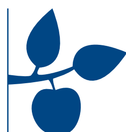
Department of Border Region Studies
Working Paper Series

Working Paper No. 05/15

‘We Remain What We Are’ North Schleswig German Identities in Children’s Education after 1945

Tobias Haimin Wung-Sung
University of Southern Denmark



UNIVERSITY OF SOUTHERN DENMARK

Department of Border Region Studies Working Paper 5/2015

Editor: Olivier J. Walther, Ph.D.

Department of Border Region Studies
University of Southern Denmark
Alsion 2, DK-6400 Sønderborg
Tel. +45.65.50.83.93
Fax: +45 6550 1779
E-mail: ow@sam.sdu.dk

The Department of Border Region Studies Working Papers are circulated to encourage the exchange of ideas about borders, regional economics, and global business. The findings and conclusions expressed in these papers are those of the authors and do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of Border Region Studies or the University of Southern Denmark. The working papers have not been peer-reviewed.

© University of Southern Denmark and the author, 2015

‘We Remain What We Are’
North Schleswig German Identities in Children’s Education after 1945

Tobias Haimin Wung-Sung
University of Southern Denmark
tobias@sam.sdu.dk

June 30, 2015

Abstract

Like many other ethnic Germans in Europe, the German minority in Denmark supported the Nazi regime in Germany and its policy of territorial expansion. But unlike most German minorities of Europe, the Germans in Denmark avoided post-war forced deportation or assimilation. Able to stay in their native region, the minority reconstructed their civic life over the next 25 years. The minority regarded education vital for securing the group’s long-term survival. The success of re-building schools, however, did not leave the minority unchanged. Over time, the identities that were constructed and communicated in the new schools changed as much as society surrounding them. The article brings forward this identity transformation through an analysis of the education system reconstruction process, 1945-1970. The article shows that children and youths of the German-minded minority in post-war North Schleswig attended schools that gradually replaced hostility and national separatism with transnational inclusion and an international outlook.

Keywords: minorities, children, education, identity, history, Schleswig, Denmark, Germany

Introduction

The post-war German minority experience in North Schleswig both resembles and differs from other German minority experiences in Europe. The minority in North Schleswig shared with minorities in other regions their origin being the plebiscites of the Versailles settlement. In essence, it was the 1920 redrawing of the Danish-German border that created a German national minority in Denmark. It differed from experiences in other German borderlands mainly for two reasons. First, the region was never re-annexed by the Third Reich, even though Denmark was occupied during 1940-45. Second, those affiliated with the German minority were neither forcefully displaced nor assimilated after the Second World War, as was common practice in other nationally contested areas of post-war Europe.

In North Schleswig therefore, we have the opportunity to study the post-war identities of children and young people who never in their own lifetimes were a minority in their host state. But, as it will also become clear in this article, the lines between minority and majority were never static and clear-cut. Similarly, we cannot speak of German minority identities as being uncontested and unequivocal phenomena. Some degree of interaction and individual variation was always present in the conceptualisations, practicing and manifestations of North Schleswig German identity, even if the opposite appeared to be the case.

'We remain what we are' was the title of an article from 1954 in the minority's annual publication, *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig*. Its author, teacher Hans Schmidt-Gorsblock, wrote that, in 1945, it would have been 'pointless to believe in German-ness (*Volkstum*) in North Schleswig.' But then 'the North Schleswig people's character (*Volkskarakter*) arose' and the German minority secured its survival.[1] Indeed, nine years after the end of the Second World War, the German minority in Denmark was steadily reconstructing a civic life in North Schleswig. Schmidt-Gorsblock argued that the minority would remain what they were. But in reality, German minority identity changed substantially in the twenty-five years following 1945.

This article presents an interpretation of the changes to German minority identities offered to children through education in North Schleswig after the Second World War. It seeks to bring forward what ideas and perceptions of self-understanding that schools and the education system wished to communicate to children and young people. The article acknowledges that identity is often seen as static, but that communications and assertions of identities studied over a longer period make clear that identities are fluid phenomena and subject to constant transformation and negotiation.[2]

Scholars have already established the relationship between national identity and education. According to Eric Hobsbawm, for example, nations need the communication provided by mass-literacy and national education.[3] Ernest Gellner understands it as 'essential for nationalism to be kept and protected by a national education and communications system.'[4] In this regard, the nation is seen as an 'imagined community' as coined by Benedict

[1] Hans Schmidt-Gorsblock, 'Wir bleiben was wir sind' in Volkskalender (1954), 21.
[2] See for example Richard Jenkins, Social Identity (London: Routledge, 1996), 4-5.
[3] E. J. Hobsbawm, Nations and Nationalism since 1780 : Programme, Myth, Reality, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9-12.
[4] Ernest Gellner, Nations and Nationalism, (New York Cornell University Press, 1983), 52.

