**Column seminar stichting Terug naar Westerbork – Jelle van de Graaf, 28-11-2019, Berlijn**

I am very honoured to have been invited here to give my personal view on the future of remembering. After a long day, I hope that I can contribute something to all the interesting things that have already been said today. For a start, the occasion of this seminar, the bicycle tour from Auschwitz back to Westerbork, perfectly connects my professional interest in World War Two with my personal passion for cycling. To stay close to this theme, I would like to highlight one example where the history of the war is combined with cycling, and that is the story of the Italian resistance hero and professional cyclist Gino Bartali. He won the Tour de France in 1938 and 1948 and was also three times winner of the Giro d’Italia. But after a promising start of his career, the Second World War brutally ended his ambitions. He continued to cycle, however, as he served as a courier and mechanic in the Italian army. After the German occupation of Italy in 1943, he joined the Italian Resistance. Most importantly, with his prize money he bought a house where Jewish refugees could hide. Moreover, as a courier Bartali transported hundreds of falsified identity documents for Jews. He hid the documents and photos in the frame of his bike and escaped the police due to his fame as a professional cyclist. Between September 1943 and June 1944, Bartali cycled back and forth between Tuscany and the monastery in Assisi, where a secret printing press falsified the documents. Eventually, Bartali was forced into hiding himself, staying in a castle for five months. But in the end, thanks to his dangerous activities approximately 800 Jews were able to flee. For this, Bartali posthumously received the Yad Vashem award in 2013, which made him a Righteous among the Nations.

Of course this is an heroic story, and the numbers are perhaps a bit exaggerated. But I think personal stories like these are significant in order to stress the importance of remembering the Second World War. At the same time, we have to realize that not every situation was as black or white, that there are certain grey areas in which people faced difficult dilemmas. You could also say Bartali was a normal man who just continued to perform his sport or even job to help other people and took advantage of his privileged position as a famous sportsman. Examples like these are helpful to imagine what one would do in the same situations; what choices would you make?

But as the example of the cycling tour back to Westerbork shows, nowadays cycling could be a very suitable theme for transferring war stories to a broad audience. In the Netherlands, there are a lot of cycling (and walking) routes related to locations and traces of the war. This combination of recreation and learning something of the history is in my opinion a very accessible way of getting in touch with stories about World War Two.

Especially as there are fewer and fewer eyewitnesses of the war, those stories gain importance. I think there are two major traditional ways of keeping the memory of World War Two alive:

1. First of all, the historical sources. Personal stories can be reconstructed through diaries, letters, memoirs and oral history (interviews held after the war). I think those sources, which are more and more digitally available, are the starting point for pursuing those personal stories about the war. Because in diaries, for example, people tell us what they actually experienced during the war, during bombings, hiding in the (bomb)shelters. In these parts you see the everyday life, the feelings and emotions people had. Writing in diaries could also serve as a means to handle their fear. Therefore, those ego documents are worthwhile studying because they add a personal and intimate dimension to the general history. Because of the emotions writers show, it is easier to identify with them and to imagine what life during the war must have been like. What I also find fascinating is that lots of people begin to write in diaries at the start of operation Market Garden, while they did not write before. The air landings in September 1944 were for them a trigger to start writing, because they were aware that something special was happening and they were on the verge of being liberated. Sometimes the urge for capturing this historical event was so big, that one women even wrote her diary on toilet paper. One last example is photographs. Currently, in the Netherlands there is a really interesting project going on, in which the Dutch Institute for War-, Holocaust- and Genocide Studies (NIOD) tries to collect one hundred war photographs from private collections. In the end this has to be a cross section of the war history through the entire country. The main focus is pictures from civilians instead of official army photographs, in order to get another perspective of the war, that is, of daily life. As well as letters and diaries, photographs are a very democratic way of looking at the war, meaning it shows the perspective of the ‘normal’ men and women and gives them a voice.
2. Secondly, we get in touch with war stories through locations or *lieux de memoire*. In a few years, the landscape will be the last witness of the war. They literally become places of memory. Some landscapes and locations still have, so to say, memories of the war. Places, therefore, like the great amount of monuments we already have, are essential in keeping the memory of the war alive. Stories gain much more meaning or impact when they are told on the places where the events actually happened. But not only monuments, also the landscape itself bears traces of the war, implicating an important task for archaeology. Here the combination with tourism is possible: locations could be connected through cycling- or walking routes. The history of World War Two becomes more tangible when locations and objects are being used for telling the stories around it.

