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Nordic National Histories

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At the beginning of the nineteenth century the Nordic region of Europe was governed by two large composite states. The Danish state included not only present-day Denmark, but also Norway and the two part-German duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. The kingdom of Sweden included present-day Finland. As a consequence of the Napoleonic Wars, however, these states experienced the loss of Norway and Finland respectively. Norway entered a new royal union with Sweden (1814–1905), whereas Finland became a grand duchy of the Russian Empire with a diet and government (1809–1917/18).

The Nordic countries represent the three main types of 'nation' in Europe in the nineteenth century. Denmark and Sweden had been states since medieval times; Norway was an 'historic nation' with an interrupted state history; Finland was a 'new nation' without any prior political independence. Denmark and Sweden gradually adjusted to their new borders. All these countries defined or redefined themselves as nations, trying thereby to adjust to or naturalise the new political realities. Their emerging national narratives show striking similarities in spite of the countries' highly different origins, a fact that raises the question of power of narrative strategies in relation to history proper. The history of a nation seems to have been the dominant idea, the master narrative, in Nordic historiography. Different pasts led to differences as to how the nation was to be defined, and they created different kinds of tensions within the different national histories.

In the twentieth century, experiences of war reinforced the national orientation of narratives, leaving the old conception of a common Scandinavian culture behind, except in Finland, where a cultural bulwark against the Soviet Union was in great demand. However, the narratives of a Nordic model were once again picked up in the heyday of the welfare state, and have been seen as

a Nordic contribution to world history on a par with that of the Vikings a millennium earlier.¹

Dissolving empires, emerging nations (1809–1905)

Intellectual impulses and basic concepts

One thing the four Nordic countries have had in common is the intellectual impulses that formed their historical consciousness in the nineteenth century. Their shared impulses were Germanic: Romantic, Hegelian and/or historicist. In all cases the impulses also seem to have been imported directly from Germany. Finland's 'national philosopher', J. V. Snellman (1806–81), studied in Germany and was an active proponent of Hegel. The Swedish historian E. G. Geijer (1783–1847) read both Schelling and Hegel. Denmark's anti-German national history was of an unmistakably German brand, as can be seen in N. F. S. Grundtvig's folk version of a philosophy of history, just as Norway's anti-Danish national history was: P. A. Munch quoted Niebuhr as his model and corresponded with Jacob Grimm.

The Scandinavian concept of *folk* had all the organic and teleological connotations of its German counterpart, *Volk* – a separate individuality expressing a unique folk spirit – and it became the central concept of history writing: the subject, the creator and the addressee of national histories. In Finnish the term was *kansa*, a word denoting at one and the same time nation, ethnicity and 'ordinary' people.² The Scandinavian *folk* have the same qualities – and ambiguities. Compared to the German *Volk* the Scandinavian concept was, however, more socially inclusive. In all four countries the national histories written from the 1830s had 'folk' in their titles: Geijer's *Svenska folkets historia* (1832–36), C. F. Allen's *Haandbog i Fædrelandets Historie med stadigt Henblik paa Folkets og Statens indre Utvikling* (1840), P. A. Munch's *Det norske Folks Historie* (1852–63), and *Oppikirja Suomen kansan historiassa* (in Swedish: *Finska folkets historia*, 1869) by Yrjö Koskinen (Georg Forsman).³

¹Overall introductions to Nordic historiography in English include W. H. Hubbard, *Making a Historical Culture: Historiography in Norway* (Oslo, 1995); F. Meyer and J. E. Myhre (eds), *Nordic Historiography in the 20th Century* (Oslo, 2000); R. Torstendahl (ed.), *An Assessment of Twentieth-Century Historiography: Professionalism, Methodologies, Writings* (Stockholm, 2000); Max Engman, 'National Conceptions of History in Finland', in E. K. Lönnroth and R. Björk (eds), *Conceptions of National History: Proceedings of Nobel Symposium 78* (Berlin and New York, 1994), pp. 49–63; B. Stråth and Ø. Sørensen (eds), *The Cultural Construction of Norden* (Oslo, 1997).

²For the concept in Finnish and in Finland, see I. Liikanen, 'Kansa', in *Käsitteet liikkeessä* (Tampere, 2003), pp. 357–408.

³A critical reply to Koskinen by a Swedish-speaking professor was titled 'History of Finland', indicating his idea that there were two nations (*folk*) living in Finland, the Swedish and the Finnish: see M. G. Schybergson, *Finlands historia* (Helsingfors, 1887, 1889).

Behind the similarities, however, there were also significant differences in understanding the nature of a people. The Norwegian P. A. Munch made his intentions explicit in his preface:

I have deliberately called this work the history of 'the Norwegian people', not of 'Norway', or of 'the Norwegian Empire' [*Rige*], or 'the Norwegian kings'. It was my intention to deliver as far as possible a true and complete exposition not only of the country's political or outward history, but of the people's inner history, of the people's life in its development and progress; not only of the monarchs' but also of the people's achievements.⁴

This tension and non-identity between *folk* and state was also found in Denmark. Danish history writing had traditionally had the Danish empire (*rige*), that is, the countries ruled by the Danish monarch, as its framework. Allen's history decisively challenged that tradition by having the concept of the Danish people as its overarching theme. And what constituted the Danish people, as opposed to the German citizens of the Danish state, was first and foremost language. According to this view, Denmark's natural border was between Schleswig and Holstein, not the border of the king's realm. And the establishment of a national state of Danish speakers became the conceived goal of history.

In Sweden, on the other hand, the *folk* became more or less tightly identified with the state in the narrative of leading historians. The king was seen as the primary expression of this collective being; the state was conceived as the culmination of the idea of nation. The history of the Swedish people was the history of the emergence and development of the central, royal power; it was the history of the kings, of their struggle for power, of the development of law and constitution. To Swedish historians, historical development was inconceivable without the state, long after the last officially appointed historian of the state had died, in 1834. Outside the discipline of history, however, a broad interpretation of people's lives and their history evolved through ethnological and literary enquiries into popular culture. Artefacts, habits and songs were seen as expressions of an unspoilt, primordial national culture.

Identifying national history with state history would have ruled out Finland as a member of the community of nations. In Finland 'folk culture' therefore had to take the state's place. In the eighteenth century H. G. Porthan (1739–1804) and his students (the Fennophiles) had conducted local studies, published in Latin, into the folklore, customs and habits of ordinary people,

and this became the foundation of Finnish historiography. But well into the nineteenth century the Swedish identification of state and history still had its advocates in Finland. When Z. Topelius in 1843 posed the question: 'Do Finns have a history?' his answer had to be in the negative, because the Finns had had no state or political history of their own.⁵ Many intellectuals disagreed, however, because they wanted Finland to have a history, and the publication in 1835 of the *Kalevala*, an anthology of poems drawn from heroic folklore, finally became Finland's passport to the family of civilised nations. It should be underlined that the identification of the nation with peasants and 'ordinary people' also made it possible to marginalise the linguistic differences between the Finnish-speaking majority and the Swedish-speaking inhabitants of the grand duchy. In this respect Finnish-ness became more a question of citizenship than of linguistic community. This was also due to the fact that, before the late nineteenth century, Finnish identity was primarily a creation of Swedish-speaking intellectuals, though of Finnish ethnic origin.

