

5. Divided National Loyalties in the Conglomerate State. From the North Cape to the Elbe ³²⁰

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The eighteenth century Danish state was a typical European conglomerate state. It stretched from the North Cape to the river Elbe – a distance as from Copenhagen to Tunisia. It consisted of parts with vastly different historical backgrounds and with vastly different economic, social and cultural backgrounds. The kingdom of Denmark; the kingdom of Norway with the old Norwegian dependencies of Iceland, the Faeroe Isles and Greenland; the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein; the County of Oldenburg; and small overseas colonial possessions. The only tie that bound them together was the person of the absolute king.

The emergence of early national identities within the educated classes – as happened in Denmark and presumably also in Norway during the 1740s and in the Duchies a generation later – was bound to create tensions of both a personal and a general character. To give a few examples. A Danish civil servant who felt a strong loyalty to his country and who loved his mother tongue would, if criticizing the appointment of so many foreigners in the administration, inevitably question the king's divine right to appoint whomever he pleased – and thereby also break his personal oath of allegiance to his king. A Norwegian timber merchant in Christiania who criticized obvious shortcomings in the way the king's ministers in far-away Copenhagen dealt with Norwegian matters would threaten the cohesion of the conglomerate state which he had sworn to uphold. And a vicar might very well find it difficult to criticize foreigners and at the same time admonish his congregation to love thy neighbour.

For clarity's sake I shall deal with the question of divided national loyalties in sequence: Denmark, Norway, and, finally, the Duchies of Schleswig and Holstein.

Around 1740, Denmark witnessed a growing national awakening among a small group of young academics. They were the pupils of Ludvig Holberg who had advocated a modernization of the Danish language in the spirit of the Enlightenment. Judging from their language they were strongly engaged in the improvement of Danish and in Danish history. Their central concept was “*amor patriae*”, and they started publishing historical sources in Danish. In 1745 they formed “The Society for the Improvement of Danish History and the Danish Language”. In 1750 they issued a medal with the portrait of the king and with the proud motto: “*vincet amor patriae*”. Although they implicitly criticized the high number of foreigners in the king’s service – or perhaps because they did – the king graciously, or wisely, made it a Royal Society and supported its activities. At any rate, the young radicals had cautiously refrained from defining their concept of “*patria*”. At that time it might mean at least two things. In the spirit of the Enlightenment it could mean: “*patria ubique bene*”: my fatherland is where I live well, as a loyal patriot and a useful citizen, regardless of birth place and language. Or it could mean the country where one was born, whose mother tongue one spoke and whose history one shared.

