Modernity, Nation, Written Culture

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Chapter 2

Historical Contexts for New Norwegian Written Culture

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The Norwegian state that was established in 1814 had an “incomplete” social structure. There was no traditional aristocracy to play a leading role in the new state, and the merchant bourgeoisie was also small and experienced heavy losses during and after the Napoleonic Wars. The only “national” group capable of conducting effective leadership were the civil servants. It was they who took the lead in the crisis of 1814, when Norway found itself handed over from the Danish king to the Swedish. They dominated the constituent assembly that gave Norway an independent and liberal constitution that year, and they dominated the parliament, the Storting, in the following decades. They also monopolised the posts as the King’s cabinet ministers and gradually transformed the cabinet into a self-supplying Norwegian government. The position of the civil servants during the years 1814–1884 was so dominant that this period in Norwegian political history is commonly called “The Civil Servant State”.

The civil servant class was a tiny social layer on top of an overwhelmingly peasant society. There were around 1800 civil servants in 1814, and their number grew only marginally to around 2300 in 1884.\textsuperscript{10} Counting their families, they constituted less than 0.5 % of the rural population and approximately 2 % of the urban population.\textsuperscript{11} The class

\textsuperscript{10} Seip 1981:112.
of civil servants emerged during the centuries of Danish-Norwegian union. They were often recruited from families that had immigrated from Denmark or Germany, and until 1811, when Norway got its own university, they were mainly educated in the common capital Copenhagen. The civil servants were therefore strongly connected to the cultural and linguistic community with Denmark.

The Old Norse written language had declined together with the Medieval Norwegian aristocracy and the Medieval Norwegian State, and went out of use completely in the course of the 16th century. Danish then took over as the common written language of Denmark-Norway. This did not change in 1814. The civil servant class continued to use a language it considered its own. The spoken language became even more "Danified" in the first decades of independence, and in the theatres of Christiana, which heavily influenced the norms of proper spoken language, Danish actors were still used.12

"The higher faculties" of law and theology, especially law, were the most important educational paths leading to a civil servant career. The University, then, was the central institution in the reproduction of the ruling class, academic education being the prime source of political power. The great majority of students were recruited from the two upper classes, from the merchants and the academics. For peasant students, on the other hand, the threshold of the University was much higher, and academic self-recruitment grew even stronger in the first decades of independence, contrary, for instance, to the development in Sweden. Among theological candidates, 1,3 % had a peasant father in the 1810s and 20s, rising to 8,2 % in the 1850s and 60s. In the first half of the 19th century the share of peasant students among the clergy was far smaller than in either Sweden or Denmark. Among law candidates, 5,8 % had a peasant background in the period 1815–1829, falling to 3,7 % in the 1850s and 60s. Sons of academics became more dominant in both law and medicine in the same period.13 Educational capital, then, was almost monopolised by the two upper classes.

The dominant group in peasant society was the group of independent freeholders and tenant farmers. A majority of them were freeholders already at the beginning of the 19th century, and their proportion grew to 90 % in 1875. Below them was a growing group of crofters and agricultural labourers, which by mid-century had outnumbered the freeholders and tenant farmers.14

The dialects spoken in peasant society were clearly different from the written language, although Norwegian peasants were fully able to read Danish. Already in the 17th and 18th centuries, linguistically interested Norwegians considered "Norwegian" to be a separate language, and they were convinced the Old Norse language had survived in the spoken dialects of peasant society, in some of them more than in others.15

Norway, then, could claim to be a "nation", according to both "the aristocratic-cultural" and "the popular-cultural" criteria used in the 19th century. Norway was a "historic nation" in that there had existed a Norwegian state with a distinct aristocratic high culture in the Middle Ages, and Norway was a nation in that there still existed a separate national language in peasant society. But this particular combination of aristocratic-historical and popular-cultural arguments was an asset only to those claiming to represent peasant society. For the class of civil servants it was extremely problematical because it made the peasants the true "heirs" of the old independent state and aristocracy, while their own cultural capital ended up being devalued as "foreign".

