

The History of a Norwegian National Identity

What is a nation state?

How do Norwegians feel about their own nation? And to what extent is it possible to describe this feeling? The aim of this article is to outline the contours of a Norwegian “*national identity*”. This term is commonly used by historians to indicate how citizens relate to and understand their own nation. It goes without saying that it is impossible to measure a “national identity”. In this way it is comparable to many other historical observations; history is a subject that combines the observation of sources and personal judgment. Moreover, “national identities” change over time. Increased insight into this particular aspect of history would make it easier for nations to understand each other and collaborate in sensible ways.

During the last two hundred years or so the word *nation* has acquired about the same meaning as the word *state*. To be more precise, – today one often uses the term *nation state* to signify a particular kind of state, – different from certain other states. But before the French Revolution (1789) *nation* meant something different: The word originates from a Latin verb meaning *to give birth*; thus it is etymologically related to other words having to do with birth – such as *natal* and *prenatal*. Many of us know it from the Latin Christmas carol “Adeste fideles”, where one phrase goes “Natum videte”, i. e. “(come) look at the (newly) born (child)”. Derived from the verb there was a noun, *natio*, which means family or

siblings. However, later on this word came to mean the group of people that inhabit a certain area, and hence share the same language, history and traditions, i. e. what we today would call a *people* or a *tribe*.

The concept of a *state* was something entirely different. The *state* was a political structure – a community – or several communities – that was ruled over by one sovereign or institution, that controlled its inhabitants, decided their legislation, and maintained law and order. The state might comprise several nations – or even split certain nations. Nations belonged to states according to the success or misfortunes of aristocratic dynasties – depending on inheritance, wars, marriages etc. One example of such a *dynastic state* was Denmark: The King of Denmark was for several centuries also the King of Norway, Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands, and certain areas that are today Swedish and German. Thus, dynastic states were normally multi-national. Some other examples of multi-national dynastic states were tsarist Russia, the Ottoman Empire, and the Habsburg Empire.

Modernity gradually reduced the number of dynastic states and replaced them by nation states. Following the French revolution the idea came up that *every nation or people ought to have its own state*. The reason for this was that people ceased to believe that the monarch had a divine right to rule the state; the authentic power of the country ought to rest in its *people* – it was up to the people to cede power to its leaders – or withdraw it and give it to someone else. This new insight required people to get together and discuss political questions. But who belonged to which people? Since peoples supposedly were different from each other, it was a common understanding that borders between states ought to coincide with the borders between peoples/ nations.

These sentiments inspired an increasing interest in the study of cultural differences between nations – particularly within the humanities and particularly during the 19th century. A number of new subjects were established at the universities – such as the history of languages – or literatures – or other fine arts, and also folklore, ethnography, mythology etc. It was as though the urge for developing democratic nation states created a psychological need for mapping the cultural differences between nations. The new academic subjects should “prove” to the intellect that there really were all those differences between nations, and thus support the idea of separate nation states rather than multinational dynastic states.

But what was it that constituted a nation? What was the essential “cement” of the nation state? There were two different traditions concerning this question. One of them goes back to the philosophers of French Enlightenment and the other one to German Romanticism. According to the French tradition a nation state consists of citizens who agree on a *social contract*, and submit to a common legislation. It resembles a *club*; any one is free to join the club – provided that one obeys its rules and regulations. Thus, the nation – according to this tradition – is basically a community based on shared duties and rights. Obviously, the French enlightenment nationalism stimulated a democratic development in the countries where it played a role. This understanding has been called *political nationalism*.

According to the German romantics the nation state ought to comprise all those individuals that share one single culture, i. e. one language, one religion, the same historical experiences, the same traditions. The nation is similar to a clan or a large family. Your nationality is not a matter of rational choice – it is a matter of fate; you are born into a nation and may not just choose to join one or leave it again. This implies that foreigners remain foreign. And since each

culture should have its own state, there should be no need for or room for ethnic or cultural minorities within the nation state. This type of nationalist thinking did not stress democracy; its essential point was loyalty to the shared culture; obviously, there were local and social and economic differences, but nationalist thinking within this tradition overlooked differences and focused on unity. This understanding of the nation is often called *cultural nationalism* or *ethnic nationalism*.

Both views imply a *modern* understanding of man and society. According to the French way it was important to discard the understanding of man as subject to original sin: Man is, according to the modern “humanism” of Enlightenment, a rational being, able to control himself and pursue his interests according to his own judgment and his own moral intuition; therefore, he is also capable of sharing responsibility for the common interest of society. – The German understanding of the nation was *modern* in the sense that it included all social groups. Previously the aristocracy of one nation would feel closer to the aristocracies of other nations than they would feel to the farmers of their own nation; for instance, the great Russian novelists of the 19th century give us the impression that Russian nobles identified more closely with French nobles than with Russian peasants. And the sense of loyalty was probably weak between villages that were located far away from each other – even though they shared the same language and the same religion. But the cultural nationalism of the German tradition unites all: All individuals, high and low, and all local communities, who share language and religion etc., are to be understood as one single entity.

(There are several introductions to the history of nationalism and the ideas of nation states. Some examples – with diverging views and perspectives – are Smith 1991, Gellner 1992, Anderson 1996.)

Early ideas of a Norwegian nation

In the year 1814 Norway acquired a new sense of nationhood – because it got its own democratic constitution. For four hundred years it had been in a dynastic union with Denmark. But in 1814 the Danish King was forced to cede Norway to Sweden because Denmark had fought on the losing side in the Napoleonic Wars – and Sweden was among the victors. But the Norwegians were quick to make a democratic constitution for themselves, and the Swedes accepted it; thus, Norway acquired a new freedom of domestic affairs. (Norway remained in a union with Sweden until 1905.)

In this situation the emerging ideas of nation states fascinated Norwegian intellectuals. Norway had been an independent state during the middle ages, and one assumes that a certain sense of national identity was even older. The geographical name *Norway* is known from historic sources as far back as the 9th century; people who lived there, were called *Norwegians*, and most likely they themselves knew and accepted these terms; this would indicate a certain rudimentary national identity. Towards the end of the 9th century a kingdom was established, which gradually consolidated itself during the following centuries. This probably strengthened the feeling of national loyalty somewhat – particularly among individuals and families who in various ways profited from the monarchy. But in the 14th century this monarchy collapsed. A terrible plague – “the Black Death” – struck Norway; a large part of the population died, and the aristocracy either died out or was integrated into the ordinary population of farmers and fishermen and workers. As a consequence the Norwegian people remained a relatively egalitarian one during the following centuries. The country was taken over by the Danish King and Danish aristocracy, and one must assume that the sense of a national identity was weakened during the union with the Danes.