Anderson.[5] The nation exists when a group of people believe they share the same 'system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.'[6] This group of people are of the same nation if they recognise each other as belonging to it. Understanding the nation as a construction has strong implications on children's national identity. Jonathan Scourfield argues, for example, that as 'national feeling is not natural or instinctive in children but cultivated in them (by adults), the nation's schools are places where dominant discourses of national identity and history are promulgated.'[7]

In order to make the identity changes more lucid, the article starts with an introductory discussion of the origins of – and the prelude to – the German minority in Denmark after 1945. This provides the necessary framework within which the changes taking place after 1945 need to be embedded. Thereafter, the article goes into greater details and analyses more closely the changes over time. As the first part discusses only superficially a number of topics, which on their own are subjects of whole academic careers, references are provided, where possible, to Anglophone key works. The discussion in the second part of the article, however, is almost exclusively based on analysis of primary sources. The German minority in Denmark after 1945 still remains virtually unexplored in international scholarship. Hopefully this article can provide a non-Danish/German readership access to this particular minority experience.

Schleswig between Danish and German

By the nineteenth century, conflicting nationalisms challenged the stability of the Danish composite monarchy and its complicated structure. For centuries, the compound state comprised the kingdom itself alongside the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. In 1815, Holstein entered the German Confederation and a growing national movement in the duchy aimed to release it from Copenhagen rule and establish closer ties with other German states.[8] In Denmark, a national movement favoured releasing Holstein from the monarchy too; but Schleswig was the source of conflict between the two movements.[9]

The movement in Holstein regarded the two duchies inseparable and rejected the Danish position that Schleswig was ancient Danish land. In Schleswig itself, the two movements divided the local population who, up until then, navigated quite un-problematically between Danish and German influences. Both Danish and German languages, for example, were used in different circumstances and did not necessarily indicate the speaker's national loyalty. Well into the twentieth century, in fact, neither High Danish nor High German were the first languages of Schleswig's population; the overwhelming majority spoke the regional dialects

---

[5] Benedict Anderson, Imagined Communities : Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism, (London: Verso, 1983).
[6] Gellner, 7.
[7] Jonathan Scourfield, Children, Place and Identity : Nation and Locality in Middle Childhood, (London: Routledge, 2006).
[8] See for example, Steen Bo Frandsen, Holsten i Helstaten (Copenhagen: Tusculanum, 2008).
[9] The scholarship on Schleswig is vast, especially in the Danish and German languages. For the most recent account of the history of Schleswig in English see: Peter Thaler, Of Mind and Matter : The Duality of National Identity in the German-Danish Borderlands, (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2009). For an introduction in English to the German minority in Denmark see Karen Margrethe Pedersen, A National Minority with a Transethnic Identity – the German Minority in Denmark in Stefan Wolff (ed.), German Minorities in Europe, Ethnic Identity and Cultural Belonging (Oxford, Berghahn Books, 2000), 15-28.

Low Danish and Low German.[10] Even the use of dialect did not necessarily reflect the speaker's national loyalty.

Following the Second Schleswig War in 1864, the Danish monarchy ceded Schleswig and Holstein to Prussia and Austria. In 1867, Prussia annexed the duchies, which became provinces in unified Germany after 1871. This structure remained until 1920 when a plebiscite divided historical Schleswig into a northern and a southern part. Facilitated by the Versailles treaty and the Wilsonian principles of national self-determination, North Schleswig became a part of the Danish Kingdom whereas South Schleswig remained part of Germany.

Following a period of national contestation over Schleswig, the 1920 border thus created the German minority in Denmark. The North Schleswig Germans that became Danish citizens descended mostly from regionally native sympathisers of the Schleswig-Holstein movement, and also in part from Prussian or other German families that settled in North Schleswig between 1864 and 1920. Despite its strong ties to the region, the minority contested from the beginning the legitimacy of the new border. In particular, it challenged the technicalities of the plebiscite. The minority disputed that votes in North Schleswig were counted *en bloc*, so that all constituencies in the region were regarded as one zone.[11] This way of counting resulted in a 75 percent Danish majority, but the larger towns and southernmost rural areas presented higher concentrations of German votes. In consequence several constituencies within the zone were ceded to Denmark despite having clear German majorities. Immediately after 1920, a revision of the border became a central ambition for the minority's political part.