Elite attitudes towards "peasant culture" were therefore highly ambiguous. An initial step in trying to come to terms with this ambiguity and the way it affected the struggle over what was to count as "Norwegian culture", is to see how both "peasant" and "culture" appeared in different discourses that highlighted different, at times directly contradictory aspects. The role of "the peasant" in national discourse could be conceptualised either primarily as a property owner or primarily as a cultural and linguistic entity. In the first instance the egalitarian social structure of peasant society, that is, the absence of a strong landed aristocracy, was held as the prime national characteristic of Norway. In the second instance, emphasis was put on peasant language and traditional peasant culture, mainly oral. The concept of "culture", on the other hand, became part of discourses that were even more difficult to reconcile. In one dominant discourse, "culture" was primarily held to be a social distinction. It was "culture" that ordered the "estates" of Norwegian society into a hierarchy. The civil servants were the more "cul-
vated”, the peasants less, or not at all. One talked about the “educated” class (den dimme klasse), and the social discourse on culture tended to make “culture” a downright class attribute. This was seemingly confirmed by the socially exclusive recruitment to the university. To become an “educated” person, one almost had to be born into an educated family. To be “educated” in this sense was the result of a socially produced habitus, rather than the outcome of a formal education. For those coming from outside the cultivated classes, education meant a total “transformation”, the passing from one world to another. Culture in this respect distinguished high and low, light and darkness, the universal and the particular, progress and backwardness. ‘Peasant culture’ would seem to be almost a contradiction in terms.

All this was quite different in the other dominant discourse, where culture figured as a national distinction. According to this criterion, the ruling class might be cultured, but its culture was not Norwegian. And the peasants might be less cultured, but their culture was at least national. This is what explains the appeal of using the language of national distinction to anyone aiming at challenging, destabilising, reversing or trying to even out social hierarchies. The hierarchy in one discourse could be turned upside down in the other.

This is, in my opinion, the central background we must take into account when trying to understand the Norwegian struggle over written language. This struggle cannot be reduced to an expression of “Norwegian cultural nationalism”; it has to be seen as an articulation of social and political conflicts that could acquire symbolic legitimacy through the discourse of national distinction. The intense struggle over the written language was not a peripheral, “purely cultural” question either. Since the ruling class ruled according to its cultural superiority, the struggle over what was to count as the legitimate, national culture was vital to the reproduction of social and political power in society at large.

Starting from these considerations, I will distinguish three periods in the Norwegian national discourse on language, culture and history from 1770 through the 19th century. From 1770–1830 Patriotic and Enlightenment ideas dominated, and the central concept was that of “national character”. From the 1830s Romanticism made its way into the debate, creating a tension between “nation” and “culture”. And from the mid 1860s the “nation-building projects” were polarised and split into two antagonistic ones. Not surprisingly, “the peasant” became more controversial the more he gained a political and cultural voice of his own.

1770–1830: Patriotism, Enlightenment and “the national character”

In “The Nordic Enlightenment”, with its pragmatic, anti-utopian character, the peasant became the foremost symbol. Instead of the usual picture of the peasant as rude, ill-bred, and uneducated, the Nordic peasants were seen as carriers of freedom, equality, and education, the mythical incarnation of all the central Enlightenment values. This rustic Enlightenment had continental sources of inspiration. Voltaire, for instance, had idealised Nordic heroes, and pictured Northern people as tall, healthy, strong, brave, proud and long-lived, ideally suited to being warriors. Montesquieu (1748) had seen the North as the cradle of freedom, and the Northern peoples as destined to break the chains of tyranny forged in the south. The outstanding qualities of Northerners were explained by reference to the climatic and other natural conditions of the North, and were part of that rediscovery and revaluation of the North which took place in European high culture from the mid 18th century. For the North, together with the seas and the mountains, had filled European aristocrats with fear and repulsion since Medieval times, representing cold and darkness, and its imaginary geography inhabited with sea monsters, witches, and people living miserable lives under depressing conditions.