But towards the end of the 17th century this changed. In 1660 the Danish King had proclaimed his kingdom an “absolute monarchy”; this stripped the Danish nobility of their power – which infuriated them so much that he had to import German nobles to administer his kingdom. But then – a century later – in 1770 – it was suddenly prohibited to appoint foreigners – including Germans – to important state positions. As a consequence the intellectuals of the kingdom involved themselves in a discussion of national differences: Was there some essential difference between the “national characters” of Danes and Germans? – (The term *national character* is not being used any more as a scholarly term. It has been replaced by *national identity*, which I introduced above. *National character* includes personality traits and *unconscious* patterns of reacting; *national identity* is *conscious* or *semiconscious*.) The idea of a difference between national characters caught on among Norwegian intellectuals as well; but their concern was if there were basic differences between Norwegians and Danes.

At the time this seemed plausible – because according to the so called “European climate theory”, which was commonly accepted then, people are influenced by their natural surroundings. And Denmark is a relatively flat and lush agricultural country – while most of Norway is steep and rugged and barren. So, since nature is different in the two countries, Norwegians were probably – by analogy – different from Danes. As one might expect, the intellectuals of the time claimed to find all kinds of differences – most often to the advantage of the Norwegians: Norwegians are tougher and healthier than Danes – because their climate is tougher – so that they are trained for hardships from their very childhood etc. – So far this discussion follows the thoughts and assumptions of *cultural* or *ethnic nationalism*.

Also, the Norwegian farmer *owned* the land he cultivated – while Danish farmers had traditionally been peasants in a feudal system where the land was the property of the noble land owner. Therefore, the intellectuals of the period assumed that the Norwegians were more independent, and had a natural pride that the Danish farmer lacked etc. And again, therefore, the Norwegian population was more promising to a generation that dreamt of a future democracy. – And then all of a sudden – in 1814 – Norway was separated from the absolute monarchy of Denmark and had its own constitution. Sure enough, it was forced to accept a union with Sweden, with the Swedes as the stronger part, but it did have a relative freedom concerning internal affairs due to its democratic constitution. This now became a new symbol of “norwegianness”. – Here, of course, the discussion runs along the lines of *political nationalism* – as the constitution is a “social contract”.

Thus, we may state that Norway from now on might understand itself as a modern nation state according to both of the dominating ideological traditions: a community sharing a common culture since ancient times as well as a society sharing a common understanding of the duties and rights of all citizens.

(The outline of Norwegian political history in this chapter is mostly based on Mykland 1976-80 and Seip 2008. – Bø 2006 is a comprehensive study of the “intellectual separation” of Denmark and Norway during the 19th century. If not otherwise specified all observations on this topic above and below are taken from this book.)

Romanticism

Henrik Wergeland (1806-1845) was the leading Norwegian poet during the era of Romanticism, which in Norway lasted from the 1820s until the 1860s. And Wergeland was one of the first prominent ideologists of modern nationalism in Norwegian history. He is also an obvious example of the understanding indicated above – that German cultural nationalism and French political nationalism are closely interwoven in the Norwegian national identity. His father was a minister of the Norwegian Lutheran State Church and a member of the intellectual upper class. He had been a member of the assembly that wrote our constitution, and, of course, Henrik was very proud of that. He also wrote an enthusiastic thesis about the constitution and the process that made it possible. (*Norges Konstitutions Historie* (History of the Norwegian Constitution) 1841-43.) Needless to say, he was very enthusiastic about our young democracy; we might well characterize him as a fanatic democrat.

However, he recognized that a true democracy would not function without a relatively high level of education in the general public. And he was well aware that the level of education in Norway at the time was insufficient. But he refused to retire into social and political arrogance – and claim for the intellectual elites the right to govern on behalf of everybody. Therefore, he took upon himself the task of educating the general worker; and he wrote and edited several journals and publications dedicated to the education of the people. This pulls his democratic vision towards the political left, of course: The lower classes should participate in government. And it also indicates that he was a rationalist by conviction, assuming that the country could best be governed through a combination of general knowledge and sound judgment. So far he reasoned within the tradition of French enlightenment.

But he combined rationalism and mysticism. His patriotism was not only intellectual, but also emotional and religious. Again and again he declared that he *loved* his fatherland. The reason for this was not just the fact that its social contract made sense according to political considerations, but the constitution was the ultimate fulfillment of an *ancient liberal tradition* in the Norwegian people – a tradition which had been planted in the Norwegian national character by our divine creator at the beginning of time. (Storsveen 2008:199ff.)

It is as though God created the peoples of the world different from each other, and He made the Norwegians particularly democratic! In Wergeland's great poetic myth from 1829 – *Creation, Man and Messiah* – he describes *history* as a long winded and changing process where God invisibly to man manipulates the course of events. And Wergeland's God favors democracy! Therefore the greatest symbolic figures of European history, Socrates, Plato, and Jesus, are all – according to Wergeland – true democrats!

Needless to say that Henrik Wergeland was a contradictory figure during his own life time. He was violently opposed by leading representatives of his own class – the intellectual and economic elites. His opponents took for granted that the state should be governed by the educated elites – i. e. themselves: Light comes from above, as they said.

How, then, could Henrik Wergeland insist that all Norwegians were democrats at heart? He solved this problem by insisting that all *true* Norwegians were democrats. Since his conservative opponents of the upper class had a strong Danish legacy after the four centuries of union with Denmark, he concluded that his opponents might well be Norwegian citizens – formally –, but they were still Danish in their heads! – His attitude towards everything Danish reveals that he on this point reasons within the framework of the German tradition of cultural or

ethnic nationalism: There are fundamental differences between Danish and Norwegian, and vital national characteristics have been created by God.

The conservatives themselves insisted that they were Norwegian. And, of course, they *were* Norwegian, according to the French definition: All those who accept the common rules and regulations of a nation, belong to that nation – no matter what their cultural background is. And these citizens were very enthusiastic about the new constitution, and they gladly submitted to the fresh Norwegian *social contract*.

Henrik Wergeland, also, reasoned in accordance with the French tradition in another ethnic conflict. The fathers of the constitution had been convinced Lutherans, and had probably inherited certain prejudices from the absolute monarchy of previous generations. Therefore, they had included in the constitution a law that prohibited Jews and Jesuits from entering the kingdom. In spite of his enthusiasm for the constitution, Henrik Wergeland campaigned to abolish this particular law. The exclusion of Jews and Jesuits was, of course, coherent with German cultural nationalism: As mentioned earlier, the German romantics thought that each culture should have its own state; thus the nation state should be homogeneous; there should be no room for minorities. We realize today, though, that this part of the theory was totally unsuitable for real life; hardly any large community has ever been completely monocultural; there are mixed populations “everywhere” – neighborhoods of various cultures have always coexisted in the large cities in most of Europe – as in many Norwegian villages and towns.