The Danish annexation led to serious economic problems too.[12] Particularly in the larger towns, the minority stood strong in trade, business and commerce; however, adjusting their trade to new markets was problematic. The market town of Flensburg remained in Germany which forced North Schleswigers to seek new connections to replace the old established one. In addition to this, the interwar global economic instability contributed to the overall experience that North Schleswig was far worse off in Denmark than in Germany. The economic problems were not exclusive to the German minority but affected the entire region. Whereas the problems did not challenge seriously the overall Danish position in the region, they certainly did not contribute to a softening of German positions on the new border.

In Denmark, however, the plebiscite was a triumph. The Danish majority in North Schleswig alongside the rest of country celebrated the annexation as a reunification. But despite public support, many were aware that the new border was potentially problematic too. A very small Danish-minded minority remained in Germany but the new and much larger German one now posed the greatest threat to the border's longevity and stability. Danish authorities therefore sought to accommodate the minority's dissatisfaction.

Regarding the education of children, there were different options. The minority established German private schools, and, in addition, the Danish state operated German branches of its public schools. The state provided German education in the countryside if more than 25

---

[10] Low Danish is known in Danish as Sønderjysk and in German as Platdänisch. Low German in German is Platdeutsch.

[11] A second plebiscite was held in South Schleswig where the constituencies voted separately, facilitating potential adjustments to the border. None of the constituencies in the second zone had Danish majorities apart from very few ones on the North Frisian islands.

[12] For one of the best and most recent accounts in Danish on the consequences of the annexation see Morten Andersen, Den følte grænse (Aabenraa: Historisk Samfund for Sønderjylland, 2008).

percent of families or at least the families of ten children requested it. In the towns, the state facilitated Danish and German branches in all public schools.[13] This made German education available throughout the region, in 59 private schools, 29 public schools and in one upper-secondary school.

Despite the liberal Danish policies, the German minority never accepted their new position. Most shared the goal of a border revision, and worked actively for a German presence in North Schleswig to remain or be expanded. By 1933, Hitler's ascend to power only intensified these sentiments. Gradually, a national socialist fraction took control of most of the minority's activities, eventually marginalising completely other positions.

The Nazi permeation of the minority had strong implications on the lives of children and young people too. From the late 1930s onwards, education and leisure activities were structured to mirror German organisations. The organisations *Deutsche Jungen- und Mädchenshaft Nordschleswig* closely resembled *Hilter Jugend* and *Bund Deutscher Mädel* in Germany. Similar to their *Reich*-German counterparts, the organisations called upon young people to be aware of their duty:

> Our young people (*Junge Manschafft*) must realise that there are things more important than comfortable evenings and afternoons, than cafes and cinemas. They must feel that precisely they, in the border region, have as their task to lead the new times to breakthrough and victory.[14]

This encouragement was published in the minority's monthly publication for youths, *Junge Front*, a clearly Nazified publication, where issues of the late 1930s and 1940s asserted the minority's aim of mobilising young people in the national struggle for North Schleswig. Through Junge Front, young people were provided news of the war effort as well as political justifications for Nazism and anti-Danish separatism.

The national mobilisation of young people was reverberated on the Danish side too. In 1933, the association, Young Border Defenders (*Det Unge Grænseværn*) was formed as a counterpart to the increasingly separatist German minority. Throughout the 1930s, Young Border Defenders organised several mass-demonstrations and other activities in favour of the 1920 border. According to the association's own publication, as many as 40,000 young people may have participated in demonstrations against the minority's calls for a border revision in 1933. Whereas this number seems a high estimate considering that the total population in North Schleswig was roughly 180,000[15] at the time, photographic evidence does indicate that Young Border Defenders was indeed a mass-movement.[16]

With both Danish and German national camps mobilised, the minority welcomed the German Wehrmacht as it occupied Denmark on 9 April 1940. Like other ethnic Germans elsewhere in

---

[13] Henrik Becker-Christensen, Det Tyske Mindretal I Nordslesvig 1920-1932, (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 1990), 202-3.

[14] Jef Blume: 'Junge Mannschaft', Junge Front, no. 2, February 1939, 9 'Unsere "Junge Manschaft" soll erkennen, dass es etwas höheres gibt, als Café und Kino – sie sollen spüren, dass gerade sie im Grenzland die Aufgabe haben, der neuen Zeit zum Durchbruch und zum Sieg zu verhelfen.'