Origins and differentiating factors

How the *folk* were defined depended on who was perceived as the nation's Other. In Denmark it was Germany; in Sweden, Russia; in Finland, to some degree Sweden, but primarily Russia; and in Norway it was Denmark and Sweden. One result of having different kinds of enemies was that religion came to play a different role in the respective countries' self-identity. In Sweden and Finland, Lutheranism achieved a very important distinguishing quality as a result of these countries' relations with Russia. Swedish historians saw it as the destiny and mission of the Swedish state to be a Lutheran bulwark against Russian westward expansion. In Finland the Church remained Lutheran after 1809, and it became a national safeguard against the Russian Orthodoxy. Religion could not play the same distinguishing role in Denmark's rivalry with Germany or in Norway's rivalry with Denmark or Sweden. Even so, religion was an important component of national identity in all four countries. In Denmark the theologian–historian–author N. F. S. Grundtvig, who played a major role in the formation of the Danish national identity from the 1840s, saw religious and national awakening as two closely related phenomena, and joined the idea of the Danes as one of God's chosen peoples to his understanding of their particular mission in history.⁶

⁵For Topelius, see M. Klinge, *Idylli ja uhka: Topeliuksen aatteita ja politiikkaa* (Helsinki, 1998). For a critical analysis of the use of the *Kalevala* as evidence of the history of Finnish culture in the past, see I. Sulkunen, *Suomalaisen Kirjallisuuden Seura, 1831–1892* (Helsinki, 2004).

⁶O. Vind, *Grundtvigs historiefilosofi*, Skrifter/udgivet af Grundtvig-Selskabet, 32 (København, 1999).

⁴P. A. Munch, *Det norske Folks Historie*, Deel 1, Bind 1 (Christiania 1852), p. iv.

None of the Nordic countries had any major religious divisions: the people constituted one Church. Therefore state, folk and religion could be more or less identified, and the churches were therefore conceived as state churches. The strength of the Lutheran identity can be illustrated by Norwegian national history. When the Reformation was introduced in Norway in 1536 it was imposed from Denmark and was accompanied by the elimination of the last remains of Norwegian independence. The last Norwegian archbishop, Olav Engelbriktsen, was also the last one who fought to uphold the power of the Norwegian 'Council of the Realm'. Even so, he never achieved the status of a hero in Norwegian national history. The concept of having missed the opportunity of becoming a Scandinavian *Ítland* was not entertained. Instead the Reformation was seen as inevitable, and beneficial in the long run. Although 1536 was the low point of Norwegian history, it was also a turning point. From now on Norway experienced demographic, social and economic progress, pointing inevitably towards new independence. Similar early threats to the Reformation were also part of the narrative in Denmark and Sweden, and associated again with foreign influences. In Finnish historiography the reformist Mikael Agricola became a hero, because he developed the written language of Finnish and thus combined the Lutheran Church with the idea of the Finnish people (*folk*) and their cultural identity.

The concept of the Other – external and internal – was also closely connected to ideas of origins. In all the Nordic countries the myth of a golden age of peasant freedom and equality played a crucial role. However, this myth was not an invention of the nineteenth century. In the seventeenth century it had been part of Swedish Gothicism, which linked the Nordic peoples to biblical legends and made them the foremost among Noah's descendants. In Denmark–Norway similar theories were formulated in the course of the eighteenth century, and Enlightenment thinkers such as Montesquieu and Justus Möser had also worked with a concept of Nordic freedom. Gradually it was turned into a specific Nordic-German property. Even in Finland peasant freedom seems to have been considered a Scandinavian import and not something originally Finnish: Koskinen saw 700 years of Swedish rule over Finland in positive terms because it had given the Finns Christianity and institutions based on peasant freedom.

The reception of Icelandic literature also played a significant role in the formation of this concept of the Nordic past. Danish and Swedish scholars viewed the sagas as expressions of a common Scandinavian culture. In Sweden this common past was seen as legitimising the union with Norway and paving the way for a possible expansion into the whole Nordic realm, thereby awakening memories of the medieval Union of Kalmar as a parallel to the ongoing German unification process, at the same time as meeting the possible threats to the Nordic realm from the east and the south.

To Norwegian historians, however, it became crucial to reject the notion that a common Nordic past was being reflected in Icelandic literature. For this purpose they had to develop a theory of migration.⁷ This theory, based on archaeological and linguistic evidence, sought to demonstrate that the Norse tribes that had originally populated Norway (several hundred years BC) had followed a northern route from somewhere in Central Asia and had moved into an empty region. By contrast the tribes that had populated southern Scandinavia had moved into a region where other Germanic tribes were already settled, and they had had to conquer and mingle with these tribes. Norse culture, Norwegian historians asserted, was therefore the only one to survive in its pure form in the Nordic realm, and thus from the very beginning there had been three different Scandinavian nationalities. From Norway the Norse people had later colonised Iceland. The idea of a common Nordic past should therefore be considered a myth, Norwegian historians claimed, and the Icelandic sagas and the *Edda* seen only as a 'Norwegian-Icelandic' heritage, not a common Nordic one. It was similarly believed in Finland that the *Kalevala* proved that one could find an original archaic Finnish culture of eastern origin beneath the later Swedish layers. The Norwegian immigration theory was met with a hostile reaction in Denmark because it undermined the Danish claim to the existence of a clearly defined border between the realms of the Danish-Nordic and the German people. As of the 1860s, however, this theory was also abandoned in Norway,⁸ and from then on theories of migration lost some of their significance in the national histories, except when marking out the origin of the Lapps and the original national appropriation of the territory after the last Ice Age. From that point the national past was extended backwards into the misty domains of pre-history, and national differences were explained as the product of a long and gradual process of interaction between the different peoples and the environments of their homelands.

Were national differences constructed in an essentialist or in a relational manner? It is not easy to give a clear-cut answer, because in the idea of *folk*, biology, or quasi-biology, politics and culture were mixed in very complex ways. We have seen that Finnish-ness was made a question of citizenship, such that political unity became more important than linguistic-cultural cleavages. At the same time the idea of the Finns having a distinct biological identity was never distant. 'Culture' was likewise a question of more than just language: it was associated with the concepts of 'national character' and

⁷Today's genetics dispute the migration theory. What remains unanswered is the distinctiveness of the Finnish language which belongs to the Uralian language family, as was correctly shown in the early nineteenth century.

⁸O. Dahl, *Norsk historieforskning i det 19. og 20. århundre* (Oslo, 1990), pp. 60–96.

historical destiny. The Danish–German border was not only a border between users of different languages; it was also considered a border separating one national habitus from another.

The most important distinguishing feature was history, and the national historians, particularly the historians of the new nations, were acutely aware of the hermeneutical character of their endeavour: how, by writing the nation's 'natural' history, they could contribute to the creation of the nation as a self-conscious, history-making subject. An example is the leading Norwegian historian of the late nineteenth century, Ernst Sars, who illustrated the complicated interrelatedness between 'natural', 'cultural', and 'historical' arguments. He was the first to write a comprehensive history of Norway, trying to demonstrate the unbroken continuity from the Viking era to the nineteenth century.⁹ One of his main narrative strategies was to compare Norwegian, Danish and Swedish history in order to show how Norway was different from its neighbours. He claimed that these differences were ultimately rooted in nature, so that it was nature and history that had created three different Scandinavian nations. (Since Norway's written language was still Danish, he naturally played down the role of language as a differentiating factor.) Nations, he further claimed, were substantially divided: modern European nations lived together in peace, but were at the same time divided by significant differences in worldviews, preferences and characters. Primitive people, on the other hand, were divided only by superficial signs and appearances. Around the turn of the century Sars explicitly addressed the ideas of Gobineau and Chamberlain, and dismissed them on the ground that biologically or physically conceived differences had played no role in European history: the differences between Romans, Celts, Slavs and Germans were all of a historical-cultural-linguistic kind. At the same time he was convinced that mankind was divided into biologically different races, so different that they should not mingle. The Sami were seen as belonging to a different race. But how could Sars then consider Norway a homogeneous nation? This was no problem because he saw the Sami and other 'Ugrian-Chukchi' peoples as having no history, consequently they could be ignored. Thus, one can say that Denmark and Sweden here functioned as the 'significant Others' in the creation of a Norwegian historical identity. The Sami as a 'radical Other' were, on the other hand, suppressed and silenced, and by excluding them Sars did not have to confront the racist bias of his master narrative.¹⁰ The same logic worked in Finnish historiography: it was known, or believed, that the Sami had populated the land before the Finns, but these primitive people withdrew when culture arrived and did not belong to the history of the nation.