Henrik Wergeland found the exclusion of Jews and Jesuits inhumane. He was a Christian theologian by education, but in his book *The Jew* from 1844 he describes Christianity, Judaism and Islam as equally valuable; believers of all

three could be equally pious and equally good in a moral sense. – Thus, on this point he ends up with a point of view which places him in the tradition of French political nationalism: Anyone who respects the law of the land should be free to become a citizen; this goes for all – Jews and Jesuits and all other law abiding individuals. – Once again we see that he reasons along both traditions: He “thinks German” about the Danes – and he “thinks French” about Jews and Jesuits. (Wergeland did not live to see the reforms he fought for. The legislation on Jews was changed in 1851, – i. e. 6 years after his death. The legislation on Jesuits was not changed until 1956!)

As we have seen, Henrik Wergeland contributed to give Norwegian nationalism a democratic and leftist orientation. The Czech Historian Miroslav Hroch distinguishes between “large state nationalism” and “small state nationalism”. (Hroch 1996.) “Large states” are usually multinational dynastic states, and they tend to be conservative and resist political change – because they are focused on keeping their many nations together within their state. “Small states” are often singular nations with separatist goals – striving to liberate themselves from a dynastic state and establish a nation state for themselves; “small states”, also, tend towards a leftist political leaning. Henrik Wergeland obviously contributed to place Norway in the “small state” category. This was because he combined his own enthusiasm for democracy with his harsh feelings about everything Danish. Or put in another way, he discussed internal affairs as a conflict between national cultures. As we shall see, this rhetoric was picked up by spokesmen of the farming population later on in the century. Therefore, certain cultural traditions in Norway are understood as particularly “national” by many; this in turn contributes to give Norwegian nationalism a leftist leaning. In many countries it is the conservative upper class that concerns itself with what they understand as “national”; in Norway one might say that to some extent it has been the “rising class” that has proclaimed ownership to the “national” culture.

The generation that took up the Norwegian nation building process after Wergeland changed their focus compared to him; *he* had focused on political macro-structures – such as the distribution of wealth and power and educational level. His successors focused more consistently on what they understood as the “national character”; this they believed they could discern through an investigation of the arts of “the people” – which they mainly understood as the farming class. Therefore, they undertook enormous collections of folklore – partly fairy tales and legends, and partly folk songs and folk music. This inspired our artists within all the fine arts: Edvard Grieg and other composers elaborated folk tunes into classical European music genres; our painters depicted Norwegian landscapes and scenes of domestic life among farmers; and our writers picked popular legends and transformed them into poems, dramas, and novels. This transformation of folk motifs into fine arts implied, of course, a certain *interpretation* of them – at least to the extent that it focused certain aspects at the cost of other aspects.

But our collectors of folk tales and ballads were more explicit in *their* interpretations than most of the artists were. This is particularly true of our collector of *fairy tales*, Jørgen Moe. During the 1840s he collected and published a number of fairy tales together with his friend Peter Christen Asbjørnsen. In 1852 they collected them in one volume and included in it a long essay by Moe about the essential meaning of the tales. Here he is obviously inspired by the famous German collectors of tales – the two brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm. Jørgen Moe takes for granted that the fictitious characters of the Norwegian fairy tales *reflect* the real Norwegian national character. (Moe 1877, v. II:75 ff.) Particularly he stresses the sense of humor in the tales, and he explains it by assuming that life conditions in Norway are so severe that people could not survive without their special sense of humor. His optimistic evaluation

of the Norwegian national character probably has something to do with the fact that the fairy tale as a genre always has a happy end. In other words, to Moe the happy end of the tale indicates that Norwegians are optimists at heart.

An interesting point concerning this search for folk culture is that the collectors tend to focus on the farming population. Here they follow up on the legacy of Henrik Wergeland and the Norwegian intellectuals of the previous century – i. e. their assumption that it was primarily the uneducated class that had preserved that which was genuinely Norwegian. This was because the intellectuals belonged to the upper class, and upper class culture was practically identical in Norway and Denmark. Therefore, they may have felt a psychological need to demarcate their supposed Norwegian identity from everything Danish. And they must have had a notion that they would grasp its essence more firmly if they studied “pure” and ”genuine” norwegianness”, which they believed they would find in the farming population.

This tendency was questioned by some. Henrik Wergelands younger sister, and our first realist novelist, Camilla Collett, wrote a feminist novel in the 1850s, where she lamented the fate of upper class daughters, who “had to” marry according to the economic considerations of their parents – rather than marry someone they loved. Her novel *The Governor’s Daughters* was a “history of woman’s heart”, she wrote. She claimed to depict a truly *Norwegian* reality – although she admitted that she focused on the class of public servants – who belonged to the elites of society and worked for the authorities. Her point in this connection was, of course, that all social classes were part of the Norwegian nation, and a concept of “norwegianness” must encompass the entire population, not only the farmers in the countryside.

A step in the same direction is taken when Jørgen Moes friend Peter Christen Asbjørnsen publishes a number of folk *legends*. While the plot of the *fairy tale* takes place in a world of phantasy, the *legend* claims to relate true stories about real incidents; the plot supposedly took place at some specific time and at some specific place; and almost always it had a tragic end. In both genres humans meet magic forces, but in the fairy tale he or she learns to employ magic for his own benefit – while the human in the legends is destroyed by the magic. Therefore, also, the characters of fairy tales are fearless; actually they rarely show any emotions at all. But the characters of legends are afraid – with every good reason – since the story is believed to be true – and the tale is very blunt about how frail humans really are. – Asbjørnsen never discusses the legends in relation to the Norwegian national character. But the persons in his legends give a picture of Norwegians that is, indeed, very different from the impression that Jørgen Moe gets from fairy tales. May be the reason why Asbjørnsen never discusses this explicitly, is that it would give a more pessimistic picture of the national character?

But Asbjørnsen differentiates the picture of the Norwegian by entering the story himself. He creates a setting in the story where the narrator is an intellectual *collector* of tales; this person meets some *tellers* of tales that are usually illiterate, and believe that the tales they tell are true. But the intellectual collector indicates more or less subtly in his text that he himself has a different understanding of what has really taken place – implying that there must be a rational explanation of the supposed magic of the tale. – The function of this is that Asbjørnsen introduces in his text two kinds of Norwegians: the tellers of tales and the collector of tales – or put in another way: the illiterate people and the educated class. Consequently, he reminds his readers that the Norwegian people is divided in different classes. And the national character must be sought not only in the illiterate part of the population.

(Perhaps I should note here that the Norwegian farmer can hardly be labeled as illiterate around 1860. The Protestant reformation of the 16th century had made the authorities establish a rudimentary education to enable youngsters of the lower classes to read the Holy Scriptures. It appears that for a long time the majority only learnt to read a limited number of biblical texts. Only during the last half of the 1800s it seems that the majority of the lower classes learnt to read and understand unknown and secular texts. (Vannebo 1984.) However, there are also sources which indicate that even during the 1700s there were individuals within the farm population of almost all local communities who read and wrote for neighbors and family who could not read and write themselves. (Fet. 1995.))