[15] Danish Statistics Portal, Population figures in Denmark, available at http://www.dst.dk/pukora/epub/upload/19249/folklim.pdf (last visited 13 May 2015).

[16] DUG, Det Unge Grænseværn (Flensburg: Duborgskolen, 1983), 13, 97, 99, 102, 107.

Europe, the minority hoped that the German army would liberate them from foreign rule and annex their region into the Third Reich. The day was described like this in *Junge Front*:

> German soldiers in North Schleswig! That means cheering, means joy, for all who can say ‘our soldiers’, for all that belong to the German people … We are now under the *Führer’s* protection! The feeling is so overwhelming that many many [sic] tears ran down the faces of young and old this morning.[17]

The minority organised young people to work actively for the German war-effort. Particularly after the invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the minority actively began to recruit young men to volunteer at the front.[18] The minority supported the German war-effort in an attempt to secure a change to the 1920 border; however, the German Nazi party perceived the situation differently, in particular the relationship between the German and the Danish nations. As argued by historian Steffen Werther, the Nazi perception of race led to a key difference between North Schleswig and the other German borderlands.[19] In the other borderlands, the perception was that inferior races dominated the German minorities. But in North Schleswig, the Germans supposedly lived together with its equal Aryan and Danish nation. Rather than bringing the minority back into the Reich, the Nazi regime wanted it to be the link between the two equal Danish and German nations. Consequently, it was actually Nazi ideology that prevented annexation of North Schleswig. This was a highly unique case in Europe, and it was deeply regretted by the minority’s different political and cultural associations.

Despite the Nazi occupation’s racially favourable view of the Danish nation, Danish resistance and animosity towards Germany and Germans grew considerably through the five years of occupation. The minority’s support of the occupiers and active participation in the war-effort therefore compromised its relationship with the majority so much that, by 1945, Danish-German relations in the border region were at an absolute low.

The showdown with the minority

Whereas the Danish government officially tolerated the German occupation and formally discouraged the public from violently resisting it, the end to the occupation in May 1945 unleashed the accumulated Danish hatred towards Germany and Germans. In North Schleswig this led to the complete and immediate stop for all German education, public and private. German private schools were confiscated as compensation for the material damage caused by the German occupation. Most German teachers were arrested, and those without Danish citizenship were deported. By far most people considered part of the minority were Danish citizen. All residents of North Schleswig had their citizenships changed with the newly-established border in 1920. The fact that a large number of teachers held German

[17] Nis Nissen: ‘Sie kommen!’, Junge Front, no. 4, April 1940, 2 ‘Deutsche Soldaten in Nordschleswig! Das heisst jubelnde, heisst Freude für alle, die ”unsere Soldaten” sagen können, für alle, die zum deutschen Volke gehören … Wir stehenunter dem Schutz des Führers! Dieses Gefühl ist so überwältigend, dass manche, manche Träne über jubge und alte zersurchte Gesichter gelaufen ist an jenen morgen.’
[18] Henrik Skov-Kristensen, Straffelejren, (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 2011), 21.
[19] Werther, Steffen, *An Unimaginable Community: The SS Idea of a ‘Greater Germanic Reich’ and the German Minority in Denmark* in Götz, Norbert (ed.), The Sea of Identities: A Century of Baltic and East European Experiences with Nationality, Class, and Gender (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2014), 85-108.

citizenships had to do with the rural nature of North Schleswig and the fact that teachers were often recruited in the larger towns of Flensburg or Kiel.

The seizure of German education was part of a much larger confrontation with the German minority. The Danish public were infuriated by the way in which the minority had expressed so blatantly their wish for annexation of North Schleswig into the Third Reich and by their support of the German war effort. The resistance movement arrested all whom they suspected had collaborated with the German occupation. In May 1945, this made it dangerous to be German-minded in North Schleswig – even for those who had not been associated with Nazism.

The children experiencing the showdown were, of course, affected by it. Not only were their schools and kindergartens closed immediately; many witnessed the arrests of family members and experienced the extreme hostility towards the minority. As experiences of children and young people in the past are hard to uncover, oral histories can sometimes shed light where traditional sources cannot. Oral histories should not be mistaken for precise accounts of what happened at a given time and place. Historian Lynn Abrams argues that 'memory is about the relationship between material facts and personal subjectivity, and it is precisely that interplay between what we remember and how we remember and why we remember that is of such interest to oral historians'.[20] In this case, the striking level of detail recalled almost 70 years later, tells us that these experiences have stuck with the individual and influenced his or her identity.