⁹E. Sars, *Udsigt over den norske Historie*, 4 vols (Kristiania, 1873–91).

¹⁰N. Fulsås, *Historie og nasjon: Ernst Sars og striden om norsk kultur* (Oslo, 1999), pp. 99–102, 239–41.

Teleology and the internal other

Most national history writing in the nineteenth century was explicitly teleological. History was considered to be incomprehensible without presupposing a purpose, goal or 'organic' development. The establishment of a peaceful world of homogeneous nation-states constituted the overarching *telos*. This implied a gendering of history whereby history was made by men, but was feminine by intent. The first step was the introduction of Christianity, which in the Nordic countries was seen as representing a feminine softening of the patriarchal, warlike, pagan spirit of the Vikings.

In Sweden, Denmark and Norway the starting point of the national master-narrative was an originally democratic society where free peasants chose their king. The people–king axis became the means of identifying the high and low points in the national history. Geijer founded a tradition in Sweden according to which the prosperous periods of national history were those during which landowning, self-governed peasants and the king had cooperated fruitfully. From a similar perspective Danish history, according to Allen, should be seen as U-shaped: starting from a high point where king and people had supported each other, and ending with those events that pointed towards a future introduction of a liberal constitution (that is, in 1849). In Norway national independence and the liberal constitution achieved in 1814 after 400 years of Danish rule were seen as the restoration of the freedom of medieval times. The challenge during both periods was seen as being the same: to ground the state on a proper balance of power between king and people.

But how could Danish and Norwegian history, the history of an imperial power and a subjected people, of the coloniser and the colonised, employ the same narrative structure? It was achieved by making the nobility – and the Catholic Church – the internal Other in national histories of Denmark, just as it was in the Geijer version of Swedish history. The original, egalitarian Danish society had been deformed by the Church and nobility, and their hegemony had first been challenged by the Reformation and the introduction of absolutism. Absolutism was seen as making once again all citizens equal before the law, and thereby as paving the way for the introduction of a free constitution.

In all four countries the nobility was not conceived of as being part of the *folk*. In Koskinen's Finnish history the nobility was foreign (Swedish) and it had exploited the Finnish peasantry. In Norway the nobility had been weak and unnational: it had pursued its material self-interest without regard to national concerns, and as a consequence the old Norwegian state had been taken over by its neighbours. In Denmark the nobility had repressed the original freedom, and the nobility and Catholic hierarchy were seen as sources of unnational, particularistic policies and as vehicles of a growing foreign influence. The main impact of the Reformation had been to make the clergy

again a part of the people. Sweden stood out in this respect, because the exclusion of the nobility did not occur without major protests. In response to Geijer, Anders Fryxell produced an influential narrative about the constitutional role and programme for political balance launched by the aristocracy, which caused a major debate in the 1840s whether it was justified to condemn the aristocracy and exclude them from the national narrative.¹¹

In all the Nordic countries the teleological structure of the national master narrative seems to have been reformulated during the course of the nineteenth century. It moved away from a simple U-shaped model, where a democratic present was seen as being connected directly to a democratic past, towards more gradual schemes from the 1860s onwards. In Denmark it continued to be of a Germanic, idealist kind, whereas in Norway Ernst Sars, being also inspired by Buckle and Comte, preferred a rhetoric based on 'the laws of history'. He stated explicitly that teleology was a precondition for objectivity: only a historian with a firm grasp of the overall direction of history would be able to reconstruct it in a rational, objective manner by rising above the different partial perspectives. And only in light of history's development as a whole would it be possible to judge the proper role and contribution of the various historical actors. It thus maintained the concept of history as purposeful, and allowed for a more thorough integration of the various periods and forces into the master narrative. What had appeared as hindrances and repressions of nationality could be seen as having been beneficial in the longer run. In Norway the lack of a strong national nobility had made the state defenceless against Sweden and Denmark in late medieval times, but this turned out to be an asset when the age of democratic nation-states dawned. For Finland, Swedish rule had not only been oppressive, it had also prepared the ground for mature nationhood. Even Russian rule could be seen as a tool by which history separated Finland from Sweden – thereby pointing the way towards a fully independent Finnish nation-state. The words of Alexander I in 1809, when he annexed Finland to his realm, thus gained a new meaning: Finland was 'placed amongst the rank of nations'.¹²

Tensions

Behind these similarities each master narrative contained tensions that were specific to each of these countries and which sprang from their highly different pasts and their different, and arduous, roads towards a democratic present.

¹¹A. Fryxell, *Om aristokrat-fördömandet i svenska historien jemnte granskning av tvenne blad i prof. Geijers trenne föreläsningar*, Häfte I–IV (Upsala, 1845–50).

¹²D. G. Kirby (ed.), *Finland and Russia, 1808–1920: A Selection of Documents* (London, 1975). See also Max Engman and David Kirby (eds), *Finland: People, Nation, State* (London, 1989).

In Sweden the identification of the history of the Swedish *folk* with the history of the Swedish state continued throughout the whole nineteenth century. This meant that national history remained connected to dynastic chronology and identified with political history. Two kinds of tensions played a role here. On the one hand there was a tension between an imperial perspective and a Swedish-national perspective. In a Swedish-national narrative the loss of Finland (1809) could be welcomed as a reduction of the Swedish state to 'Sweden proper', whereas in an imperial narrative it appeared very different since it indicated that the period of greatness belonged to the past. In the collectively produced *Sveriges historia från äldsta tid till våra dagar* ('The History of Sweden from the Oldest Times to the Present', 1877–81), volume 4 had the title *Sveriges storhetstid: från år 1611 till år 1718* ('Sweden's Days of Glory: From the Year 1611 to the Year 1718'), 1611 being the start of the reign of Gustav II Adolf and 1718 being the end of the reign of Karl XII. On the other hand there was also a tension between a purely political perspective and a perspective wanting to include society, culture and *folk* in the sense of 'ordinary people'. The leading historian of the late nineteenth century, Harald Hjärne, polemicised forcefully against the emerging 'cultural history', which had the effect of more or less excluding cultural history from the world of professional historiography. This gave Swedish historiography a rather conservative and exclusively academic character, which prevented academic history accommodating the growing demands of a democratic society. This is an interesting parallel to the effects of the Lamprecht controversy on German historiography. At the same time, however, in Sweden it left a space for popular amateur historians and novelists, such as August Strindberg.

It was not only professional and lay historians who wrote the master narratives. Other disciplines also played an important role, ethnology/folklore and archaeology being the most prominent. Swedish museums, such as the Nordiska muséet and the open-air Skansen, contributed, together with schools and popular culture, to the establishment of national master narratives. The role played by these cultural institutions furthered the establishment of a cultural identity with a distinct Scandinavian dimension, alive at least until 1905, when the dissolution of the Swedish–Norwegian union helped to re-establish a state-national narrative with a focus on Sweden's age of imperial greatness (the seventeenth century). Hence cultural differences within the country became depoliticised in order to further an integrative strategy, whereas in the new states of Norway and Finland the cultural heritage had to be integrated into the political and state-oriented narratives via an emphasis on either regional culture (Norway) or the state more directly (Finland). The political and social establishment in Sweden did not want to run the democratic risk of unleashing regional identification.

