Working with Memories:

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"Memory is truth, memory is a lie"1 was the headline of an article in the Danish daily ‘Kristeligt Dagblad’ from 2010. The article was based on an interview with writer Lars Saabye Christensen. The above claim also comes from the author of this piece. The claim is provocative and only partially correct. For memories are rarely outright, intentional lies, but rather experiences from a person's past, which gradually change and adapt to the given situation in which the memory is evoked. There is a reconstruction of reality when the experience is evoked through a memory. Any gaps in memory are filled with the person's general knowledge of the outside world.

What is evoked depends on what is stored as memory in the given, experienced situation. What is stored depends on the person's upbringing, environment, age, etc. What is evoked depends on the questions of others, the expectations of the outside world, the moral compass of the person at the time of the event, etc. Memories are most often changed unconsciously, and once the memory is changed, the change will stick and it will be difficult to recall the original memory. Once a memory is changed, it will be forever changed. Traumatic memories, on the other hand, are pockets of the past, where the experienced situation rarely adapts to the present and change as long as the memory has the character of trauma. People with traumatic memories are stuck in the past and relive the situation exactly as they experienced it in real time. Thus, traumatic memories must be considered as accurate memories of a sequence of events experienced by a given person.

Memory history is a relatively new field in historical research, which in recent years has gained more and more ground. Memories can be anything from ego-documents such as diaries, autobiographies, etc. to monuments raised to remember for example fallen soldiers. It is therefore advantageous to distinguish between individual memories and collective memories. Pierre Nora wrote in a groundbreaking work, *Les Lieux de mémoire* [The Places of Memory], about imagined communities in French history. These imagined communities are part of a collective memory.

When working with individual memories, the frankness of the memory can be checked by comparing it to other people's narratives, recordings or documents etc. of the given experience. Likewise, memories from diaries, for example, can be compared to later memories of the same situation. Here one will typically look at the similarities and differences in the various memories and thereby be able to analyze given topics. In case you want to work on memories of Holocaust survivors, the following books could be advantageously used:

- Daniel Levy og Nathan Sznaider: *Memory Unbound: The Holocaust and the Formation of Cosmopolitan Memory*. (2002)

- Lawrence Langer: *Holocaust Testimonies: The Ruins of Memory* (1991)

- Robert N. Kraft: *Memory Perceived: Recalling the Holocaust*. (2002)

If you are interested in how recollection and memory work, the following works can be recommended:

- Dorthe Berntsen: *Erindring – Tænkepauser* 15. (2014)

- Jonathan K. Foster: *Memory – A very short introduction*. (2009)

- Peter A. Levine: *Traume og hukommelse*. (2017)