A practically opposite movement from that of Asbjørnsen is undertaken by the author Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson in his so called “farm tales” from around 1860 (*Synnøve Solbakken, Arne, A happy boy*). These tales are all fiction. But Bjørnson believed that the farm population of his time was basically similar to the brave and silent heroes of the medieval Icelandic sagas. Medieval Iceland had had a considerable immigration from Western Norway during the 9th century, so that the Icelandic medieval culture and the culture of Norwegian farmers of the early 1800s were in certain ways similar to each other. But what Bjørnson does in his “farm tales”, is to introduce a psychological realism that at the time was new in Norwegian prose fiction. Thereby his fictitious characters became recognizable to the reader in a more direct way than had been the case in older literature. This must have had an appeal to the reader that would contradict Asbjørnsen’s legends: The psychological realism of Bjørnson’s fiction must have “told” readers that Norwegian farmers were similar to – not only the saga heroes, but also to themselves – the readers; they would meet *their own* anger, jealousy, fear and hope in Bjørnson’s fictitious farmers. And most readers belonged to the upper class. This must have had an effect of uniting the

classes; the literate reader must have felt that he or she was “of the same kind” as Bjørnson’s “national” farmers.

The dramatist Henrik Ibsen also contributed to this artistic and intellectual mapping of the Norwegian national character. In his early dramas – from the 1850s and -60s he sketches what he must have believed to be the history of a Norwegian psychology. In dramas like *Vikings of Helgeland* and *Feast at Solhaug* he presents “the same” psychological conflict between “the same” character types, but in different centuries. It is as though he wants to show how these “same” character types have changed from the pre Christian Viking age to the Christian age of medieval ballads and courtesy. – But in his later and more famous plays Ibsen becomes a stern critic of the supposed Norwegian character type. He scorns it in his dramas *Brand* and *Peer Gynt* from the late 1860s – and drops the topic entirely in his contemporary plays from the last three decades of the century.

Integrating new social groups in the democratic process

The 19th century fascination among the intellectual elites for “the people” was partly a legacy from 18th century patriots – who hailed the Norwegian farmer at the cost of the Danish peasant. But it was also to some extent a consequence of social developments during the 19th century. The lack of nobility was one factor. As we remember “the Black Death” had swept away our medieval aristocracy, and what little we had of the kind, was done away with by the fathers of the constitution; they decided to abolish nobility altogether within Norway. This provoked the Swedish king, but he reluctantly accepted it. The lack of nobility may serve as a symbol for the fact that Norway through the centuries has had a relatively egalitarian population.

A more negative consequence is that the country also lacks the great cultural monuments of earlier times: Russians may pride themselves of the Winter Palace, the Kremlin and many similar monuments; the French have their Versailles Palace, etc. – all symbols of the greatness of the nation. Also, they have the cultural legacy of a wealthy aristocracy within other fields – like ballet, music, opera, literature, science, philosophy. Norway had very little of that in 1814. This was probably the reason why so much focus was directed towards Norwegian nature, the “national character” and the cultural legacies of the lower classes.

Not only did the 1814 constitution abolish nobility. The egalitarian tendency was also reflected by a surprisingly large representation of the farming population in Parliament. The session of 1815 had 39 public servants, 29 farmers, 14 merchants and land-owners, and 5 “others”. Historians assume that some 45,5 % of all men above the age of 25 were eligible to acquire the right to vote at that time , i. e. 10,3 % of the total population. (In order to actually acquire this right they had to pledge allegiance to the constitution.) The prerequisite was that he had lived in the country for 5 years, and was the owner of a farm, a city house or some other substantial property; if you had no private property to speak of, you did not get the right to vote. And no woman had the right to vote. (For a comparison one might mention that 20% of all adult men got the right to vote in England from 1832. In Belgium 1,15 % of the population got the right to vote in 1840, and 4 % of the population got the right to vote in Sweden in 1866. (Mykland 1978, v.IX:402.)

In addition to the 18th century legacy of enthusiasm for the farming population, there took place certain developments on the grass root level during the 19th century that must have strengthened our relatively radical democracy. One such development was a broad religious movement that was started in the 1790s by

the farmer and lay preacher Hans Nielsen Hauge, and gained ground all over the country during the 19th century and even into the first decades of the 20th century.

Norway had become protestant when the noble dynasties of Northern Europe in the 16th century decided to support the German reformist priest Martin Luther. One particular point about Lutheran theology, which may be relevant in our connection, is that he reduces the significance of the church – as compared to Catholicism. The believer is to a greater extent left responsible for his own salvation; the priest is less present as a mediator between the believer and God. Therefore the Lutheran should learn to read Biblical texts. This is why protestant authorities had the Bible translated into the vernaculars of Northern Europe during the subsequent century. And it is also the background for the efforts mentioned above to teach people to read.

This was the basic precondition for the Hans Nielsen Hauge movement. One element in this is probably also that when the individual is made responsible for his own salvation, it stimulates puritanism. In the state churches of the protestant countries the priest would become the representative not only of the church, but of the king. And as such he would belong to the upper class, and could allow himself a more comfortable way of life than his puritan parishioners would accept. Thus, protestant societies nurtured their own opposition, and probably promoted a development towards democracy: When the grass root believer acquires his own understanding of essential questions, he may also dare to stand up against the authority of his official superiors. (Sejersted 1978:259.) – This laymen's movement was not explicitly engaged in the nation building efforts of their time. And yet, I believe we can say that it has had some influence on the Norwegian national identity. I shall return to the question of why this is so.

The combination of the two – the legacy from the farmer fans of the 18th century and the developments in religious life during the early 19th century – may well have contributed to the decision by our parliament to establish a local democracy in 1836. The villages were to elect their own assemblies to administer local affairs. Thus, the social contract of the French tradition “descended” from the national to the local level. This, of course, reinforced the leftist tendency of the Norwegian political system; more grass root representatives got the opportunity to take part in politics. Policy making came closer – it was no longer to the same extent a privilege of the intellectual and economic elites of the capital of the nation.

Somewhat later during the 19th century still another popular movement arose which may have contributed to move our democracy in a leftist direction. This, also, was a grass root movement, but it was fronted by intellectuals with a background of all social classes. While the religious radicalism of the Hans Nielsen Hauge movement did not understand itself as either political or national, this next one was both, and has been called the “National Left”. It has to do with the Danish legacy in our cultural history. I mentioned that Henrik Wergeland discussed internal political affairs as though they concerned a conflict between the Norwegian and the Danish nation. And I also suggested that this rhetoric survived Wergeland. In fact, it is probably justified to claim that it became the pervasive argument of the “National Left” during the last half of the 19th century and the first half of the 20th.