A woman born 1938 to a German minded family recalled in 2014 the arrest of her father in this way:

> As I answered the door, two young men stood outside with each their automatic weapon … they asked: 'Is your father home?' And I so nodded … my father then swiftly passed me, went with them and he was gone … it was a hatred situation in 1945 between German and Danish … only the German minority was left in Denmark because the soldiers were long gone … they [the minority] were the objects of their hatred and if he [the father] had made one attempt of escape they could have shot him dead.[21]

This woman's father was convicted and served time in prison. But even the German-minded that distanced themselves from Nazism faced danger too, as a man born 1940 recalled in 2013:

> We lived on a farm in Broager, not long from Flensburg Bay … in the German minority there were some organisations that really were Nazi … but all that my parents kept themselves away from, and then we a neighbour on one side and a neighbour on the other, and they were both members of the resistance movement, and my parents knew that very well … they were not friends but they had a good

[20] Lynn Abrams, Oral History Theory (London: Routledge, 2010), 81.
[21] Oral History Interview, F.E.C. (12.08.2013) (15:02-16:22): 'Ich gehe zum Tür und da standen dann so zwei großen junge Männer mit Maschinenpistole … sie fragten: 'er din far hjemme?' und ich so nickte … und dann sauste mein Vater schon an mir vorbei, raus, und weg war er … das war ein Hasssituation zwischen deutsch und dänisch … Die deutschen die da noch in Dänemark waren, das war nur die deutschen Minderheit, denn die deutschen Soldaten, die waren längst weg … Die [die Minderheit] waren das Objekt ihres Hasses, wenn er eine Bewegung in Richtung Flucht versucht hätte gemacht, dann dürfen sie schießen.'

relationship with each other, and I will say that they actually protected my parents when it came to the trials. It was quite dangerous to German in May ’45.[22]

Local resistance fighters were in charge of this showdown only during the very first months after capitulation. After a formal judicial system was re-installed, all arrested were given individual trials and sentences. The British Foreign Office suggested solving the problem by exchanging populations with the Danish-minded minority in South Schleswig. The Danish government in Copenhagen always refused this.[23] From the point of view of the minority, the application of *ex post facto* laws challenged the legitimacy of the trials. In other words, the minority disputed the verdict of actions as crimes when the actions had not been illegal at the time of doing. Particularly disputed were the convictions of young men who had volunteered to serve in an armed but civil group in North Schleswig, never actually in battle. Within the German minority, around 3,500 individuals were arrested out of whom 3,000 were sentenced. This corresponded to roughly one in four of all German minority males.[24]

In reality, the Danish showdown with the minority was not a question of law; rather it was a question of perception. The Danish position perceived the German minority first and foremost as Danish citizens. Their collaboration with Germany, thus, was seen as treachery. This perception of the minority was tied to the nineteenth-century Danish nationalist understanding of Schleswig and its population as being essentially Danish. The Danish view never perceived the minority as genuinely German but rather as Germanised Danes. The North Schleswig German self-perception was the opposite. From their point of view the 1920 division of Schleswig was the main source of conflict. Although the minority *de jure* had been Danish citizens since 1920, *de facto* their loyalty had remained with the German nation. The minority argued that Danish position never acknowledged the loyalty conflict between feelings of national belonging and citizenship.

The Danish accommodation of German cultural autonomy in the interwar years was as much a product of stabilising the border as it was respecting the minority’s sense of national belonging. Lying in ruins, Germany was unable to challenge the border or Danish sovereignty in North Schleswig. Furthermore, the minority no longer could look towards Germany for a kin-state through which it could renegotiate and reconstruct its identity. By 1945 the minority therefore was left with two real options; it could either dissolve or change radically.

With the wartime political and cultural leadership imprisoned, a group of prominent North Schleswigers very quickly assumed new and official leadership. The reorganised minority became based on a secret society of well-to-do men from Haderslev, the so-called *Haderslebener Kreis*. In 1943, these men had written a manifesto in secrecy, declaring absolute loyalty to the Danish state and recognising unequivocally the 1920 border. This manifesto became the new basis for the reconstructed minority identity – at least officially.