In Denmark things were different for two reasons. First, because of the conflict with Germany the *folk* had never become totally identified with the state: it was

also defined by language. Therefore, there was a 'cultural' element present in national history from the start. Second, because Schleswig-Holstein was lost to Prussia/Austria in 1864, the Danish national framework introduced by Allen could easily become the taken-for-granted approach to Danish history. From that time academic historians began writing histories of Denmark to be read by the Danish people, and their work contributed to the maintenance and reworking of a Danish national identity. An influential example is A. D. Jørgensen's *Fyrretyve fortællinger af fædrelandets historie* ('Forty Stories of the History of the Fatherland', 1882), where the in-built teleology was directed at a future establishment of a border between Denmark and Germany in accordance with the national identities of the inhabitants of Schleswig. Around the turn of the century Danish historians published a collective *Danmarks Riges Historie* ('History of the Danish Empire', 1895–1906). This title, however, was somewhat paradoxical, since the prevailing perspective was Danish-national – that is, a history of Denmark inside those borders established in 1864. The traditional master narrative was challenged by K. Erslev, who employed a more materialist, conflict-oriented perspective, but it was not until after the First World War that this issue began to divide the history profession.

In Norway and Finland the idea of nation was founded on society and culture. The more or less imagined 'nationhood' was developed through peasant freedom, which had been preserved as the basic structure of the society. The main problem to be overcome was that because of their imperial histories the countries had become culturally divided. In Finland there was a minority of Swedish-speakers, including the nobles, most civil servants and burghers. Swedish was moreover the dominant language of administration and education until the 1880s. In Norway, Danish had become not only the written language but also the spoken language of business people and civil servants in the towns. In the countryside the peasants spoke Norwegian dialects, and during the 1850s a new Norwegian language was constructed by intellectuals with a rural-peasant background.

In both Finland and Norway these divisions resulted in different versions of national history. In Finland a straightforward Fennoman version of Finnish history was seen as too political, old-fashioned and discriminating, and was challenged both by 'Finnish-minded' historians doing 'people's history', inspired by Karl Lamprecht and German sociology, and by 'Swedish-minded' historians writing Finnish history from a Stockholm-centric perspective. Both took a more positive view on the 'Swedish period', at the same time as they identified themselves with the (imagined) Finnish state. Therefore they did not challenge the master narrative, but in contrast to the original Fennoman view insisted that Finnish national identity had to be seen as something relatively new, and should be based more on civic society and liberalism than on a conservative and loyalist mode of thinking. In Norway those historians who

fought against democracy and identified themselves with the cultural heritage of the Danish period were also the ones to favour a strengthening of the union with Sweden, and they insisted that modern Norway should be seen as a result of seventeenth- and eighteenth-century developments. Those in favour of full national independence, foremost among them Sars, claimed that there was a line of continuity running from the old Norwegian kingdom through the union with Denmark and up to the present, and that such a connection had remained alive in Norwegian peasant society.

The introduction of democracy intensified these conflicts. In conjunction with the implementation of universal suffrage in Finland in 1907, which reduced the influence of the Swedish-speaking part of the population to its numerical strength, a more radical Swedish-nationalist version emerged, claiming that there were two nations in Finland. This group was partly successful in its efforts to have institutions, associations and journals divided along 'national' lines. In Norway the question was whether the linguistic-social division should be seen as a division between two nations – that is, between the descendants of the colonial power and the subjected population – or if Danish had become part of the national heritage so that the division was rather between 'two cultures' or 'two societies' within the same nation.

These questions were more or less resolved by later political developments. In Finland the struggle for democracy and the independence that was achieved in 1917 had the effect of strengthening the nationalistic Fennoman interpretation of Finnish history, with its long-term, teleological perspective. Norway's separation from Sweden in 1905 also stabilised the continuity perspective on Norwegian history. Whatever one might think of the mythical, constructed character of the national narratives, they were actually able to relate the past and the present to each other in ways that were not only perceived as meaningful, but which also appeared as realistic. The nation ended up as bilingual in both Finland and Norway: the former with Finnish-speakers and Swedish-speakers, and the latter with two written languages, New Norwegian and a 'Norwegianised' version of Danish.

The challenges of democracy and class (1905–1940)

Nordic societies modernised rapidly at the turn of the century, and it was no longer possible to write the histories of the emerging democratic societies without taking the existing class tensions into account. Social changes and conflicts were reflected in national histories. Yet, this did not amount to a serious challenge to the idea of a national history. The democratic nation-state needed an historical identity too, but the versions available had to be criticised, reworked and modified.

In all four Nordic countries a major challenge came from the labour movement and the intellectuals associated with it, some of whom were inspired by

a Marxist interpretation of history. In Denmark and Norway a left-wing historiography with an emphasis on class became incorporated into the academic world, while in Sweden and Finland such approaches were rejected and expelled from an academic history which was preoccupied with the critical use of source material. Thus, in Sweden and Finland a class-based approach did not succeed in developing a new paradigm of national history. However, it was not totally absent in Sweden, but added a social dimension, especially through the new discipline of economic history. The leftist approach succeeded, however, in creating an alternative history culture among working-class people. In Finland this alternative kind of history was related to the experience of the civil war. The broader national context was not normally discussed, and if it was, the message was that a workers' history should not be excluded from the national history.

National or ethnic minorities did not become significant subjects of historical research in the Nordic countries before the Second World War. Their history was not totally neglected, but their place and role in national history was in the main ignored. That was the case with the Sami in Norway, Sweden and Finland, and the Eskimos in Danish historiography. The Sami became a subject of ethnographic research representing 'the internal Other' or 'the undeveloped' when compared to the dominant national culture and language. Though Nordic countries appeared progressive where women's rights and educational opportunities were concerned, women remained mostly absent in the academic world or were on the whole marginalised. It should, however, be mentioned that the first woman in the world to become a cabinet minister (1924) was the Danish historian Nina Bang. In Finland several women became academic historians, and one of them, Alma Söderhjelm (1870–1949), became professor of history in 1927. Those female historians with a doctorate, who specialised in 'male' subjects such as politics and technology, were accepted, but were also regarded as women with 'a man's mind'. Most women were supervised to study 'female' and less important issues of culture – history of art, manners, family and education.¹³ At the same time female symbols (such as the Maiden of Finland and Mother Svea in Sweden) were actively employed by male historians and politicians in their representations of the past, especially in public history.¹⁴

¹³M. Kaarninen and T. Kinnunen, "'Hardly women at all': Finnish Historiography Revisited", *Storia della Storiografia*, 46 (2004), 152–70; E. Katainen et al. (eds), *Oma pöytä: naiset historiantekijöinä Suomessa* ['A Table of One's Own: Women Writing History in Finland'] (Helsinki, 2005), includes statistical data on female students, masters, doctors and professors of history.

¹⁴J. Valenius, *Undressing the Maid: Gender, Sexuality and the Body in the Construction of the Finnish Nation*, *Bibliotheca Historica*, 85 (Helsinki, 2004).

People's history as national history

During the interwar period a significant number of national histories were published in all the Nordic countries. Some of these were conceived as 'histories of the people' and were shaped along the lines of German *Volksgeschichte* or *Kulturgeschichte*, but did not repeat their assumptions about the 'soul' of a nation. One who played a significant role in some of the Nordic countries was the German Karl Lamprecht, considered to be a founding father of the new cultural history. However, many Nordic historians also found their main sources of inspiration in the other Nordic countries.

The general thrust of these national histories was to start to focus more attention on everyday life, and on the social and economic life of those classes who together composed the common people, or now the nation. The development story of the nation included the questions of how the Nordic countries were populated, how modes of cultivation were spread and industries developed, and how local communities were organised.