This gradually changed from the second half of the 18th century, culminating in the emotional strategies and aesthetics of the romantic sublime. In this process Northern nature was reinterpreted as being especially suited to the nurturing of attractive virtues, like bravery, hardiness, loyalty, self-confidence and unwillingness to put up with injustice, that is, characteristics usually attributed to the aristocracy. In Norway these virtues were not only explained by reference to nature, but also to the allodial rights that were held to be a major product of Norwegian history and a main characteristic of the structure of Norwegian society. These characteristics also had a strong affinity to the “virtues of citizenship” hailed by classical learning, like public spirit, a sense of justice, patriotism, outspokenness and so on. To learned circles

in the Nordic countries, then, Classicism, Enlightenment and Nordic enthusiasm could merge in an idealised picture of the free peasant.

A Norwegian patriotism of this kind emerged in the 1770s, due to an increase in literary production, a temporary suspension of censorship, and a focus on Norwegian topics. The question of national identity emerged partly because of German influence in the Danish-Norwegian administration, spurring debate over what was to count as “the fatherland”. In the last decades of the Absolutist state, a sense of a separate national identity clearly existed in the Norwegian elite, though without developing into a national movement aiming at Norwegian independence.

The peasant-idolatry of Nordic Enlightenment could be justified by pointing to the role of the peasants in estate assemblies and local government, and in Norway it certainly made an impact on the work of the Constituent Assembly of 1814. With national independence Norway emerged as the most advanced of all the Nordic countries by liberal-democratic standards. As property owner, the peasant was suddenly elevated to the status of a political citizen. The constitution of 1814 granted suffrage to anybody owning or leasing registered land. Consequently, almost 45% of the male population above 25 was qualified to elect representatives to Parliament. Unaccustomed to their constitutional rights, until the 1830s, the peasants to a large extent elected civil servants to represent them politically.

"Patriotic Liberalism" continued to be the hegemonic ideology of the ruling civil servant class after 1814. The central dichotomy of the ideology was the opposition between "freedom" and "despotism". In this perspective 1814 was interpreted as signalling the revival of the Old Norse freedom, a freedom that had been suppressed during the centuries of Danish rule. The peasant was still considered the incarnation of the Norwegian "national character", and the Constitution safeguarded the institution of alodial rights that were seen as the cornerstone of Norwegian history and distinctiveness. Both nature and "history", then, established a direct connection between the "old" and the "new" Norway, with the peasant-cum-property-owner constituting the link.

What about the educational aspect of the Nordic Enlightenment? Jostein Fet has shown a sharp increase in book ownership among the Norwegian peasantry from the mid 18th century, mainly in religious literature. Although it is difficult to infer from ownership to reading, and to estimate to what degree book-buying was conspicuous consumption, his picture of "reading peasants" seems to be a legitimate counterweight to the more traditional picture of an illiterate pre-modern peasantry. In this context, the local Enlightenment tradition and learned culture of Sunnmøre is of special interest. It has been highlighted especially by Arne Apselth, who explains it by referring to the democratisation of written culture in the wake of the confirmation decree of 1736, the local spirit of economic enterprise, relatively egalitarian social conditions, and the long distance to major towns. This created an environment well suited for Enlightenment clergymen bent on disseminating knowledge and learning to the common people. In Sunnmøre the activities of Hans Strøm in the 1760s and 70s were especially important in creating a peasantry-dominated book culture, institutionalized in three libraries, a teacher's seminar, the first printe's shop in the Norwegian countryside, and a newspaper as early as 1810. This was the environment in which Ivar Aasen, who laid the foundations for a new Norwegian written language, grew up. This local learned culture provided him with an alternative model of "education", independent of the academic and socially exclusive one, and it made Aasen a life-long opponent of all efforts to make culture, learning, and education a class attribute.

Important in this respect is also the religious Hauge movement of the early 19th century. By challenging the religious authority of the academic clergy, Haugianism too was an important factor in the empowerment and self-assertion of peasant society. Popular religion was perhaps the single most important force in developing a culture of reading and speech that could educate members from the peasants' own ranks to represent peasant society politically.