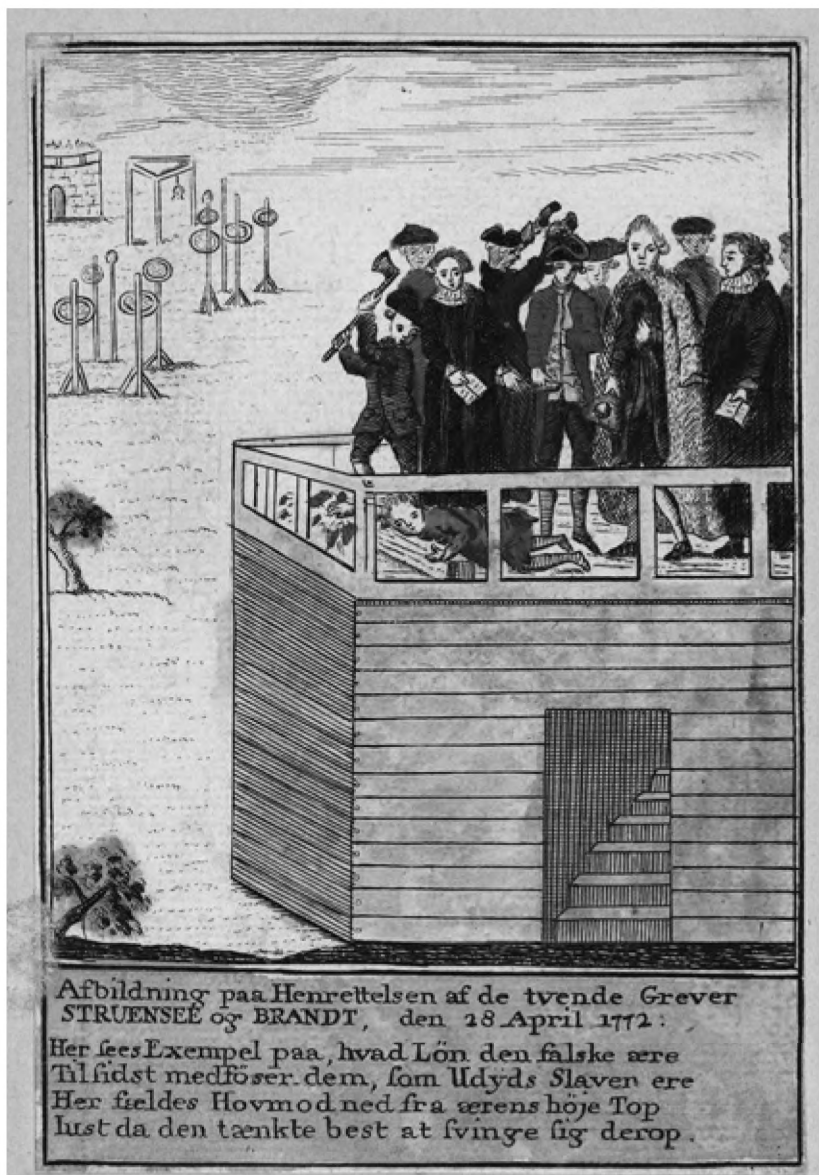
During the reign of Frederik 5 (1746-66) the official definition was and remained the former cosmopolitical one. No wonder, since the government, the central administration and the diplomatic service were almost solely recruited from among foreign born men and from Danes who spoke their language and adopted their culture. The men in power let the king pay writers like J. S. Sneedorff and Tyge Rothe for defending this definition and for rejecting the place-of-birth criterion. Most of the subjects, however, accepted the definition – which the censored press claimed was the right one. But a few fearless writers such as the young professor Ove Høegh-Guldberg from the Academy for the Nobility at Sorø did criticize that so many foreigners ate the bread of the land without deigning to speak the language. Even more interestingly, those who were attacked did not respond but chose to keep up an aristocratic silence.

At that time – in 1763 – all awaited the change of power which was imminent. Frederik 5 died in 1766 and the campaign against the many foreigners – Saint Germain, A.G.Moltke and J. H. E. Bernstorff – started immediately. What is more, the extraordinary royal motto which the 16 year old Christian 7 proclaimed seems not only to have sanctioned the

hunt but also to call for an entirely new definition of the term “patria”. The king’s motto was: “gloria ex amore patriae”, glory from love of the fatherland. The man who in 1767 launched the new definition was a young and ambitious Norwegian academic Eiler Hagerup who was backed by a group of Danish civil servants with political aspirations. He published a pamphlet which was a frontal attack on Tyge Rothe’s book from 1759 about the right definition of “amor patriae”, a definition which he totally rejected. He was enthusiastically supported by the same censors who had previously praised Rothe, and from now on “patria” was commonly understood as a matter of one’s place of birth.

But Hagerup and his political supporters wanted to go further. Rothe had defended the many foreigners as being indispensable if Denmark was to be brought to a European level of achievement. Hagerup’s argument was that Denmark now disposed of enough loyal and professional candidates for the king’s service. And as for artists he presented a long list of educated Danish painters and sculptors. But he had the courage to go even further. Quoting the king’s motto, he wrote that if his loyal subjects were to love their fatherland, the king must necessarily show respect for their language and their culture. He implored the king to appoint Danes even if their qualifications were somewhat lower than those of foreign candidates. He did not claim that the king should appoint only his own native subjects, but he was very close to saying so, and many of his readers would undoubtedly have read that unconstitutional suggestion between the lines.