The character of this form of people's history varied in the Nordic countries. During the interwar period some Danish historians began to challenge the traditional national master narrative. A major new history (*Europas Kulturhistoria*, 1928) was written by Hartvig Frisch, a socialist and later a minister. He sought to incorporate the history of the Danes in the broader European tradition in order to avoid a narrow national approach. The most prominent example, however, was the history of Denmark which Erik Arup published in 1925 and 1932.¹⁵ His approach was distinctly materialist, yet not of a Marxist kind, and he had set himself the task of viewing the history of the peasantry as nothing less than the backbone of Danish history: this was thus an early attempt to write a national history viewed from below. It was not, Arup asserted, the history of wars and kings that really counted, it was the peasants' slow, yet steady cultivation of the land and the selling and buying of goods that had made a significant difference in the long run. Arup's new history was an attempt to apply a critical and positivist approach to Danish history, and its publication unleashed a veritable history war in Danish society. Moreover, introducing a class perspective on Danish history had the effect of splitting the history profession into two opposing camps who openly fought each other for almost two decades.

In Norway the political centre of gravity in the historical profession after 1905 settled on the left of the political spectrum. The challenging of national history on the basis of labour and class issues was personified by two of the leading historians, Halvdan Koht and Edvar Bull Sr., both of whom were labour politicians and served as foreign ministers in Labour governments. For the younger Bull the nation was not important: he wanted to study Norwegian 'society' rather than

¹⁵E. Arup, *Danmarks historie*, Bd. I–II (København, 1925–32).

the nation. It was symptomatic of the interests of Bull that he invited Marc Bloch and Alphonse Dopsch to Oslo in 1929 when a programme for 'Comparative studies in the cultural relations of peasant society' was to be inaugurated. Yet, despite his lack of interest in the nation, Bull ended his career as editor of a ten-volume *Det norske folks liv og historie* ('Life and History of the Norwegian People', 1930–35). Its periodisation, however, was based on a social and economic periodisation rather than on a conventional political chronology – with one significant exception, namely 1814, the year the modern nation-state came into being.

The older Koht saw it as his task to integrate nation and class, that is, Sars and Marx. He began to reinterpret medieval history in a class perspective – thereby destroying the traditional notion of solidarity between king and people – but insisted at the same time that class struggle and nation-building were not opposed processes: quite the contrary. Each time a new class had succeeded in gaining political power, the nation had become richer. The peasants had done so in the nineteenth century: now the turn had come for the working class to do something similar.¹⁶

In Finland cultural history achieved a strong position in the academic world without being connected to the labour movement. When the proponents of cultural history in 1904 founded the *Finnish Journal of History* (*Historiallinen Aikakauskirja*), they were inspired especially by Karl Lamprecht and Paul Barth (*Die Philosophie der Geschichte als Soziologie*, 1897). Another source of inspiration was the German historical school of economics and sociology – the works of Gustav Schmoller, Adolf Wagner, Lujo Brentano, Max Weber and Werner Sombart, who even visited Finland. But younger historians were also inspired by Finnish nationalism, and they were therefore welcomed by older professors and politicians. The new generation of historians and social scientists wanted to address the 'social question' in Finnish history. They took on a conscious role of nation-builders in the aftermath of the civil war. In the 1930s a comprehensive *Cultural History of Finland* was published. In fact it was a social history – a history of the population, industries, classes, everyday life and institutions. The last volume ('Age of Industrialism and National Rising') ends with chapters on education, civic activity and 'Finnish culture'.¹⁷

This history was written from the perspective of the 'people' (which in Finnish equals the 'nation'). It was a collective (holistic) history in the sense of Lamprecht attempting to fill the gap between a Finnish past without a state and the contemporary nation-state. The working class was integrated into

the national history at the same time as it was integrated into the nation-state through reforms. One of the key figures of the Finnish school, Professor Väinö Voionmaa, was yet another Nordic cultural historian to become a minister in a national government.

The approach of cultural history broadened the subject and scope of national history, and hence redefined both actors and contexts. A typical novelty was the role of economic interest in history, but it was not understood as an outcome of man's selfish nature as in the nineteenth-century historiography, but as a normal function of social organisation and development. A similar emphasis was put on individuals and groups as actors, and on knowledge as a resource. This was clearly a self-image of the emerging modern society characterised by class divisions and social problems. Besides this more sociological approach, the new cultural history included a history of manners, feelings and cultural representations. Gunnar Suolahti, a Finnish student of Lamprecht, who was also influenced by the Danish historian T. Troels-Lund and the psychology of Wilhelm Wundt, developed a theory of cultural evolution which is surprisingly close to the analysis of the process of civilisation made by his contemporary, Norbert Elias.¹⁸

People's history in Sweden was of a very different kind. The field was early on dominated by histories which may be called 'popular history', namely history books written by others than professional historians and for a wide audience. Carl Grimberg's *Svenska folkets underbara öden* ('History of Sweden', 1913–24) became a best-seller. He was by training an historian, but not academically respected as a researcher. His narrative was a slightly modernised and democratised version of the old idealistic, anecdotal and state-oriented narrative. The bulk of Swedish professional historians, on the other hand, focused their work on highly specialised research. Their ideal of objective science, developed particularly by the Weibull School in Lund, was perhaps a victory for professional craftsmanship, but it also represented the eclipse of the historians' public role. Social issues and cultural studies were not totally ignored in Sweden, but they were mainly to be found outside academic history. Eli Heckscher was a professor in economics and was later given a chair in economic history. That became the starting point for a strong tradition in Sweden – economic history existed outside history departments, unlike in other Nordic countries. Cultural studies followed a similar pattern of professionalisation within such disciplines as ethnology, archaeology, cultural geography and sociology, in contrast especially to Finland, where cultural history was a joint effort of historians, social scientists, economists and ethnologists.

¹⁶O. Dahl, *Historisk materialisme: historieoppfatningen hos Edvard Bull og Ottar Dahl* (Oslo, 1974), pp. 71–9.

¹⁷*Suomen kulttuurihistoria*, I–IV (Helsinki, 1933–6).

¹⁸For a detailed study on Suolahti, see P. Ahtiainen, *Gunnar Suolahti historiantutkijana* (Helsinki, 1991).

Another aspect of people's history was the way it was used politically. Though many historians were prominent political figures, particularly in Finland and Norway, their role in public discussion was determined by their political status, not by their scholarship. If socialist and moderate historians succeeded in launching social reforms, their rightist colleagues were more successful in influencing the public image of history. For instance, in Finland the common hostility towards Sweden and Russia gave a platform to a medieval historian, Jalmari Jaakkola, who repeated the old fantasies of the great past of Finnish peasant society. In wartime, historians 'did their bit' by writing justifications for national propaganda purposes.¹⁹ In Denmark and Sweden a conservative nationalist historiography remained influential alongside the new cultural history. In all the Nordic countries the national master narratives had thus become politically divided.

A true novelty in the 1920s and 1930s was the rise of local history. Historical institutions (archives, museums, societies) were organised from state level to village level. There was a strong, nationally minded movement to make history everyone's property. Each family, village, community and county should write their history, and the hope was that these efforts would in the end make up a comprehensive national history. This view was shared by many academic historians too, and may be called an idea of an authentic people's history. It represented a peculiar combination of nationalism and democracy. Once again this tradition was introduced in Sweden outside the academic discipline of history, by local history societies, and was institutionalised only by a modest urban studies institute in Stockholm founded in 1919 by the Confederation of Swedish Towns. In Finland local history and traditional activities were organised on a national level. One could say that *national history was localised*, because the ideology of the movement was that the nation was a biological entity, and in the end national history consisted of the collected histories of tribes, families and individuals.