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1830–1865: National Romanticism and the growing tension between nation and “culture”

The proportion of peasant representatives in the Storting increased sharply from 25% to 45% in the early 1830s, stabilising around 40% in the 1840s and 50s. Rural representatives also, at least in periods, gathered behind a policy adverse to civil servant interests. The civil servants, then, lost their firm control over parliamentary politics. In return they strengthened their control over the government at the expense of the king.

In the 1830s a new generation of civil servants replaced the old. They initiated a basic modernisation of Norwegian society, developing communications and replacing a system of economic privileges and regulations with a free market economy. The shift was accompanied by an intellectual and ideological reorientation towards a more “classical” liberalism with a sharper elitist profile. It contained a theory of political leadership which underlined the active, leading role of the government, and a theory of social leadership which unequivocally made the academics an aristocracy of “mind”, “education”, and “intelligence.” They attacked the patriotic ideology of the older generation for being a mousy, national boasting that only served to cover up the backwardness and poverty of contemporary Norwegian society. The hailing of an ancient Norwegian “freedom” was brushed aside as historical anachronism. New and old freedom were two different things, they claimed, and the new freedom had been obtained almost by sheer accident. They held isolationism to be the prime danger to the further development of Norwegian society, and appreciated the cultural and linguistic community with Denmark as a necessary condition for participating in European culture at all, both in the past and in the present.

But at the same time this was also the generation that introduced National Romanticism to Norway, with its concept of a particular Norwegian “national” or “folk spirit”. This provided for some acute tensions in the new ideology, particularly concerning the question of the national language.

Language had been a delicate issue ever since independence. In the constitution of 1814 the written language had been called “Norwegian”; a linguistic “coup attempt” that the Academic Collegium of the University backed with the argument that the language had been used and developed by Danes and Norwegians in common for so many centuries that Norwegians had acquired the right to call it their own. This argument was met by forceful resistance from Danish linguistic authorities. In 1832 it was also rejected by the leading Norwegian authority in linguistic matters, P.A. Munch, who simply stated that the written language was “Danish, nothing but Danish”.

Three main attitudes prevailed towards this fact. The first was to accept, and even appreciate it. The second was the strategy formed by Knud Knudsen. He called the written language “Dano-Norwegian”, and opted for its gradual “Norwegianization”. The third attitude argued for establishing a new and pure Norwegian language, based on contemporary dialects. Ivar Aasen formulated such a programme in 1836, at the age of 22. It was not published in his own lifetime, but it tells us something about his motivations, which were three-fold. First he had a social argument: He was upset every time he experienced the contempt with which popular language was referred to by members of the higher classes. He wanted to challenge social hierarchies, and show the biased character of the existing ranking of high-grade and low-grade language. Then he had a political argument: The constitution required competent citizens, which again presupposed a wider appropriation of written culture. This would be a problem as long as the written language was so different from the oral. The third argument, his trump card, he played out immediately: The foremost distinction of every nation, he said, was to have its own written language.

Starting in 1841, Aasen received a scholarship from the state enabling him to travel through large parts of Norway gathering linguistic material. He published his first results in a grammar in 1848 and a dictionary in 1850. Both books were very favourably reviewed, and immediately granted Aasen status as a linguistic authority. Aasen’s work in those years was generally supported by the cultural elite, including P.A. Munch. Munch’s motive was partly philological and documentary: he wanted to prove that there really existed a distinct Norwegian language, and that the Old Norse language was still alive. The existence of a distinct Norwegian language was generally held to support and legitimise the existence of a separate Norwegian state. To many, the whole point of Aasen’s work ended there. Munch, though, was during the 1840s not

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totally unwilling to support even Aasen's more far-reaching goals: the development of an independent Norwegian written language for overall usage. But in the early 1850s he stopped flirting with such ideas. In 1853 he launched a forceful attack on the reformist endeavour of Knud Knudsen, an attack that clearly identified Munch as a defender of the linguistic status quo. To make rural dialects, Old Norse, or a Norwegianised version of Danish the new written language, he said, would be to retard cultural development by several hundred years, and to renounce participation in overall European development. A Norwegian language was incompatible with modern life, he claimed; it would succumb between mahogany furniture, floor carpets, and newspapers, and in the noise from steam ships, railways and factories. It could only thrive within the beam walls, the hearth, and the smokehouse. Peasant culture, then, was identified with backwardness, and Munch's concern for language as a cultural and social distinction won out over his concern for language as national distinction. The revolutionary upheavals of 1848, which in Norway found an offshoot in the so-called Thane-movement, made for an overall conservative turn in the 1850s, also in linguistic matters. Thus Munch could for instance claim that Knudsen's wish to approximate the phonic signs to spoken sounds was "communism applied to orthography." In this climate Knudsen lost many of his former elite allies.