Under the mentally deranged Christian 7, the political scene changed quickly, and Eiler Hagerup’s suggestions became law in less than ten years. The first dramatic change of scenery happened in the autumn of 1770 when Struensee started his 16 months of dictatorial power. His hectic rule did not in itself contribute to the development of national identity, although his open disrespect towards what he called “dumme Dänen” did cement the opposition to his reforms. But his abolition of pre-censorship on 14 September 1770 – which earned the king a complimentary letter from the old Voltaire – offers the historian a unique possibility to see how far the feelings of national identity had shifted. The conclusion is that such feelings seemed well established among the Danes and the Norwegians, but that they had not yet taken hold in the Duchies.



The execution of J.F. Struensee and E. Brandt in Copenhagen April 28, 1772. Broadside with woodcut.

The new people in power in January 1772 did not intend to repeat Struensee's political mistakes. From the very beginning they worked on securing for themselves a reliable base for their newly won power which constitutionally was no stronger than Struensee's had been. Struensee's short dictatorship had shaken absolutism as a constitution and raised doubts about the continuance of the conglomerate state. The new people's weapon was to be "Danishness" and a new definition of "Fatherland". Guldberg soon became the leading political figure, and he quickly demonstrated his intentions. Only a month after the coup in January 1772, it was proclaimed that the language of the administration in Denmark and Norway had to be Danish. Struensee's cabinet orders had been in German. It further increased the popularity of the new regime when, in 1773, it proclaimed that the army should be commanded in Danish, not in German, the language of the navy having always been Danish. But Guldberg's masterstroke was to mobilise the schools, a move that later was highly praised by the founder of the national (eventually, international) Folk High School movement, N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783-1872). His targets were the sons of the middle classes, the future civil and military servants and vicars, and also the representatives of public opinion. In the School Ordinance of May 1775 the Danish language and Danish history were for the first time made subjects in their own right. Furthermore, Guldberg saw to it, that the school books necessary for his grand design were ready. In 1776 P. F. Suhm – under Guldberg's relentless censorship – published his *Danmarks, Norges og Holstens Historie* (History of Denmark, Norway and Holstein) which of course depicted the conglomerate state as an unqualified success and where all occasions for criticism were glossed over. Even more successful was the school book published by Guldberg's young protégé Ove Malling in 1777: *Store og gode Handlinger af Danske, Norske og Holstenerne* (Great and Good Deeds by Danes, Norwegians and Holsteiners). Here Malling interpreted the history of the conglomerate state, and showed that men –and women as well – from all parts of the state and from all social layers through the ages had excelled in loyalty to the king and love of their fatherland – the fatherland being, of course, the conglomerate state. Indeed, to obey the King was to obey God. With these things in place, Guldberg could set the coping stone on his grand design. On the King's birthday, 29 January 1776, he published the Law of Indigenous Rights which was to be part of the constitution and never to be revoked. The message of the new law was brief. In future, with a few unimportant exceptions, positions in the King's service were to be

given only to men born in the fatherland, and the fatherland was defined as the conglomerate state.

The public reception of *Indfødsretten*, the right of the indigenous, was almost as interesting as its actual contents. Guldberg wanted the new regime to be popular, and in Copenhagen and in the many small towns of Denmark the new law was received with spontaneous festivities. First of all, the Danish public sector was not very big. Furthermore, it seems likely that the law satisfied an emotional need within a young and rising "Bürgerschaft" seeking a new place in traditional society. But it is interesting that the law does not seem to have been accorded a similar spontaneous reception in the towns of Norway and in the Duchies.