The Cold War and the welfare state (1945–72)

In the Scandinavian countries, as in the rest of Europe, the Second World War came to have a substantial impact on the national master narratives, but in different ways. Denmark and Norway could retrospectively produce a communal response to a comparatively light occupation, which in some respects strengthened the traditional master narrative. This was a more complicated issue in Finland because of its more complex experience of being aligned with

Germany and the war with the Soviet Union (and hence the Allies). In Sweden the formal neutrality, which in reality had been an opportunistic orientation to the stronger side (first Germany and after 1943 the Allies), could not easily be used for an upsurge in national historical culture. The combination of bad conscience and rapid industrialisation prompted instead the emergence of a modernistic historical culture, underlining the difference between the past and the present.

The violence and distress of the interwar and war periods was on a general level met by a double response. The first was a return to a traditional political history, especially to medieval and early modern history, and its empiricist methodology. A greater emotional distance was created from earlier Scandinavian and European conflicts, which in turn could facilitate identification with the modern political community, at the same time as favouring a more timeless Scandinavian culture. This gave rise to the establishment of the new narrative associated with the Nordic welfare state – a model which gained international fame with Sweden: *The Middle Way*.²⁰

The second response was to reinforce a social perspective on the past, through which the welfare state could be contrasted with the poverty of earlier times. Even if the same tendency also was at hand in other Nordic countries, the experiences of war and national resistance were able to feed a more positive version of the traditional master narrative in Denmark and Norway. In conclusion, there were three discernible others in the postwar historical discourses: hostile states, internal traitors and opponents of progress.

Finland had the most problematic war legacy, and the war had also to a large extent discredited the old national, Fennoman tradition of history writing. The complex experiences of civil war and the Second World War were treated only indirectly. It was done, for instance, through a discussion of the Cudgel War (*Klubbekriget*), a violent peasant rebellion in 1596–97. The first to deal directly with the history of the Second World War from the perspective of ordinary people was the author Väinö Linna. This can be considered both a symptom of and a contribution to an ongoing political marginalisation of Finnish historians, even on their home ground. Moreover, between the 1960s and the end of the twentieth century Linna's seminal contributions to the history of the civil war continue to set the agenda also for professional historians.²¹

Another symptom of the same trend was the publication of a new *Suomen historian käsikirja* ('Handbook of Finnish History', 1949). The delicate political issue of who should be responsible for editing it was solved by choosing an

²⁰M. W. Childs, *Sweden: The Middle Way* (New Haven, CT, 1936).

²¹P. Haapala, 'Väinö Linnan historiasota', *Historiallinen Aikakauskirja* (2001), no. 1, 25–34; N-B. Stormbom, *Väinö Linna: kirjailijan tie* (Helsinki, 1963) (also in Swedish).

¹⁹See, among others, J. Jaakkola, *Suomen historian ääriviivat* ['Outline of Finnish History'] (Helsinki, 1940); and V. Auer and E. Jutikkala, *Finnlands Lebensraum* (Berlin, 1941).

historian close to President Paasikivi. None of the contemporary professors was recruited. The professional historians focused their attention on meticulous research, emphasising the 'objective' nature of historical research, much as Swedish historians had done a generation earlier.

Because of Finland's delicate geopolitical situation, bordering on the Soviet Union, any controversial subjects had to be carefully scrutinised. The Swedish past could therefore become a resource also for Finnish-speaking researchers, since they wanted to emphasise the long-standing democratic and Western traditions of their fatherland.²² The east-west conflict was toned down in favour of a more realistic-pragmatic understanding of the Soviet Union in order to achieve some degree of security.

Three different ways of handling the Danish master narrative were operative during the period 1945–72.²³ The first was an attempt to develop further Arup's approach to history. A group of young academic historians collaborated in the writing of a new popular history of Denmark – *Historikergruppens Danmarks-historie* (1950–1) – in which they viewed Danish history as a process through which ordinary Danes had become more and more able to take responsibility for ruling their own country. Thus, the emergence of a democratically ruled nation-state was here presented as the overarching *telos* of Danish history. The second strategy sought to place Danish history in a somewhat new context. One of the aims of the next major history of Denmark – *Politikens Danmarkshistorie* (1962–6) – was to emphasise the gradual integration of Danish history into that of Europe, a process that had originally begun with the Christianisation of Denmark at the beginning of the Middle Ages, and which would be brought a decisive step closer if Denmark at some future date succeeded in joining the Common Market. Third, whereas *Politikens Danmarkshistorie* tended to stress the cooperative and harmonious nature of the Danish people, other historians began to view Danish history as being inherently conflict-ridden. At the beginning of the 1970s Niels Skyum-Nielsen, who saw himself as an upholder of the legacy left by Arup, began publishing a new history of Denmark. The aim was to bring into focus those groups that traditionally had been more or less completely left out of the standard histories of Denmark. The first volume appeared in 1971: it covered the period from 1085 until 1250 and was entitled *Kvinde og slave* ('Woman and Slave').

In Norway the war seems to have had a double impact. On the one hand it demonstrated the vulnerability of Norwegian independence, and thereby the contingent character of the nation. The last remains of national teleology had become undermined, and the national independence of 1814 had to be reinterpreted as an unexpected outcome of the Napoleonic Wars.²⁴ On the other hand the war also became a major source of national cohesion. The interconnectedness between liberal constitution, democracy and national independence that had characterised the events of 1814 and of 1905 had again been confirmed in 1940–45. National history had not lost its integrative capacity: where the Swedish welfare state was seen as a break with the past, its Norwegian counterpart was seen as a continuation of earlier generations' struggle for independence, democracy and social justice. As in the other Nordic countries the research ethos was underlined, but in Norway academic historians did not escape into specialised research and thereby withdraw from the public sphere. One of the foremost historians of the period, Sverre Steen, is an example. He published a multi-volume history of Norway in the nineteenth century, characterised by high standards of scholarship, dealing with politics, society and local government, and written in a highly readable, accessible and vivid prose.²⁵ Moreover, he addressed an even broader public in a series of radio lectures published under the romantic title *Langsomt ble landet vårt eget* ('The Country Slowly Became Our Own', 1967).

The Swedish master narrative slowly switched its focus from the Swedish state to Swedish society, and thus contributed to a merger of the two concepts. Henceforth a state-oriented history could readily be transformed into a national social history, reflecting the character of an ambitious integrative welfare state. Academic historians consequently began to move closer to contemporary society both methodologically and thematically. The history taught in schools should not be about ancient glory but should provide insight into the background to the development of the democratic system – and the totalitarian threat to it. The first – and only – significant attempt to publish a comprehensive academic history of Sweden after the Second World War was made in the 1960s. It was compiled by 98 historians who had agreed to write a consensus-oriented, richly illustrated, legitimate national history.²⁶ It has since been reprinted and abbreviated, but not followed up by other professional projects of this kind. On this point Swedish academic history represents the most extreme example, not only in a Scandinavian but in a European setting, of a professional group that had become extremely marginalised in

²² Illuminating examples are popular books written by professional historians, *Suomalaisen kansanvallan kehitys* ['The Roots of Finnish Democracy'] (Helsinki, 1956); and E. Jutikkala, *Pohjoismaisen yhteiskunnan historiallisia juuria* ['Historical Roots of Nordic Society'] (Helsinki, 1965) (also in Swedish).

²³ B. E. Jensen, 'Danmarkshistorie: en genre i opløsning?', in idem et al., *Danmarkshistorie: en erindringspolitisk slagmark* (Copenhagen, 1997).

²⁴ J. A. Seip, *Utsikt over Norges historie*, vol. 1 (Oslo, 1974), p. 17.

²⁵ S. Steen, *Det frie Norge*, 8 vols (Oslo, 1951–73).

