest element
- 6.4. Town shutdown element
- 6.5. The spread of the uprising
- 6.6. The collapse of the cooperation policy as a result of pressure from below

7. Rescuing the Danish Jews

- 7.1. Position in Danish society
- 7.2. Internal German divisions
- 7.3. Warnings
- 7.4. Popular participation in the rescue operations
- 7.5. Entry to resistance movement
- 7.6. The payment to the fishermen

8. Uncensored information

- 8.1. Danish illegal press
- 8.2. BBC broadcast in Danish

9. Copenhagen “people’s strike” 1944

- 9.1. Background to the strike
- 9.2. Strikes more efficient than sabotage
- 9.3. Limited strikes later in the year

10. Rule by department heads

- 10.1. Benefits (state resources to resistance movement, assisting Danes in concentration camps, misleading Germans about food production).
- 10.2. Problems (continuation of the cooperation policy)

11. Dynamics of nonviolence

- 11.1. The paradox of repression
- 11.2. Participation
- 11.3. Sabotage/violence in relation to nonviolence