---

[22] Oral History Interview H.C.B. (30.07.2013) (34:42-35:52): ‘Vi boede på en gård inde i Broager ikke langt fra Flensborg Fjord … i det tyske mindretal var der nogle organisationer, som gik meget ind for det nazizstiske … men alt det der det holdt mine forældre sig langt væk fra. Og så havde vi en nabo på den ene side og en nabo på den anden side og de var begge medlemmer af frihedsbevægelsen, og det vidste mine forældre meget godt … de var ikke i selvskabligt lag, men de havde det godt sammen, og jeg vil endda sige såvidt at de beskyttede faktsik mine forældre da det kom til retsopgøret i ’45. Det var jo ret farligt at være tysk i maj ’45.’

[23] See, for example, Johan Peter Noack, Det Sydslesvigske Grænsespørgsmål 1945-7 (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 1997).

[24] Lubowitz, 117.

Reconstruction of German education

The new fraction that took control argued that loyalty could be secured best if German education continued in the Danish public schools. Waldemar Reuter of the restructured school association, *Schul- und Sprachverein,* contacted the Danish authorities in Copenhagen, arguing that: 'Under all circumstances, we are very much interested in nurturing a spirit of loyalty in our schools and we believe that the public school provides the strongest guarantee for loyalty'.[25]

In December 1945, the law to replace the tolerant interwar structure established the ways in which education of German minority children could take place.[26] The law opened up for the possibility of re-establishing German private schools, but these would first have to be either built or re-purchased. In addition the law allowed for special German-speaking classes in the public schools, although none of such were ever formed. Danish teachers refused to instruct any classes in German. In 1945, the only real option for German families therefore remained transferring their children to Danish schools.

The German minority reacted against the new law, but there was little they could do about it. *Deutcher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* described the situation the following way:

> Where there is government support for the destruction of a people, where even state violence against a people takes place, as in ancient times, the family alone assumes responsibility for the education of the young. In particular the mothers are responsible for nurturing the language and for passing it on.[27]

The perception that government policies were violent attacks against the minority was somewhat an exaggeration. But the situation in North Schleswig was indeed both violent and hostile when seen from a German perspective. In 1945 and 1946, Danish clandestine groups carried out a number of reprisals, destroying or vandalising several buildings and memorials associated with the minority and with Germany.[28] This included, for example, the explosions of a German 1864-war victory monument in Dybbøl and the landmark 'Bismarck Tower' north of Aabenraa. Both were completely destroyed and no efforts were made to catch and or prosecute the perpetrators.

Furthermore, the hostile atmosphere between Danish and German in the border region made it dangerous to reconstruct a German school system. In June 1946, Peter Jepsen of the school association received a letter from an anonymous group threatening that: '[i]f you do not immediately abandon your plans of a [German] school you will from this day not be able to consider yourself safe either day or night … it may not be that we bomb you; we can also

[25] Letter from Dr. Reuter, Graasten to Kommisionen til Drøftelse af Undervisningsforhold for Skolenævnet i de sønderjyske landsdele, 15 Aug. 1945, Archiv Deutsche Volksgruppe (ADV) Deutsche Schul- und Sprachverein (DSSV).

[26] Law no. 610, ADV, DSSV.

[27] Fr. Christensen, Volkskalender 1946, 93. Original quote: 'Wo die staatlichen Stützen des Volkstums zerbrechen, wo gar Staatliche Gewalt zum Kampf gegen das Volkstum antritt, übernimmt wie in alten Zeiten die Familie allein die Erziehung des heranwachsenden Geschlechts. Besonders die Mütter sind für die Pflege der Sprach unter der Überlieferung verantwortlich.'

[28] Inge Adriansen, Erindringssteder i Danmark (Copenhagen: Tusculanum, 2010).

collect you … I am, for example, the owner of an electrical iron ring which can be fitted to the head and connected to current'.[29]

In addition to an outside pressure on the minority, the German-minded group was also threatened from within. As discussed above, many North Schleswig Germans had strong ties to the region, which was always the meeting place of both Danish and German culture, language and identity. The fact that the minority shared their regional vernacular with the Danish-minded meant that passing into the majority could take place easily. To pass into the majority was generally unproblematic seen from a majority Danish perspective. Seen from a generalised Danish point of view, the previously German-minded had now discovered their true national identity.