Until the middle of the 19th century most Norwegian nation builders had taken the Danish legacy for granted. The most important element of this legacy was the written language. The language of the sagas had died out during the union with Denmark, and Norwegians *wrote* Danish during most of the 19th century. But they *spoke* Norwegian – in different dialects and sociolects. Both

Norwegian and Danish (and Swedish and Icelandic and Faeroese) have developed from Old Norse. So none of these languages are remote from each other today; and Norwegians and Danes and Swedes understand each other pretty well. But in the 19th century the Danes, the Swedes and the Icelanders had their own *written* languages while the Norwegians and the Faroese wrote Danish. However, in Norway our new sense of a relative political sovereignty – and the liberation from Denmark – made some idealists think that Norway ought to have its own written language – like other nation states.

The self-taught linguist and poet Ivar Aasen collected Norwegian dialects and created a synthesis of them – which he around the middle of the 19th century launched as a future written language for Norway. At about the same time the teacher Knud Knudsen launched the idea of creating a Norwegian written language based on Danish – but with a *spelling* based on the way that upper class Norwegians *pronounced* Danish. These two suggested language reforms later on developed into the two varieties of written Norwegian that are in use today; the Aasen model has developed into contemporary “nynorsk” – i. e. “New Norwegian”, and the Knudsen model into contemporary “bokmål” – or “Book Norwegian”.

From the last half of the 19th century this question was the subject of a broad cultural conflict. The Aasen followers drew their main support from the farming population and a new middle class with a rural and working class background. The movement functioned as a leftist political opposition concerning a whole range of issues – against the traditional upper class, whom they accused of being “Danish” at heart – following Wergeland – and against the union with Sweden.

“The National Left” also renewed and strengthened the old romantic fascination for folk art. For this “rising class” now questioned the cultural supremacy of the

bourgeois and professional elites, and proclaimed that the old folk arts expressed their own essential self – folk art was the valid cultural expression of *their* spiritual legacy. To some ideologists Norway did, in fact, not have *one* national culture – the Norwegian people was not even one nation, but *two* – since it had two languages, “bokmål” and “nynorsk”, and two cultural treasures – the European classics of fine arts, worshipped by the “Danish” elites – and the folk arts of “the people” – consisting of the “real” Norwegians.

To some extent, though, this is a simplified and biased description. It may be true of “some ideologists” – as I phrased it above. But the leading intellectuals on both sides accepted each other – and the cultural treasures of their opponents. Intellectuals of the “nynorsk” camp translated European classics into Norwegian – and thus introduced leading European intellectuals to a larger Norwegian public. And intellectuals of the “bokmål” camp celebrated the “nynorsk” artists and introduced folk arts into the textbooks of public schools for all social classes.

The question remains how these popular “countercultures” relate to *political* and *cultural* nationalism. Both the laymen’s religious movement and the “National Left” are concerned with people’s everyday life – i. e. *culture* in the German sense; both of them wanted to cleanse it from liabilities within society, which they found offensive. As indicated previously, the religious movement hardly intended to be political at all. And it was obviously mystical and antirational. Thus, it was basically *cultural* – as in the German heritage. The “National Left” also stresses the *culture* of everyone’s private life in that its main concern is the written language that people use – and also certain aesthetic values in everybody’s private life: They select certain types of clothing for “national costumes”, and they declare certain art forms more “national” than other art forms. Thus, they establish a number of “national symbols” – or treasures of

“civil worship”. Therefore, they, also, are *cultural* in the German sense. And still, although both popular movements focus on every day culture, they directed their criticism towards the upper class; and since they reached such a wide following, they to some extent affected the power balance of society. Hence they had a certain emancipatory effect, and contributed to tilting the Norwegian democracy towards the left. In that sense they get a “French” influence on our history – they influenced our social contract so that it ended up revolving around a political center that lies to the left of some other modern democracies.

Unlike the laymen’s religious movement, the National Left was explicitly “French” in its way of arguing. In hindsight we see that it emerged from a conflict that primarily was a social one – the old upper class versus a “rising class”. But because of the ideological climate the combatants used a nationalist rhetoric. Unlike the laymen’s movement, the leading ideologists of the “National Left” argue for their political program without a metaphysical perspective. Their argument is materialist, sociological and pedagogic. Ivar Aasen defines the *nation* as a community based on tradition – for practical purposes; there is no metaphysics in his understanding. And others defend “nynorsk” because it is closer to the language of the people; it will be easier to learn to read and write if the written language is closer to the spoken language. This also contains an emancipatory aspect; with literacy for all the new democracy may function better. From this angle the question of language is not only a question of *culture* in the German sense, but a question of facilitating an easier access to the principles of the social contract.

The most important result of these countercultures is hardly their own history, but the way they have contributed to the extension of democratic rights to new social groups. All adult men obtained the right to vote in local elections in 1896 and in national elections in 1898. This was not particularly early for

constitutionally governed European states. But women were given the same rights in 1910 and 1913, and that was rather early for Europe.

Another radical advancement for our democracy was the growing participation of the working class. The Labor party grew fast after the common franchise had been obtained, and got a considerable representation in Parliament from the 1920s and on. Already in 1927 they formed a short lived minority cabinet, but in 1935 they formed a majority cabinet together with the Agriculturalists, which lasted until World War II. And after the war the Labor party (Social Democrats) has been the largest party in parliament, and it has played a dominating role in our political life. Trade unions have also had a strong influence in Norway since the beginning of the 20th century, and still seem to stay strong. This is probably partly a consequence of a “General Agreement” that was reached in the mid-thirties between the unions, the employers and the state – establishing national rules for regulating work conditions and salaries. This seems to have had a stabilizing effect on our economy, and Norway has so far seen very little of the “union busting” of some other western countries.

Norwegian national identity in 2015?

Norwegian nationalism was a *utopian vision* during the 19th century – an optimist dream of a sovereign democracy – and of modernity. But during the 20th century it seems that both nationalism and modernity have faded – particularly in Western Europe. *Nationalism* triggered the two world wars, and continues to trigger conflicts between ethnic groups and states. This is only one of the reasons why many nation states have given up some of their sovereignty to organizations like the League of Nations, the United Nations, NATO and the European Union. – *Modernity*, also, proved more ambiguous than expected, and one reaction has been the literary “modernism” of Franz Kafka and T. S. Eliot

and others; the term *modernism* is generally used for art forms that *question modernity*, and express a feeling – shared by many – that the modernization process has created estrangement and unemployment and war instead of utopian democracies. The philosophers Max Horkheimer and Theodor W. Adorno speak of *The Dialectics of Enlightenment* in their book from 1947; advances in knowledge and technology are used *against* humanity – not *for* it.