An important aspect of divided national loyalties had come to the surface with Struensee's abolition of pre-censorship. Publications now made it abundantly clear that Germans were not popular in Denmark and that their unpopularity was rising in these years. The politically dangerous aspect was that the king's Danish subjects did not distinguish between Germans from South of the river Elbe and the King's German-speaking subjects from Holstein and Schleswig. Either they could not make that important distinction or, perhaps, they would not! *Indfødsretten*, the right of the indigenous, did not solve that problem, and the tensions remained under the surface. The Danish speaking public met at the new clubs to talk politics and sing frivolous songs around the punchbowls. Clearly they felt culturally inferior when they compared their own milieu to that of the aristocratic literary salons, where the latest news from the European continent was debated and the latest poems by Goethe and Schiller were read. The Danes just went on grumbling while the Germans kept an aristocratic silence – until the spring of 1789, when the Germans finally reacted. An anonymous pamphlet accused the Danes of cultural mediocrity and a self-destructive hatred against all things German. The pamphlet was in German, and it was evident that the author belonged to the highest strata of the Germans. Today we know that he was the cousin and private secretary to the minister of finance, Count Ernst Schimmelmann. The ensuing pamphlet war, the so-called German Feud, lasted for 18 months and then ended abruptly, as if by an order from above. The Danes criticized with much bitterness the Germans for keeping to themselves and for not showing due respect towards the Danish language and culture, and a prominent Dane even turned against the Law of Indigenous Rights



Placat angaaende Indfødsretten 1776 (Broadside concerning the Law of Indigenous Rights 1776). The monogram of the King Christian 7 carries the motto: *Gloria ex amore patriæ*.

and suggested that if the king's German subjects were to serve their king, they might do so in Holstein and nowhere else. The Feud demonstrated clearly the divided loyalties between Danes and Germans in the conglomerate state at the end of the eighteenth century, and it boded ill for the time to come. Furthermore, one of the German combatants had for tactical reasons put the question: where were the Norwegians standing in the conflict?

Norway had a glorious historical past as a hereditary kingdom in her own right. Since 1380 it had been ruled by the same ruler as Denmark. In 1661 the country had embraced absolutism, as Denmark had done the year before. But since around 1500 it had been ruled more or less

from Copenhagen, one of the main reasons behind its secondary position being that the old Norwegian nobility virtually had died out in the late middle ages. In the eighteenth century, Norway had a diversified export economy based upon fishing, timber and iron, and it imported part of its corn from Denmark and Schleswig, the so-called Corn Monopoly dating back to 1735. Norway was a peasant society with no large landed estates as in Denmark and the Duchies. No Norwegian had a seat in the king's council. Norway was run by the central administration in Copenhagen, and no Norwegian held a top post in any of the central colleges. At the same time, the Norwegian local and regional administration was recruited from among Norwegians who all swore an individual oath of allegiance to the absolute king. These people formed a body of administrators who increasingly studied theology or law at the University of Copenhagen.

The abolition of pre-censorship in 1770 opened up for a stream of criticism against the way Norway was treated in the conglomerate state. There were no institutions in Copenhagen that dealt with specific Norwegian matters, as there was for the Duchies. Norway was also refused a university and a bank of its own. The Corn Monopoly made Norwegians starve from hunger. And incompetent civil servants were dumped upon Norway. The official presentation of Norway and Denmark was as sisters and twins that loved and obeyed the king as their father. But the political reality was that Norway was treated like a conquered kingdom while Denmark and particularly Copenhagen were favoured.

From these varied criticisms it is possible to distill the components of a Norwegian national identity as it was in 1772. It comprised all parts of Norway and all Norwegians, not only the middle class, and the free Norwegian peasant was seen as an ideal for the nation. Norway's glorious historical past was of course part of this identity, just like that of Denmark was prominent in the early Danish national identity. But there were real differences between the two national identities. The Norwegians in 1772 saw the rugged grandeur of their landscape as an image of their national character drawing, in clear contrast to Denmark where the landscape did not become a national icon until around 1840 with the appearance of the painter Johan Thomas Lundbye (1818-48). In contrast to Denmark, the language was not part of Norway's national identity. The old Norwegian written language had definitively

gone out of use around 1500, and old Norwegian was spoken only in the countryside. To the Norwegian pastors and civil servants, the Norwegian language was that found in the Bible of Christian 4 and in the legal code, Norske Lov, of Christian 5. Last but not least, it is essential to stress that Denmark and the Danes did not appear in this context as enemies.

What sort of national expectations did these generations of Norwegians prior to 1814 cherish? And how successful were they in realizing them in the short and in the long term? When among friends, the Norwegians, whether at home or in Copenhagen, might talk and sing about “Freedom” in the future, but concrete thoughts and plans are not to be found. But the authorities in Norway and in Copenhagen did, nevertheless, react to the popular “For Norway! Birth Place of Heroes” in December 1771. It was forbidden and confiscated – but still sung in private as a protest.