If the nation was not to be rooted in a separate written language, what else could serve such a purpose? For Munch the answer was ethno-history. His main contribution to Norwegian cultural nationalism was to write the first comprehensive history of Medieval Norway. In addition he set out to prove that the Old Norse language was not Icelandic or Nordic, but Norwegian. Consequently, the prestigious literature written in this language was also a truly Norwegian (including Icelandic) heritage, not a common Nordic heritage, as particularly Danish scholars claimed. Munch's cultural nationalism was basically directed at establishing exclusive Norwegian proprietary rights to a heritage he thought had been unlawfully appropriated by Denmark and Sweden. In this strategy, the past was to serve the present as a kind of cultural capital that would encourage national pride. In his efforts to regain for Norway what he considered to have been illegitimately annexed by others, he was uncompromisingly nationalist. But in the present he held the cultural community with Denmark as a necessary condition for development.

Another answer was to locate the nation in nature. This was no longer the nature of the Enlightenment, the breeding ground of high virtues, but nature romantically reinterpreted as a source of the inner self and a symbolic reservoir for expressing the inner self, both individually and collectively. This was the answer of the poet J.S. Welhaven. He held nature to be a formative power both in the past and the present, and in the poetic and painted landscape one could (re)discover one's true self.

The third strategy was to look for the national in folk songs, folk music, and folk tales, where a huge task of collection was undertaken from the 1840s onwards. While privileging peasant culture as the most "authentic", this strategy at the same time reproduced the social hierarchy confining peasant culture to the domain of the purely oral. The search for "the genuine" and "the original" tended to blur the fact that 19th century popular culture was already mediated by writing, and the outcome of complex interactions between high and low, popular and learned. In the presentation of this material a more popular language was accepted and recommended, and it was particularly in this respect that the work of Aasen was held to be of practical value. But to culture proper, these collections constituted only raw material. To be presented as culture, for instance in the national poetry of Welhaven, the popular material had first to be refined through the aesthetic and linguistic conventions of the educated class.

After the struggle for linguistic reform had been definitely rejected in the early 1850s, its protagonists went underground, until they resurfaced in 1858. This year A.O. Vinje, a poet, journalist, and probably the first of the crofter class to attain the highest university degree, started his weekly paper Dølen ("The Dalesman") written in Landimål, although in a form not totally in accordance with the Aasen standard. Aasen himself took the step from being a pure linguist, to being an oppositional language entrepreneur. The term "Landimål", "Country Language", had a triple connotation, denoting, first, the language actually spoken in the

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29. Ibid.
countryside, second, the only language *legitimately* belonging to the
country, and third, the *future* goal of making this the language of the
whole country.32

Vinje's *Dalen* was the first paper to use the new language as a general
literary language, and this provocation brought about the first in a series
of major public confrontations over the *Landsmål* program. The main
opponent in 1858 was the philosopher M.J. Monrad. Monrad's main
point was for the most part the same as Munch's; it was pure fantasy to
try to make a literary language out of peasant dialects. Peasant language
could express peasant life, but was unthinkable in the domains of high
culture, such as politics, religion, philosophy, science and law. He criticised the "constructed", "artificial" character of *Landsmål* - it was, in
Monrad's German phrase, a "Machwerk" - which was simply to say that
peasant language should remain purely oral, and be kept inside the
sphere of the "idyllic", "immediate", "unreflective", and "natural".33 In
fact, the "constructed" character of the Aasen standard was nothing but
a standardisation required by writing as such.