The new ambivalence to modernity and to nation building seems to have changed nationalist patterns of thought. This has also taken place in Norway. The romantics all the way up to Bjørnson and Ibsen understood the idea of “norwegianness” as something unified – it was thought of as *similar* in all parts of the country and in all social classes. But from the era of Realism – i. e. from the 1860s and -70s and on – the idea comes up that Norwegians are different in various regions of Norway. (Bø 2006:133ff.) The poet and journalist Aasmund Olavson Vinje and the novelist Jonas Lie claimed that people from Eastern Norway are different from those from Western Norway. Knut Hamsun (e. g. *Pan*) and Jonas Lie (e. g. *The Visionary*) made a similar point in novels about people from Northern Norway. And gradually the idea gained ground in the works of many writers – that people from all kinds of local communities – as well as from different social classes – have their typical characteristics due to their particular background.

Also, some writers have followed up the ideas of Ibsen during his romantic period that Norwegians have changed with history. One prominent author, who pursued this idea, was Sigrid Undset, one of our Nobel laureates – and a contemporary of Hamsun. She wrote a number of novels in the 1920s about medieval Norway where she attempts to describe Norwegian character types during the middle ages (*Kristin Lavransdaughter*, *Olav Audunsson*). Other authors combined the idea that Norwegian minds change through history with

the idea that they change according to class and natural surroundings. Arne Garborg writes along these lines about the farming communities of South West Norway (*Farm Students, Peace*), Olav Duun (*The People of Juvik*) about the fishing and farming communities of Central Norway, Johan Falkberget (*Christianus Sextus*) about the mining communities in Eastern Norway etc. etc.

After World War II authors like Sigurd Hoel (*Milestone*), Aksel Sandemose (*Exile in Search of a Home*) ventured to analyze our psychological reaction to Nazism and to the atrocities of the war. Their point was that the brutality of the Nazis was contagious; it stimulated brutality also among Norwegians – even in the resistance movement. – Among contemporary novelists Edvard Hoem, Kjartan Fløgstad and Jan Kjærstad have elaborated their mixed feelings towards various kinds of “norwegianness”. Hoem’s Norwegians are earnest and sincere idealists, but emotional and naïve (*Ave Eva*). Fløgstad’s Norwegians are cynical capitalists on the one hand, and on the other easily manipulated, but eternally optimistic survivors (*Dalen Portland*). And Kjærstad’s Norwegians are ambitious “do-good’ers” on the one hand, but emotional and arrogant and greedy on the other (Jonas Wergeland trilogy). – Still, one must say that the theme of a Norwegian national identity is *not* encountered very frequently in contemporary literary fiction.

However, questions concerning “norwegianness” and Norwegian values are being discussed from time to time by journalists in various media. Also, some politicians or other opinion makers touch on these questions at times. I shall try to sketch an outline of some of the points that are often made. One line of thought tends to defend or idealize Norwegians – another tendency is to criticize. I shall refer some points from both categories, and I start with the claims that are most often considered favorable.

One aspect of “norwegianness” that Norwegians seem to be pleased with is that most citizens show a general *trust* versus “the system” – they have confidence in the authorities – they accept their government as *theirs*; the decision makers of Parliament, the cabinet, and the local governments, are not enemies, but the servants of the public. Therefore, citizens generally accept decisions made by the authorities – may be reluctantly, but still ... People assume that the decision-makers are generally not corrupt; most often they have morally acceptable reasons to conclude the way they do.

The most likely explanation for this loyalty would be that we have had a *stable democracy* for 200 years. It may also be of some importance that it has been a *small country* – only 5 million inhabitants altogether – and a *leftist* democracy; the decision makers may appear less remote from the public than in some other countries; there is considerable transparency in the administration of society.

May be, also, the previously mentioned legacy from protestant puritanism may have had some influence. In traditional Norwegian upbringing a moral behavior towards all, hard work and a frugal way of life are key values; this may have contributed to a mutual regard between citizens, and contempt for corruption.

This social trust may also be a result of the geographic and social *mobility* of the population during modernity; more people live their adult life at another place than in their childhood village – and in another profession than that of their parents. This makes them more anonymous than in premodern times, and their dependency of society at large may increase at the cost of their loyalty toward family and other childhood acquaintances.

Still another reason for social trust may be the egalitarian structure of the population. This has historic sources – as mentioned before – but it is also being

kept up by mighty social institutions to this day. The collaboration between the trade unions, the employers and the government to regulate work conditions and salaries is an important element in the Norwegian social structure. This system encourages an egalitarian social structure by maintaining a narrow scale of difference between salaries. Therefore, also, the economic difference between social classes is relatively small: A doctor earns more than a nurse, but the difference between their salaries is smaller than in most other countries. It is commonly believed that this contributes to conflict solving between social classes.

A final reason for the general trust in our society may be the fact that the nation is young; it is relatively recent that we obtained our sovereignty – from Sweden in 1905 – and from the occupying Germans in 1945. This may have stimulated a notion that during both those liberation processes we conquered the right to do things our own way; this may have given us the feeling that we finally have our own social contract. Perhaps, a similar attitude made the majority vote “no” in both the referendums on the question of joining the European Union in 1972 and 1994. – This was, however, a striking example of a conflict between the people and its authorities; most of our elites were in favor of membership, but the voters were against. Later on, however, our elites have made us very close associates – through the European Economic Area and the Schengen and the Dublin treaties.

Tadia Hajik is a young politician who comments on several of the points mentioned above. She was born in Norway in 1983, the daughter of immigrants from Pakistan, educated in law, the youngest cabinet minister ever (Minister of Culture 2012 – 2013), now Leader of the Committee of Law in Parliament.

To me Norway is where the daughter of an immigrant worker may become Leader of the Committee of Law in Parliament – because the Norwegian model gives people a solid ground to stand on (...) If my parents had stayed in Pakistan (...) it would have been impossible for me with our ordinary family background to become a politician (...) I thank the Norwegian Model every day. It is something pretty, which we should take care of, that we live in a country where so many are community oriented. In a small nation like Norway people have understood how important it is to work together and pull in the same direction. (*Dagbladet* 2014:13.)

Our strong *public welfare system* may probably be understood as an expansion of the social trust. Social welfare is not unique for Norway, but my concern here is to explain the Norwegian case. Two examples will illustrate the system; the first one is the support parents get when a baby is born, and the second example is the support all citizens get if they need medical treatment:

- When a new baby is born, the mother has a legal right to either a fully paid leave from her job for 49 weeks – or 80 % income for 59 weeks. And the father has the right to a fully paid leave of 10 weeks. The employer pays a minor portion of this – a public insurance company pays the rest. But there are conditions: You need to have had a steady employment for some time before the birth takes place, and you are not refunded 100 % if your salary exceeds a certain amount ... etc. ([altinn](#) announcement, cf. bibliography.)
- When citizens need medical care, they pay only a portion of the price for the treatment; the rest is paid by the public insurance company. Once the portions you have paid yourself – during the year 2015 – add up to somewhere around 270 €, public insurance takes over again and pays your medical expenditures for the rest of the year. Medical care for children is free.