The coup d'état of Gustav 3 of Sweden in August 1772 – whose primary political goal was to acquire Norway – made the government strengthen its determination to keep Norway as a low tax country. Because of Norwegian national pride, it also refrained from sending troops up from Denmark, leaving the defence of Norway to its inhabitants. Political positions did, however, change over time. In 1772 Johan Nordal Brun, the author of the above mentioned song – the Norwegian Marseillaise, as it has been called — felt obliged publicly to define the attitude of Norwegians towards Norway and towards the conglomerate state. Norway was, he suggested, their natural fatherland, but politically it was the conglomerate state. At the same time, he also claimed equal rights for Norway within that state and asserted the duty of loyal Norwegians to go on claiming such rights. In 1787 another Norwegian civil servant, Hans Arentz, published a book in which he claimed that the first obligations of a patriotic Norwegian were to Norway and to the king as king of Norway. One wonders how Norwegians reacted to such a book which even indicated that some people did in fact discuss Norwegian independence in a distant future.

Also the national positions changed over time. The petition for a university in Norway had been put forward as early as 1661. When the wish was repeated by many in 1771, the reasons given were still of a practical and economic character. So were the reasons given both by Struensee

and Guldberg for refusing it. When the matter was taken up again in 1793 – now with promises of private funds to support the scheme – I have no doubt that at least some of the Norwegians saw it in a tactical light, as a lever for other and more important political claims. I also believe that the government's flat refusal should be seen in the same light. When it was taken up for the third time in 1809, both the Norwegians and king Frederik 6 saw the matter as clearly political. It was now the conglomerate state: yes or no! And in 1811 the king finally gave up the fight and promised a full and complete university in Christiania which in 1813 opened up its doors for the first seventeen Norwegian students.

How far were the Norwegians prepared to go for political concessions – and how far for independence? Standing up for concessions was not in itself dangerous, at least not as long as formal proprieties were maintained. But agitating and plotting against the state and the king's majesty (or just knowing about it) was high treason, and the penalty was that barbarous punishment which Struensee had undergone in 1772. His right hand was cut off, his head was severed from his body which was then quartered, and the parts were exhibited in public. At least some Norwegian patriots were prepared to go that far. In early March 1790, the Lord Lieutenant (*stiftamtmand*) in Christiania nervously reported that the revolution was on its way to Southern Norway, and the only thing he did not know was the exact date. Actually he was closer to the facts than he probably knew. Within the same week four prominent timber merchants from Christiania and Frederikshald, who later were known to have been political activists, met at Eda on the Swedish side of the frontier with Gustav 3's closest confidant, Gustaf Mauritz Armfelt. Here they presented some vague plans for starting a rising among the Norwegian soldiers in the garrisons and among the copper mine workers at Røros. For this they needed assistance from Sweden, but as their aim was a free and independent Norway, they had no wish to join Sweden with its aristocratic form of government, and the contacts were broken off. They were taken up again by the Swedish Crown Prince Karl Johan twenty years later. In this first venture, the four brave agents returned to Norway and carried on less dangerous work together with their co-conspirators, but the event does throw an interesting light on the conflicting loyalties in the conglomerate state.

Until 1773 Holstein and Schleswig – respectively fiefs of the German Reich and of the Crown of Denmark – had developed into a territorial patchwork. That year saw the Great Exchange of Territory whereby all of Holstein and Schleswig were united under the Danish King.

In Holstein and in Southern Schleswig the language and peasant culture was German while the peasants in Northern Schleswig spoke Danish. The real political power was held by the strong Ritterschaft consisting of the great landowners of the two duchies with their vast landed estates cultivated by peasants under the traditional *Leibeigenschaft* (bondage). At the formal political level the Ritterschaft claimed its sole right to represent the duchies vis-à-vis the distant Landesherr in Copenhagen, while the agents of the absolute monarchy maintained the position that the *Lex Regia* of 1665 made it impossible to recognize any power as a privileged and equal partner in negotiations. A *modus vivendi* had, however, been established. A standing committee, the so-called “Fortwährende Deputation”, dealt with the king’s ministers, and the taxes from the duchies were formally styled “free gifts” (*dons gratuits*). As some of the king’s ministers owned estates in the duchies and were members of the “Ritterschaft”, business was transacted in “Einigkeit” and aristocratic harmony.