The supporters of Aasen and Vinje at this time were on the whole a
tiny faction of the academics in Christiania. Even peasant politicians
were largely indifferent to their endeavours. The civil servant elite was
by now consolidated behind the need to reject *Landsmål*, and in the
1860s Vinje was simply boycotted by the Christiania newspapers.

The paradox of this situation is that the work of Aasen was seem-
ingly perfectly adapted to fit National Romanticism. The "problem"
was that he wanted to create a *new*, modern Norwegian language, based
on existing, rural dialects. This gave his work less symbolic value and
utopian appeal,34 in addition to posing a threat to the whole cultural
capital of the ruling class. Let us suppose that the Old Norse language
had died out altogether, and that the language shift had been as thor-
oughgoing in rural as in urban areas. Then there quite probably would
have appeared a Norse movement as an elite project. In such a situation
the appeal for a purely Norwegian language would have meant the re-
awakening of an aristocratic past, not the social and cultural elevation of
contemporary peasant society.

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34. Spring 2000.

1865–1905: Mass democracy and polarisation

Beginning in the 1870s, the independent civil servant government met
consolidated resistance from a majority of peasant and urban radical rep-
resentatives in Parliament. In 1884 the King was forced to appoint a
new government from the opposition, and from then on a parliamentary
governmental system based on party organisations was gradually estab-
lished. After 1884 the major political issue was the growing controversy
with Sweden over rights and responsibilities between the two union
partners. The Liberal Party launched a more offensive union policy from
1891, and took advantage of a growing nationalist wave towards the end of
the century. In 1905 even the Conservative Party finally backed the
decision to abolish the royal union with Sweden, which meant abolishing
the whole union.

In this period the *Landsmål* activists became part of the broad move-
ment that constituted the Liberal Party. When the Liberal Party took over
government responsibility in 1884, one of its first moves was to grant
*Landsmål* equal status as an official, national language. In 1892 each
school authority was allowed to decide whether textbooks should be in
*Landsmål* or in "the general book language", as the older written language
was now being called, and immediately several hundred school districts
decided in favour of Landsmål. The new language was also given academic status by the establishment of a Landsmål professorship in 1899.

The language movement was still heavily influenced by academics. Importantly in this respect is the growing proportion of students with a peasant and rural background, particularly from the 1870s. Among the Landsmål students at the university around the turn of the century, 44% had peasant fathers, while 16% were sons of schoolteachers. Schoolteachers were themselves the other major foundation of the movement - around 1900 the movement had to a large extent become a teacher's movement. Their support for the new language was partly motivated by pedagogical reasons. In addition, Landsmål became part of a whole "Norwegianness" ideology that furnished the schoolteachers with the self-confident identity of a social group that was escalating to a position of cultural and political leadership in rural society. They were, as Reidun Høydal has called them, "the nation builders of the periphery". This social basis is significant since it indicates the "in between" position of the main protagonists of the Landsmål movement. They were situated between the peasant society that was their origin, and the educated culture that had allowed them to advance beyond this origin. From this position they claimed to speak on behalf of and in defence of peasant culture, while at the same time being committed to the task of "enlightening", "elevating" peasant culture towards the standards of "high" culture. Norw was never meant to be the universalisation of the existing peasant culture. What he wanted, Vinje said, was not to reflect popular speech, but to talk like a peasant would have talked if he had had more knowledge. Landsmål was constructed to mediate between learned and popular, high and low, thereby calling the fixity of these distinctions into question.

The polarisation between the Liberal and the Conservative parties from the 1870s was accompanied by a struggle about what was to count as legitimate culture going beyond the question of national language. From the 1860s there also emerged two competing versions of Norwegian history. For both parties it was vital to overcome the impression of abrupt, seemingly accidental reversals in Norwegian history. Of particular importance was the incorporation of 1814 into Norwegian history, which again meant domesticating "the Danish period" and showing that Norway had a separate history also during these centuries. For this whole generation of historians, history constituted a coherent development. This made history something more than cultural capital, it became a community of origin and destiny. But then it also became vital to be able to define the essence of this continuous line of development: What had the present emerged from, and towards what did it point?