These examples only indicate the basic principles; there are a number of minor exceptions to this. (Ibid.) The welfare system is enormously differentiated and the services offered are impressive. Basically, one may say that the public offers a “safety net” to all citizens in case they are declared unable to provide for themselves by their appointed medical doctor. – One should probably not only praise the welfare services as such, but also the fact that the *cost* of the system is generally accepted by the public as well as by all political parties.

The historical reasons for the welfare system are many. One important reason is obviously modernity in itself: More individuals live on their own now than before, so that they cannot be nursed by their families; therefore the public takes over more of the responsibility. – In addition there are ideological traditions in the people that probably are relevant in this connection. One of them may again be the puritan legacy; their tradition for Christian charity may contribute to secure political support for the welfare system; at any rate we see that our Christian Democrats Party are among the most staunch defenders of a generous welfare system. – Another tradition is the traditional *collectivism* of the labor movement. The modern welfare system gained ground as Labor strengthened its power in politics – i. e. particularly from the 1930s and on. But important basic initiatives were older, and the bourgeois parties in Norway have always supported the construction of “the welfare state”. It is worth remembering that the basic principles of “the welfare state” were established half a century before Norway became a wealthy oil nation.

Enough about social trust. Quite another characteristic of “norwegianness” is a liability among leading opinion makers to favor *popular events and traditions*. *Sports* are probably most striking. Our state run television company sends sports every Sunday in the winter season from 9 AM to 5 PM. And there are special sports reports in all news programs. Daily newspapers also have several pages of

sports reports. It is safe to say that sports competitions are enormously popular. This is especially true of skiing during winter and football during summer. It is also very common to do some sports for recreation. There is also something of a “social imperative” in Norway to be “slim and trim”, and obesity is relatively rare.

The public enthusiasm for popular events and traditions also favors the cultural *legacy from the “National Left”*. Local dialects probably enjoy more respect in Norway than in many other countries. Members of Parliament, cabinet ministers and television journalists speak their dialect! – Also, folk music has a broader following here than in most other western European countries. – May be one could also claim that farmers and farm life enjoy a higher esteem in Norway than in many other industrialized countries. The same goes for hunting, fishing and other wild life sports. – Also, it is a fact that exceptionally many have a “national costume” – particularly women – in all social classes, and its popularity seems to increase every year. The “national costume” is used in weddings – for Christmas – or at other formal events – and particularly on our “national day” – which is on the 17th of May, the date when the constitution was signed back in 1814. This is an enormous celebration in Norway – with a lot of festivity for the whole family. – This reminds us again of the peculiar mix of “French” and “German” nationalism in our culture: The fact that it is the Constitution we celebrate is “French”, but the fact that people wear “national costumes” is “German” – it symbolizes cultural tradition more than social agreement.

The features of Norwegian culture listed above are usually pointed out as positive. But as already mentioned some of our contemporary authors had mixed feelings about their country, and current media coverage gives them good arguments: Let us start with the claim that Norwegians maintain a social trust –

and one should expect some kind of allegiance – to their social contract and their own legally elected authorities. The most striking *contradiction* of this is the practice of *cheating the public*. Critics claim that it is all too widespread to commit economic fraud with money that rightly belongs to the public. One of the methods is to cheat the public insurance company that offers *welfare services*. During the year 2014 the public insurance was cheated for 271 million Norwegian crowns (around 30 million €). Some 1200 persons were indicted, most of them for small amounts, while 15 persons were responsible for bigger amounts. (NAV press announcement 05.02.2015, cf. bibliography.) May be this is not such a big deal with a population of five million? But it is assumed that the fraud amounts to considerably more than these figures, as the authorities only indicted people for the gravest cases. – The other method of committing fraud with money that should belong to the public is to hide income or property from individual or company taxation. It is commonly assumed that this amounts to a lot more than the cheating with welfare services – only that it is so complicated to decide the extent of tax fraud that they dare not estimate the dimensions of it! – I should also mention in connection with the claim of “social trust” in “the system” that we do have a conflict between political parties – where some right wing politicians tend to *criticize* high taxes and large public expenses – while the left *defends* a strong public sphere, claiming that this enables us to stabilize our economy when needed.

So far we have seen that there is a certain *resistance* against the Norwegian social contract – by citizens who cheat the public for money – and by politicians and citizens who question the state monopolies and the large public expenses. But in spite of this all the political parties from right to left have defended and supported the basic elements of the “Nordic Model”. By comparison there seems to be much greater distance between the left and the right in many other European countries.

I shall then turn to the *egalitarian attitude* of Norwegian culture. Obviously, the assumption of equality for all is sound from a judicial point of view, and as a principal of human worth. But critics claim that egalitarianism has been exaggerated in our recent school reforms. There has been an increasing tendency in our schools that certain school subjects seem to be easier for girls than for boys, and also for children of parents from the higher social classes and with a higher education. All post war school reforms have had as their goal to change schools in such a way that grades that pupils achieve vary less according to gender and social background. (Bakken and Elstad 2012.) These school reforms were, obviously, based on an egalitarian vision, and they did achieve an increase of the general educational level; there is now 10 years of obligatory school for all children, and in addition all youngsters have the right to attend high school for 3 years. This is a considerable increase as compared to a generation ago. However, the gender and class difference seems to increase – and particularly after the reform of 2006 (“Kunnskapsløftet”) where one attempted to strengthen the subjects Norwegian, mathematics and natural sciences – compared to previous requirements. It may seem that to some students the new emphasis on theoretical subject is hard and demotivating. The schools offer extra support to students who do not cope with the theoretical bias, but an increasing number fail or drop out of school. (Junior high school (8th, 9th, and 10th grade – age group 13 –15 years) is obligatory for all; 3 % of junior high students completed less than 50% of the subjects – in 2011.) (Ibid.) – Perhaps, one might say that the reformers have blurred the distinction between *equality* and *similarity*. They have taken for granted that all youngsters are *equally* entitled to the same education; but they seem to have assumed that the students are also sufficiently *similar* to accomplish this goal. It is probably symptomatic for egalitarian Norway that it is the students who lag behind who receive extra support. It is rare that schools push the *brilliant* students to the utmost of their potential. And

it is remarkable that the “egalitarian” pedagogy is limited to ordinary school subjects. For all Norwegians take for granted that extraordinary talents within *sports* or *fine arts* should be pushed to their utmost – and have the very best teachers.

I have now discussed some of the “pros and cons” of “norwegianness”. But I have limited my discussion to elements of a general nature – so that they qualify for statistical research and news reports. I hinted above that in contemporary *fiction* all kinds of human characteristics may be attributed to Norwegians: They are introvert, reserved, timid ... or suspicious, unfriendly, arrogant, self righteous ... or again naïve, innocent, do-gooders, friendly ... etc., etc. And all of these characteristics are probably true – about *some* Norwegians! Which means that there are Norwegians of all kinds – just like the citizens of all other nations! Also – as I hinted earlier – I am personally convinced – unlike the romantics – that it is impossible to find a common denominator for the personal or moral character of a nation. It would, for instance, be impossible to answer the basic and introductory question of who should be the object of such an investigation: Who is a Norwegian? All Norwegian citizens? Only those who have “an all Norwegian family” many generations back through history? How many generations? On both sides? Is “half” Norwegian sufficient? Three quarters? Why?