²⁶ S. Carlsson et al., *Den svenska historien*, Bd. I–X (Stockholm, 1966–8).

the historical culture at large. No doubt this in part had to do with Sweden's marginal position during the world wars and its progressive welfare policies. But partly it was also due to the fact that the national history mentioned had been organised thematically within larger epochal chapters, whereas the use of a chronological approach had been more pronounced in the other Nordic countries. This had furthered the production of strong chronological narratives in Denmark, Norway and Finland, where a historian had taken responsibility for a larger or a major period, whereas each Swedish scholar had a much more limited field of responsibility – which tended to undermine the idea of working within an overarching national plot, but rather regarded national history as an example of universal progress.

The presentation of a scientifically based and consensus-driven national narrative was the last time such a framework was reproduced in a naive or self-evident, hence unprecedentedly powerful, fashion, even in the context of Swedish 'unromantic nationalism'. The narrative emphasised the importance of history for understanding contemporary society, but also sought to be exciting and amusing to the general reader. Its scientific method and legitimacy were emphasised, but it also included many illustrations and made for easy reading. The format represented a compromise between market conditions and scholarly standards, yet the structure of this history was embedded in the century-old genres of topographical literature and national history. Through the frequent use of the term 'we' this history sought to appeal to a common identity and project it back in history: as the ice withdrew, our landscape had become populated by our ancestors, speaking Indo-European languages, and developing prehistoric societies. All this was presented as occurring within the setting of twentieth-century state borders, and it thereby naturalised the existence of the contemporary state and made its establishment the overarching goal of history – but without using the idealistic rhetoric of former times. Probably such a narrative was more powerful as it presented the whole history from the beginning to the present as one stressing basic continuity.

A functionalist view of society at large, influences from Anglo-American social science and an ongoing specialisation could be found throughout academic history in the Nordic countries, but this tendency was especially pronounced in Sweden with its combination of modernistic ideology and collective welfare-state solutions. On a political level history itself had become the Other, a narrative suitable mainly for highlighting the story of success brought to the nation through the successful negotiation between capital and labour, i.e. nationally oriented industrialists and the organised labour movement. The Swedish model was one example of the Nordic model – an approach which the other Scandinavian countries also subscribed to, and it could be seen as a new version of nineteenth-century Scandinavianism. 'The Other' in this perspective became continental Europe. This narrative suppressed the stories of centuries of wars and

stressed the long period of peace, negotiation and democratic traditions from 1814 onwards.²⁷

Academic historians had quite different positions in the Nordic countries. Swedish historians were marginalised first by their predominant affiliation to the conservative camp and later by their reluctance to participate in the production of public history, by their swift adaptation to a more analytical mode of history writing, and by preferring to communicate within the academic world rather than working as organic intellectuals. At the other extreme were the Norwegian historians who took an active part in forming public opinion. Especially in Denmark and in Sweden there was harsh criticism of the academic historians for their lack of public appeal since the times of Grundtvig and August Strindberg. In 1972 Vilhelm Moberg published *A History of the Swedish People*,²⁸ which represented a protest against academic historians' failure to interest themselves in the conditions and perspective of ordinary people. Parallel to this traditional contestation of academism a more profound Marxist criticism emerged, where the traditional narrative was criticised for its lack of theoretical consistency and naive objectivism. In Sweden this was done for the first time in the 1960s, while Norway had an early strand of radical history from the 1930s. In Denmark an older tradition of people's history was reinterpreted in *Dagligtiv i Danmark* ('Everyday Life in Denmark, 1963–64). Such criticism of the established tradition, however, had trouble finding the source material it needed in order to write a new and revised history from below. It therefore tended to function more as a supplement rather than an alternative – filling out the gaps in the traditional national history.

National master narratives at the end of the twentieth century

During the last third of the twentieth century the cultural setting of Nordic history writing was significantly transformed by two major events. In 1972 referendums were held in Denmark and Norway on joining the European Community, but only Denmark became a member state at that point. Again in 1994 a majority of the Norwegian electorate rejected a proposal to join the European Union, whereas the electorates of Finland and Sweden opted to do so, thus making Norway the only major Nordic country to remain outside the EU. The relevance of this for the writing of history was threefold. First, the groups that were most opposed to joining the EU were also those that upheld traditional national master narratives. This history war was, however, mainly fought outside the institutions of academic history. Second, the populations

²⁷Stråth and Sørensen, *Cultural Construction of Norden*.

²⁸V. Moberg, *A History of the Swedish People* (New York, 1972).

of the Nordic countries were deeply divided when it came to identifying who or what was to be seen as the external Other when writing a national narrative. For the groups opposed to joining the EU it was mainly this union that came to represent the most powerful enemy of a national master narrative. Third, joining the EU also occasioned the publication of a series of new histories of Europe, thus establishing a new framework for the writing of national history.

In this period the Nordic countries also began to receive a significant number of immigrants and refugees from different parts of the world. The largest influx was to Sweden, the smallest to Finland. However, the political and cultural impact of such immigration was felt in all four countries. It not only occasioned – especially in Norway and Sweden – the writing of the histories of the entry of immigrants into the Nordic countries;²⁹ it also made it difficult to maintain the traditional notions of Denmark, Norway and Sweden as ethnically homogeneous societies, thus raising the issue of whether a future writing of history would have to be geared towards a multicultural society. During the same period there was a growing interest in the place of indigenous ethnic minorities in Nordic history, the most striking example being that of the Sami in Finnish, Norwegian and Swedish history. Other factors contributed to the transformation and pluralising of the national master narratives, most notably the growing interest in the new social history, gender history and local history. For the most part these new approaches were supplements to national history rather than challenging the key paradigms of national history.

Around 1970 the significance of local history had begun to change. Before then it had been mainly seen as part of an overarching national history; local studies had been a way of investigating at the micro-level problems of national history. After 1970 local history began to appear as an alternative to national history, since it was now being conducted for the sake of the local community and as part of local identity politics.

Women's history, having developed from the idea of an added dimension to a new paradigm of gendered history as a basic perspective on all history, has challenged the master narrative, demanding a paradigmatic shift in the Nordic countries.³⁰ The presence of women in history has its own history, following the waves of female emancipation. It has challenged the traditional

master narrative, but is still most often integrated into it in various ways. In Finland *The Lady with the Bow* and many detailed studies have represented women as major contributors to civic society and hence of *national history and modernisation*. The role of modern women is associated with a centennial myth of the existence of a strong and free Nordic Woman. In Norway leading women's/gender historians have produced a national history from a gender perspective. The major contribution of women's history in Scandinavia has not been to split national history (not even gendered reality), but to show how important the birth of female citizenship has been for Nordic societies and their self-image – including history.³¹

There has been a notable difference between Sweden on the one hand, and Denmark, Finland and Norway on the other, when it comes to writing multi-volume national histories for a larger public. Academic historians or publishing houses in Sweden have not involved themselves in such a project, and it has thus been left to other professional writers to produce all-round histories of Sweden. The main reason why Swedish academic historians shunned such projects was a wish not to get involved in contemporary identity politics. This unwillingness stands in sharp contrast to their willingness to participate in rehabilitating less privileged groups. One might even say that the national integrative project changed from a focus on territory to groups such as workers, women, minorities and ethnic groups. The national ideology even in national cultural politics is identified as the Other, which should be met by empowerment of the local, regional and various group identities. Here, too, Sweden stands out among its Nordic neighbours and in its relationship with its public. Once again there are other, more traditional demands feeding the national response to international and European challenges: the largest modern museum project, The Swedish History, was undertaken in the 1990s without professional historians being (invited to be) active participants.

In Denmark, Finland and Norway, however, the well-established tradition that academic historians cooperated in the writing of national histories has been upheld during the latter part of the twentieth century.³² Yet, it is worth noting that the concept of *folk* which earlier played a very prominent role in the national master narratives no longer figured in the titles or subtitles of new national histories. This can be taken as indicating a change in the way national histories function in the context of contemporary identity politics. In

²⁹K. Kjeldstadli (ed.), *Norsk innvandringshistorie*, 3 vols (Oslo, 2003); I. Svanberg and M. Tydén, *Tusen år av invandring: en svensk kulturhistoria* (Stockholm, 1998).