According to the Conservative account, the Old Norse state was over, past history with no explanatory relevance for contemporary developments. The preconditions for the new state of 1814 were to be found in the cultural, legal, and social developments of the Danish period. According to this interpretation it was the civil servant class that represented the main line of continuity between pre- and post-1814 Norwegian history. It also claimed that Medieval history had shown that an independent Norwegian state had not been able to survive, and that Norway had prospered only during the association with Denmark and the contemporary union with Sweden. This version of Norwegian history was an argument for upholding the sense of cultural community with Denmark and strengthening the political union with Sweden.

Against this version Ernst Sars, the leading Liberal historian, set out to show that although Norwegian society had received new points of departure during the centuries of Danish rule, the main line of continuity was a line stretching all the way back to the Viking and Medieval period. To Sars the constituting characteristic of Norwegian society was the large degree of peasant proprietorship and the freedom of the tenants. This social structure was the product of the struggle between monarchy and aristocracy in the Middle Ages, he claimed, and it was preserved throughout the union with Denmark. The hailing of peasant freedom was the essence of Norwegian patriotism from the end of the 18th century, and the inspirational source behind all that was achieved in 1814. Sars's message was that the course of Norwegian history did not point towards greater political community with the other Nordic countries, but towards full sovereignty.

Sars's version of Norwegian history was in continuity with the old Patriotic Liberalism. In both cases, emphasis was put on the peasant as landowner. This version of history became an integral part of Liberal

ideology, and on the whole united all fractions of the party. In 1905 it even became the hegemonic national version, when "history itself" seemingly had proven Sars right. In part, this version also legitimised the Landsmål movement, but towards the end of the century the peasant as a cultural figure turned out to be a source of division also in the Liberal party. From the 1870s there emerged three positions that would end up as conflicting oppositions. In 1877 the poet Arne Garborg forcefully stated that there existed two nations in Norway, each connected to its own language, and that those who held the Danish language as their own, ought to be considered "a province of Denmark". The doctrine of "two nations" had been put forward also by Assen in 1864. Sars was always a firm opponent of this view. He talked instead of "two cultures" or "two societies", one with antecedents all the way back to prehistory, one that had emerged during the centuries of Danish rule. But Sars denied that this cleavage was identical with a cleavage between Norwegian and Danish, or between culture and non-culture. Both societies were Norwegian, he claimed, and both had culture, but while peasant society was the most national, the other was the most cultured. The existence of two languages was the necessary expression of the ruptures of Norwegian history and the resulting cleavage of Norwegian society. The Landsmål was to Sars necessary for purely national reasons, and the two languages had to coexist and compete with each other until they finally merged, signalling that national unity at last had been achieved.

Garborg was himself moving towards this position in the 1890s, but a rapprochement was abruptly ruled out when the foremost Liberal agitator and cultural personality, Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, in 1899 started his frontal attack on the Landsmål movement, much to his friend Sars’s disapproval. Bjørnson now moved into the old elitist position, claiming that there existed only one educated culture, and that the true home of this culture was the capital city Kristiania. Repeating Munch and Monrad, he accused Landsmål for being incompatible with development and outwardness, even with Christianity and the promotion of cleanliness. Bjørnson’s new position was enthusiastically received by the Conservatives, and in a few years lead him to break with the Liberal Party. His speech in 1899 became the starting point for organising the supporters of the linguistic community with Denmark, and Bjørnson also came up with one more solution to the same problem. He introduced the term Riksmål — “the language of the realm” — with its more royal connotation than Landsmål — “the language of the country”.

From now on the fronts were clear and locked into place, and on both sides the language struggle was being firmly coupled to the urban/rural opposition. This dichotomising rhetoric and mutually exclusive identities were constantly being reproduced by the combating parties. Landsmål was the expanding language for the following decades, culminating during the Second World War when 34 % of the school districts were using New Norwegian, as it was now called, a proportion later falling to 15–20 %.