I think we must conclude that a modern Norwegian identity consists of some kind of *semiconscious allegiance* to life and traditions and nature in Norway. Perhaps even *less* than a “semiconscious” allegiance? On dreary weekdays when nothing special happens, perhaps it would be safer to say *unconscious*? It is hardly every day that Norwegians reflect consciously about their national identity? But on special events it may strike their consciousness – for instance when he or she meets a foreigner, or during international sports events, or on the

17th of May, or if one has to spend Christmas abroad, or just feels far away from home? May be in some such situations the feeling of allegiance may even approach *affection*? It is vague and shifting, and it was probably more prominent in the minds of the nation builders of the 19th century – when the nation state felt new – than it is for most Norwegians today. And it was, also, most likely much more present in the minds of the 19th century nation builders than it was in the minds of their admired hero – the Norwegian farmer; to him a regional identity – not to speak of a social identity – would probably be more important.

As to the object of the allegiance – or affection – I hope to have shown some of the basic patterns. Modern Norwegian culture is a mix – an enormous patchwork – of cultural impulses – some from Norwegian history and some from all over the modernized and globalized world of today. Still, one may discern the contours of two particular traditions in the confusion of this great mix – that is the "German" and the "French" thoughts about what it is that constitutes a nation.

As I have shown above the German tradition of cultural nationalism has had a remarkable influence throughout the history of our nation building process. And no doubt it still lingers on in present day Norway. As I have also touched upon above, one must admit that there is a "sunny side" to this tradition as well as a "dark side". Let me start with the dark one: The idea that each nation/ people shares a common history, language, religion, and traditions, may be true enough. But almost always they also share a *territory* with another people with *different* cultural traditions. This implies that in real life it is impossible to create *nation states for only one people* – where everybody within the *territory* shares the same culture. There will be neighborhoods with different cultures in the same area. But if one people manages to establish a state, and insists on implementing cultural nationalism consistently, the result very often is that this people

becomes the “dominant ethnic group” of the territory; then they very often try to *oppress* the “non dominant ethnic groups”, which might even be the majority. The rulers try to “assimilate” the others by oppressing their language and culture, or in uglier cases they eliminate them through “ethnic cleansing”. Holocaust was one example. – Cultural nationalism would also resist *migration* and *intermarriage* across cultural borders. The negative aspects of cultural nationalism have become easier to register today – after World War II and after several other wars during the 20th century – wars with the goal of creating “pure” nations.

The “sunny side” of cultural nationalism is its fascination for cultural traditions and achievements. It was the ideas of the German romantics that inspired 19th century scholars to collect the treasures of folklore and other popular art forms. Without this heritage we would have been more ignorant of our past than we are. It is enriching to experience the emotional and aesthetic and intellectual “vibrations” of this heritage. It gives a deeper feeling of belonging and a more profound understanding of our cultural and ideological background – of what influenced us to become the persons that we are.

This curiosity towards cultures is valuable. Coexistence in a globalized world requires curiosity rather than resentment. No doubt one will find that all traditions are not equally valuable. But our first obligation is to know about them – as thoroughly as possible – and then evaluate the good and the bad aspects of them. It must be recognized and appreciated by all that individuals and groups cherish their own cultural heritage – as long as it does not seriously harm anybody. A critical comprehension of one’s *own* culture as well as of *other* cultures is a precondition for civilized life in the modern world.

As I have shown above, the “French” thoughts of democracy and justice are also prominent in Norwegian culture. – When World War II started, only 2 % of the votes went to the Nazi party. And when the fascists made progress everywhere and looked like they would win – in 1943, the percentage of Norwegian Nazi voters had risen to 4 %. (Ugelvik Larsen 1975.) One can hardly claim that 96 % of all Norwegians were liberal democrats, but it is probably safe to say that a vast majority was. – A key argument for those who resisted a Norwegian membership in the European Union was that there is a “deficit of democracy” in the EU. – When a Norwegian insane fascist murdered 77 persons and blew up a number of government buildings on the 22nd of July 2011, the Norwegian prime minister gave a speech where he promised that the political reaction to terrorism would be “more democracy and more openness”. And a vast majority of us were extremely pleased with him just then. So – obviously – a liberal democracy in the French political tradition means a lot to Norwegians, and is an essential part of what they understand as “norwegianness”.

It is “the sunny side” of The “French” tradition that we have been able to follow through Norwegian history during the last 200 years. Fortunately, it has been balanced by “the sunny side” of the “German” tradition. Norway has been fortunate to share a mix of the two. If either one of them is left alone to dominate a nation they might be dangerous. In Germany the dark side of cultural nationalism obviously stimulated Nazism. The French tradition may at first glance appear friendlier – as the epitome of tolerance and equality. As one might expect, it is above all France that has implemented these principles down through their history. A striking example is that they gave immigrants from the French colonies visas and work permits in France as the French Empire collapsed after World War II. This was according to the principle that anyone who accepts the social contract is welcome to join the nation. But this policy has led to grave social problems. The authorities have not succeeded in integrating

the immigrants in French society; the suburbs of the great cities have become immigrant ghettos; and French employers have hesitated to offer jobs to immigrants – so that the unemployment rate among immigrants is much higher than among ethnic French.

While the German tradition focuses too much on culture and too little on democracy – the French tradition just may focus too much on democracy and too little on culture. My point is that may be the French admire their own elitist French language heritage so much that they have no curiosity left for other cultures. The elites of the Paris region oppressed the regional cultures of the rest of France during the modernization process: When schools were made obligatory to all, the regional languages were oppressed – only French was allowed in school. In 1850 French was a minority language in France; nowadays the historic languages of Brittany, Langued’oc and Provence are practically nonexistent. Their present attitude towards immigrants is not similar; immigrants are not actively oppressed like the regional languages were, but their cultural heritage is pretty much ignored. This may in turn lead to political conflicts and disintegration of the population. May be the frustration among Moslems that lead to the Charlie Hebdo terrorism could be viewed in this context?

It is here that I feel Norway was fortunate: The German way of thinking could easily create a cultural conflict between the “rising class” and the old upper class; but thanks to the French tradition the elites on both sides managed to balance both legacies against each other and appreciate the best from both. Hopefully, this historical experience has conditioned us to openness towards *cultures* – in the plural. The concert is richer for those who hear all the instruments of the orchestra. And yet – the French tradition of rights and rules is

absolutely necessary; musicians who play without a common understanding of music can only make noise – not music.

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