³⁰A.-S. Ohlander and U.-B. Strömberg, *Tusen svenska kvinnoår: svensk kvinnohistoria från vikingatid till nutid* (Stockholm, 1996); I. Blom, 'Nationalism and Feminism in Europe', in H. Kaelble (ed.), *The European Way: European Societies during the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries* (Oxford and New York, 2004); I. Blom and S. Sogner (eds), *Med kjønnsperspektiv på norsk historie: fra vikingtid til 2000-årsskiftet* (Oslo, 1999/2005); A. Ljungh, *Sedd, eller osedd? Kvinnoskildringer i svensk historieforskning, mellan åren 1890 till 1995* (Lund, 1999).

³¹P. Setälä and M. Manninen (eds), *The Lady with the Bow: The Story of Finnish Women* (Helsinki, 1990); Katainen et al., *Oma pöytä*; A. Wallette, *Sagens svenskar: synen på vikingatiden och de isländska sagorna under 300 år* (Malmö, 2004).

³²K. Mykland (ed.), *Norges historie*, 15 vols (Oslo, 1976–80); K. Helle et al. (eds), *Aschehougs norgeshistorie*, 12 vols (Oslo, 1994–8).

contrast to what was happening in the first two-thirds of the twentieth century, academic historians no longer assume that the populations of Denmark, Finland or Norway can be considered as ethnically homogeneous. The traditional master narratives have been modified in other ways too. The new multi-volume national histories have frequently been the outcome of cooperation between a number of academic historians, each of whom was given significant freedom to shape the narrative structure of their own particular volume – thereby producing a national history in which there is no or little inner narrative coherence. There have even been instances where the periodisation of the history of the nation was completely arbitrary, and in such instances the maintenance of the framework of a national master narrative has become nothing more than an empty shell. This trend has been more marked in Denmark than in Finland and Norway.

Between 1965 and 2000 Finnish history was rewritten in dozens of major works from a revisionist perspective, especially exposing the national biases in the treatment of Sweden and Russia. The most important cases have been the reinterpretations of the civil war, the Second World War and the Russian period (1809–1917), which in current historiography is seen as a period of economic and social progress, a precondition of independence and the welfare state, and not as a period of Russian repression.³³ National history continues to be written from the perspective of a nation, but it is pursued in a more reflexive way than before.

It is only in Denmark that academic historians have begun to write what appear to be unequivocal counter-histories to the national master narratives. In 1996 Søren Mørch published *Den sidste Danmarkshistorie* ('The Last History of Denmark'), a history of the Danish nation-state beginning in 1848–9/1864 and ending in the last quarter of the twentieth century. The purpose of writing it was to explain to a Danish reading audience why it was no longer possible to write a national master narrative of Denmark. It had to be seen, it was pointed out, as a genre which now belonged to a bygone period. This frontal attack on the national master narrative was later followed up by Michael Bregnsbo and Kurt Villads Jensen's *Det dansk imperium: storhed og fald* ('The Danish Empire: Its Greatness and Decline', 2004). The history of Denmark until 1864 was not seen as a history of the Danish people, but of the Danish Empire and consequently as the history of a conglomerate state, and the history of Denmark between

1864 and 1973, when the population of the Danish state was ethnically homogeneous, was thus presented as the exception rather than the rule.

Conclusions

In very broad terms we may conclude that in all the Nordic countries the master narrative of historical representation has been an idea of the history of a nation. Historiography first flourished together with the rise of nationalism and nation-building. The twentieth century saw a more pragmatic and democratic attitude to the past. History was used to legitimise the ideas of Nordic democracy and the welfare state. It was therefore self-evident that national history became the history of all the people. Nordic historiography has always had an integrative task. This has led to the overemphasising of the homogeneity of society and the uniformity of historical experience. This may distinguish the Nordic countries from larger states and from oppressed nations. Nordic historiography strikingly often represents the past as a nation's success story – in the case of Finland a story of survival. This tone of history writing has allowed historians to concentrate more on the positive distinctiveness of their own nation and less on defining identity through the enemy.

Although the last decades of the twentieth century saw a disintegration of national history, it is striking how willingly the new social history, revisionist political history and women's history wanted to be integrated into the national history. Maybe that is the only possibility in a small – and equal – society which wants to safeguard its political consensus and identity.

The role of academic historians certainly varied in how they participated in creating Nordic understanding of history. In Sweden and Finland historians had more 'difficulties' in constructing a stable national master narrative, but for rather different reasons: Finland because of its stateless past and wartime experiences, Sweden because of its imperial past and difficulties in connecting this to a social-democratic present. The trouble for Sweden had started in the nineteenth century with the unresolved tension between a state/imperial and a national perspective. This was only solved when historians opted to become advocates of a self-sufficient research paradigm, underlining the discontinuity between past and present, and leaving living history to cultural heritage institutions, non-professional historians, television and other disciplines to produce national master narratives. Denmark adjusted earlier and more decisively to a new national framework in the wake of the collapse of the conglomerate Danish state in 1864. Since the 1970s the national framework has lost most of its former influence. In Norway the tradition of national history seems to have been the most continuous and least interrupted of Nordic countries. With a new liberal-democratic centre of gravity it has been able to serve as an integrative framework for understanding the country's modernisation over the

³³Especially interesting – and now largely accepted – is the reinterpretation of the nature of the Finnish state in the nineteenth century by O. Jussila and M. Klinge. See Osmo Jussila, *Maakunnasta valtioksi: Suomen valtion synty* (Porvoo, 1987), and *Suomen suuriruhtinaskunta, 1809–1919* (Helsinki, 2004); M. Klinge, *Keisarin Suomi* (Helsinki, 1997) (also available in Swedish). There is a wide consensus that Finland really was part of Sweden for 700 years and not a semi-independent proto-state.

last 200 years, and it has not had to meet the challenge of membership of the European Union. Creating an historical identity in a globalising context seems to be difficult in all the Nordic countries without also abandoning the idea of Nordic particularism. On the other hand, the example of the Nordic countries shows that the role of academic historians can be important in the construction of national identity.

11

Weak and Strong Nations in the Low Countries: National Historiography and its 'Others' in Belgium, Luxembourg and the Netherlands in the Nineteenth and Twentieth Centuries

Marnix Beyen and Benoît Majerus

During the Second World War, the most prominent historians in the Netherlands and Belgium decided to start a close collaboration with the aim of publishing a large-scale history of the Low Countries, which was to become the reference work in this field for several decades. In the history of national history writing, the project had a somewhat ambiguous character. On the one hand, it was a product of the feverish quest for national roots which began to express itself during the Second World War in both countries (and made publishers bold enough to risk such an undertaking); on the other hand, the choice of 'the Low Countries' as a geographical circumscription was a result of these historians' wish to break the chains of traditional, 'state-nationalistic' historiography. As such, it seemed at first sight to legitimise the new transnational entity which came into being during this period in the form of Benelux.

The undertaking resulted in the prestigious *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden*, which was published in twelve volumes between 1949 and 1958. Without a doubt, it remained the most important history of the Low Countries until the publication of the second edition in the late 1970s. From the outset, it was clear that this was not a genuine Benelux historiography, as the territory of Luxembourg, which had been part of 'the Low Countries' for centuries, was not systematically integrated into the narrative. Only the second edition included a short chapter on Luxembourg, written by Albert Calmes.

Regardless of this omission, the *Algemene Geschiedenis der Nederlanden* was soon under attack for offering 'two parallel national histories' rather than one integrated history of a 'transnational context'. A closer analysis of this lengthy work suggests that the tendency to remain within the boundaries of traditional

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