Conclusion

I will conclude by making two points. The first concerns the relation between Landsmål and modernism. Landsmål has often been called a "counter culture" in the sense of being a defence reaction against modernisation. It seems more precise to call it an integral part of the cultural appropriation of modernity — "appropriation" denoting exchange, interaction, translation, co-production, and selective adaptation to one’s own needs and frame of reference, in contrast to diffusion, consumption, and purely elite, top-down agency. Landsmål was part of, not opposed to, the integration of peasant and rural society in political democracy, cultural modernity, and market economy. That it was possible to reconcile modernity with peasant culture and rural identity was just what Munch, Monrad and Bjørnson denied. The development of Landsmål since then has simply proven them wrong.

The second point concerns the relationship between language, citizenship and national identity within the framework of European nationalism. Political citizenship was obviously related to the moulding of national identity, and it presupposed the mastery of a national language. In the 19th century language was at the same time considered the foremost expression of national unity, identity and distinctiveness. The existence of two written languages was therefore considered by all par-

43. Time 1997.

44. For instance Nordby 1991.
imperfect, and impure. On closer analysis one can demonstrate how all these homogenising discourses concealed and repressed internal differences, trans-cultural border-crossings, and the ambivalent in-betweens that constantly destabilised them. The difference even in the name of the country – “Norge” vs. “Noreg” – was already a symptom of the necessarily contested nature of every effort to create national unity and identity. The national, homogenising rhetoric that followed the Landsmål project, particularly from the 1870s, tended to blur its most important achievement, namely that Landsmål was primarily an effort at mediation and trans-culturation – between high and low, foreign and domestic, tradition and modernity. What we can learn from the history of the Norwegian language dispute is that citizenship does not require a homogeneous national culture and identity. Political community is compatible with competing historical narratives, cultural identities, and even written languages. New Norwegian should then not be interpreted as the only, truly national language, but as one way of being a Norwegian citizen and relating to the Norwegian political community.

The gradual expansion of democratic and social rights is the core theme of all histories of modern Norway, as it is in most western developed countries. The temporary success of the welfare state, with its emphasis on rational, scientific-like political engineering intent upon overcoming all threatening cleavages of the past, has throughout most of the post-war era produced culturally defined “counter cultures”. With its themes rooted in the nation-building phase of the 19th century, they seem historically to provide the “solution” to the so-called “social question”. What appeared as an overwhelming success for the social democratic integration project could make countercultures centred on issues like lay-religion, popular language and the dangers of alcohol look like anachronisms slowly dying away in the more peripheral parts of cultural and political life. This historical perspective is not as obvious as it used to be. The neo-liberal challenges in a multitude of ways washes away what kept us from seeing this clearly. With the New also the Old returned. Perhaps the social democratic project itself was just an episode. Is the New Norwegian language, which Aasen built, also overcome in the same way? Here, however, there is an important difference. Because Ivar Aasen is a proto-politician, he does not represent a clearly defined social movement. He was more of a de-constructor of literate power within the cultural field. His focus was on the technology of literate power. And thereby he becomes a machine builder himself.
ties a sign of a divided, unfinished, and incomplete nation. The ideal of national homogeneity was a common presupposition between Garborg, Sars, and Bjornson. To all of them the existing situation was temporary, imperfect, and impure. On closer analysis one can demonstrate how all these homogenising discourses concealed and repressed internal differences, trans-cultural border-crossings, and the ambivalent in-betweens that constantly destabilised them.45 The difference even in the name of the country – “Norge” vs. “Norøg” – was already a symptom of the necessarily contested nature of every effort to create national unity and identity. The national, homogenising rhetoric that followed the Ladesmål project, particularly from the 1870s, tended to blur its most important achievement, namely that Ladesmål was primarily an effort at mediation and trans-culturation – between high and low, foreign and domestic, tradition and modernity. What we can learn from the history of the Norwegian language dispute is that citizenship does not require a homogeneous national culture and identity. Political community is compatible with competing historical narratives, cultural identities, and even written languages. New Norwegian should then not be interpreted as the only, truly national language, but as one way of being a Norwegian citizen and relating to the Norwegian political community.

Response to Narve Fulsås

Ivar Aasen – The Cultural Deconstructionist

Nils Rune Langeland

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