A similar situation actually unfolded south of the border too. In the early years after the war, German-minded South Schleswigers in their thousands joined the Danish movement. From a German point of view, however, the passings were ill tolerated. The following quotes provide an idea of how children placed in the Danish schools were perceived by the minority. Commenting on the situation south of the border in 1949, new head of the school association, Fr. Christensen, expressed his discontent in the following way: 'Also amongst the German North Schleswigers such treason exists. Characterless weaklings exist in all places and at all times. Those who are not with us are against us'.[30]

In 1953, when the passing of minority families into the majority appeared to continue, Christensen commented again on the matter:

> Is it really so, that the German people have weaker characters than the Danish, that, like a dog, they lick the boot of the one who steps on them, that indifferently and thoughtlessly in a moment of hardship they follow the bigger mass, that their Germanness is only a varnish that can be scratched off?[31]

Fr. Christensen reacted so strongly because he did not accept that national identity could be changed. Born in North Schleswig in 1882, Christensen lived most of his life in the region, apart from shorter periods of time spent in Germany. He belonged to the circle of people who favoured good relations with Denmark and the Danish majority. Nevertheless, he vigorously opposed those who did not see the Danish and German nations as two clearly distinct and separate groups. As head of the German Language and School Association until 1955, he was probably the main early influence on the formulation and dissemination of a new German identity for post-war minority children and youths.

German minority children and youths also experienced harassment, however mainly from other children and youths of the majority and not, it appears, from the Danish establishment.

---

[29] Letter from 'de 18' to Herr Peter Jepsen in Uge, 10 Apr. 1946, ADV, DSSV. Original quote: 'Dersom De ikke straks forkaster Deres Planer med skolen vil De fra I Dag ikke vide Dem sikker hverken Dag eller Nat … det er heller ikke sikkert vi bomber Dem; vi kan også afhendte dem [sic] … Jeg er f.Eks. Indehaver af en Jernring med elektrisk Apparat til at spænde om Hovedet og så slutte Strømmen til'.

[30] Fr. Chistensen, Volkskalender, 1949, 35. Original quote: 'Aber auch unter den Heimdeutschen gibt es den gleichen Verrat. Charakterlose Schwächlinge gibt es überall und zu jeder Zeit'. 'Wer nicht für uns ist, ist gegen uns.'

[31] Fr. Christensen, Vertraulich Rundschrieben 26 Jan.1953, ADV, DSSV. Original quote: 'Ist es so, dass die deutsche Volksgruppe charakterlich schwacher ist als die dänische, dass sie wie ein Hund den Stiefel leckt, der sie tritt, dass sie gleichgültig und gedankenlos dem augenblicklichen Schwergewicht der größeren Menge folgt, dass ihr Deutschtum also nu rein Firnis ist, der abgekratzt werden kann?'.

A woman born in 1938 recalls during an interview in 2013 how Danish boys chanted a rhyme translating, 'German filth should have stones on their necks'.[32] A man, born 1944, recalled, in 2011, how other boys in his village often yelled '*Hitler-boy*' and 'Nazi-pig' after him. And even a woman born in 1953 remembered too, that a few times other children in her neighbourhood called her a 'Nazi-pig'.[33]

Nothing suggests, however, that institutionalised discrimination of minority children by Danish teachers took place in the Danish schools. During an interview in 2013, a German minority man born 1940 remembered his experiences in a Danish middle school in Sønderborg as mostly pleasant. The teachers, he recalled, treated him and other German minority children very well indeed. He remembered too, however, the feeling that the Danish school paid special attention to him and the seven other youths in the class who came from German-minded homes. He was under the impression that teachers worked quite intensely on influencing him nationally.[34]

The absence of institutionalised discrimination of German-minded children and youths in Danish schools can be explained by the Danish-German struggle over Schleswig: Danish conventional wisdom regarded the inhabitants of Schleswig north and south as belonging to the Danish nation. When Danish schools welcomed children previously attending the German schools, they sought to assist these children with re-discovering their true national identity.

Early post-war identity: North Schleswig as the region between German and Danish

It was not that Christensen or the school association were anti-Danish. Rather on the contrary. In 1949, Christensen wrote that: 'To improve our relationship with the Danish people is our most urgent matter, but to speak of this has rhetorical meaning only insofar our equality as citizens is no given condition'.[35] In 1951, after highlighting that over 3,000 German children were still attending Danish schools, Christensen made his view even more explicit:

> None of the stated is a criticism of the Danish school as such, everything is to be understood in relation to the educational questions of the German minority. The Danish school is good and right for the Danes the way it is. We are different and hold different views regarding many important questions of schooling and education. We need the German school.[36]