This harmony was, however, broken when Crown Prince Frederik (eventually Frederik 6) took over as chief of government in 1797 after the death of A. P. Bernstorff. He wanted “*Einheit*” (unity) instead of the traditional “*Einigkeit*” (unanimity) in the conglomerate state. In 1800 he one-sidedly changed the drafting system for the army, something that shocked the Ritterschaft. When two years later he introduced an entirely new tax system, the chief of the German administration in Copenhagen, Cay Reventlow – also a member of the Ritterschaft – immediately resigned. The Crown Prince, however, carried on, and in 1805 he abolished the *Leibeigenschaft* without listening to the landowners and the Ritterschaft.

The Napoleonic Wars and the abolition of The Holy Roman Empire of German Nation in 1806 created an entirely new situation with regard to Holstein, till then a fief of the Reich. Denmark annexed it with Napoleon’s approval in 1806, and the Crown Prince immediately appointed a commission which should produce a common legal code for the entire conglomerate state, a sort of Code Napoléon. At the same time he embarked upon a project that should promote Danish as the

administrative language in the duchies. In 1811 he created a professorship in Danish language and literature at the University in Kiel, thereby provoking the growing German national identity. The German civil servants called it a “Dänisierung” of the administration, but they refrained from open opposition. And the Ritterschaft, which controlled the university in Kiel, was strongly conservative and felt a deep loyalty towards their Landesherr, while they looked with grave misgivings at the bourgeois liberals in Kiel with their newfangled social and national ideas.

The “divided loyalties” of the nineteenth century were a legacy from the eighteenth. In 1807 Denmark was forced into the war on the side of Napoleon and ended up with the state going bankrupt in 1813. The Norwegians discovered that when Great Britain’s Royal Navy cut the ties between Copenhagen and Christiania, they were actually able to manage for themselves. When the Danish king ceded Norway to the king of Sweden, the Norwegians proclaimed themselves independent and elected the Danish viceroy king under the liberal Eidsvoll Constitution of 17 May 1814. When they were forced by the great powers in Vienna to enter into a personal union with Sweden, they succeeded in salvaging most of the liberal principles of the Eidsvoll Constitution, foreshadowing their path to complete independence in 1905. And in 1814 – when Cossacks were roaming in Holstein and in Northern Schleswig, the populations of the two Duchies learned that membership of the old conglomerate state did not secure them against war and social upheaval.

However, the old Danish conglomerate state – the so-called “Helstat” – lived on, though in a mutilated form. The proportion of Germans – as defined by language and culture – rose from 25 per cent to 40 when the peace was signed. This at a time when national ideas and identities for the first time in history had developed into a powerful political factor in Europe. The conglomerate state of 1814 consisted of the Kingdom of Denmark, the Duchy of Schleswig (half Danish, half German), the Duchy of Holstein, and the tiny Duchy of Lauenburg between Hamburg and Lübeck, with Holstein and Lauenburg becoming members of the German Confederation. Such was the great powers’ compensation to the king of Denmark for his loss of Norway.

In this conglomerate, Schleswig with its Danish-speaking peasant population in the northern half was left as a ticking bomb in Metternich’s

new conservative Europe. After the revolutions of 1830 the cracks in this construction grew radically. The Danish political liberals wrote "Schleswig Danish" on their banner; while the German liberals made the Schleswig Question the touchstone for the German Idea ("Prøvestenen for den tyske Tanke"). In other words, the transformation of the loose German "Kultur Nation" into a politically powerful German "Staats Nation" was under way, and with the revolutions of 1848 the dissolution of the old conglomerate state became just a matter of time. Three years stand out in this process, 1864, 1866, and 1870.