However, for the less visible traces, like the landscape and archaeological finds, there are a lot of possibilities with new technologies to visualize the stories from the past there. There are several methods to visualize those traces, which at the same time make it easier to involve younger generations in this topic:

* Applications, for instance for presenting the mentioned cycling routes or with Virtual- and Augmented Reality.
* Vlogs.
* Games.
* Escape rooms.

With all these examples, there has to be a certain justification: why is it done this way, what is the message that has to be delivered? The condition is that is has to be done ‘right’, that it is historically correct. Those methods also need to have an educational value instead of just playing a game without explanation. For instance, games are especially suitable for portraying the grey areas in the past, like giving children dilemmas and force them to make choices. Afterwards it could start a conversation where you explain your choices. Those new forms of remembering could be perfect for reaching a younger audience, and to keep telling the history of World War Two to next generations. New media and technologies could be really helpful to reach children and youngsters. Of course, education should be the starting point for involving children in the history and commemoration of the Second World War, but this could be another way of triggering them to get in touch with stories about the war. As well as education can be carried out not only through schools but also in museums. The key to make them aware of the importance of World War Two is stressing the presence of stories within their families, and related to their own neighbourhood, because traces of the war are omnipresent in our society.

What I see in the province of Gelderland is that there are a lot of local, grassroots, initiatives coming up. Everything is organised very bottom up. Therefore, awareness is created on a small scale, it makes you realize what has happened in a specific area. It is of course also important to cooperate with multiple organisations and initiatives, maybe even with our German neighbours across the border. But apart from the local scale, also the bigger national picture has to be kept in sight, because remembering could be both something personal and something of national or general importance. For instance, our national Commemoration Day on the 4th of May is significant for lots of people. It is, so to say, an official ritual and is recently even designated as intangible cultural heritage.

Furthermore, in Gelderland we work with youth ambassadors. They are related to different kinds of projects, but all of them have a close connection with art. The basic idea is that art could serve as an accessible and versatile way of dealing with the war and remembering. That is why I am very supportive of the idea of this foundation (Stichting Terug naar Westerbork) to reach young people through sport. Areas such as theatre, music and sport are perfectly fit to reach a wide range of society and involve people in remembering the Second World War. In short, there are numerous creative methods of dealing with the past.

As I mentioned before, education is the starting point for involving children in the history and commemoration of the Second World War. In order to create awareness, children could be taken on excursions in their own cities or even neighbourhoods, to realize what actually happened in their own surroundings 75 years ago. Good things already happen in the Netherlands, like the poems children read during our national Commemoration Day, or the ‘adopting’ of war graves. Nowadays, telling stories is easier because, at least when speaking of the Netherlands, almost everyone still has some connection with the war within their families. However, in a short period of time we will experience a shift from memory to history. The challenge for the future is, I think, how to reach the next generations without grandparents to tell about the war from first hand. Another thing is to make immigrants and refugees aware of the history of the country they come to live in. They may have no history of the Second World War within their families, but our war history in Western Europe could be connected to their current experiences of war.

To conclude, such thoughts on how to reach new audiences were also an important issue at the Past Forward conference in Eindhoven. Last September, we organised this international conference for young professionals interested in or working in the field of World War Two and commemorating. One of the interesting results is that new technologies and art could be very useful for addressing a broad audience, among which the next generations. Furthermore, in some countries, even in Europe, people live in peace for just 20 to 30 years, like on the Balkans and former Yugoslavia. Commemorating could be much more difficult and politically charged there. For instance, sometimes war memorials are being used as a form of propaganda. But on the other hand, the culture of remembrance could serve as a means to achieve reconciliation between different layers of society. Remembrance is not something from the past, it is something happening now. So freedom should not be taken for granted, and commemorations should reflect on current wars or conflicts as well. It is a very topical theme, so we have to keep the dialogue alive and talk with each other while crossing the boundaries of generations and countries.