Christensen saw German- and Danish-minded in North Schleswig as two distinct groups that should be able to live side-by-side but not necessarily interact much. In the first decade after the Second World War, this was the principle upon which education was reconstructed. The schools wished to offer this understanding to German children, as made clear in 1952:

[32] Oral History Interview, F.E.C., 12 Aug. .2013: 'Tyske pak ska' ha' sten i æ nak' [Low Danish Dialect].
[33] Oral History interview, I.M., 08 Aug. 2013.
[34] Oral History Interview, H.C.B., 30 Jul. 2013.
[35] Fr. Christensen in Volkskalender, 1949, 35. Original quote: 'Dass unser Verhältnis zu dem dänischen Volke gebessert werde, ist unsere dringlichste Angelegenheit; aber darüber zu reden hat nur rhetorische Bedeutung, falls nicht die staatsbürgerliche Gleichberechtigung selbstverständliche Voraussetzung ist.'
[36] Fr. Christensen, Volkskalender, 1951, p. 26: 'Nichts von dem gesagten ist Kritik gegen die dänische Schule als solche, alles ist in Relation zu den Schulfragen der deutsche Minderheit zu verstehen. Die dänische Schule wird für die Dänen gut und richtig sein, so wie sie ist. Wir sind anders und haben über manche wesentlichen Schul- und Erziehungsfragen andere Auffassungen. Wir brauchen die deutsche Schule'.

> The children must achieve a clear consciousness of the fact that our homeland (Heimat) is no Danish land and that it never has been. For one thousand years, it was neither German nor Danish and here we have something to preserve.[37]

With this statement Fr. Christensen referred to a regional conceptualisation of Schleswig, which actually served two different purposes. First, it rejected the Danish conventional wisdom that Schleswig was Danish only, and second, it detached North Schleswig from the idea of a greater Germany often associated with the Nazi experience.

The regional focus that considered North Schleswig its own autonomous unit was new. Previously, German-minded North Schleswigers had identified themselves either with the Schleswig-Holstein movement or the German nation at large. From the early 1950s onwards, the focus became to consolidate itself as a regional group whose identity was tied to the possibilities of the region.

The impact on children and young people of this process was clear. With only kindergartens and primary schools in North Schleswig, it became crucial that efforts were made to keep children and youths in the region. The educational options provided were limited to professions relevant for life in rural North Schleswig. The focus for boys was on agriculture and the trades, and for girls overwhelmingly on housekeeping. From 1951 onwards, preparation for professional life could take place in a vocational training and boarding school in the small town of Tinglev. Originally a school of education for young people and adults, the reorganised boarding school offered six-month programmes for 14 to 18 year-old boys and girls as well as agricultural training programmes for young men over the age of 18.

By the mid-1950s, there was no longer a direct outside threat to the minority's continued existence. Keeping young people in the region from then on became the minority's main concern vis-à-vis continued survival. In 1956, the concerns were vocalised this way:

> All education insofar it causes young people to leave the region is damaging to us, under some circumstances perhaps even deadly. It is better to be a crofter in the native region [*Heimat*] than a steward in Zealand. It is better to be an office clerk in the native region than office manager in Copenhagen.[38]

Even if a greater opportunity was to be found elsewhere in Denmark, the minority still urged youths to stay in North Schleswig. These priorities were connected to the fact that German secondary education no longer existed after 1945 when the German upper secondary school (*Gymnasium*) in Aabenraa had been closed down. But in 1955, the minority regained the right to provide education that qualified students for higher education. With money raised primarily in Schleswig-Holstein, the minority managed to initiate the reconstruction of an upper-secondary school that stood ready in 1958. This exam-right was reintroduced in connection with the Copenhagen declaration which clarified the rights and obligations of the Danish state and the German minority.

[37] Fr. Christensen, Rundschrieben, 1952.

[38] F.G. Kolberg, Volkskalender 1956, 95. Original quote: 'Alle Bildung, sofern sie die Jugend aus der heimatlichen Gemeinschaft hinausführt, ist us schadelich, unter Umstanden sogar tödlich. Besser in der Heimat Häusler als Gutsverwalter auf Seeland. Besser in der Haimat Kontorist als in Kopenhagen Kontorchef.'

From the mid-1950s onwards: towards reconciliation

In reality the Copenhagen declaration was just one piece in a much larger puzzle making possible West Germany's entrance into NATO. It mirrored the Bonn declaration, which clarified the relations between the Danish minority south of the border and the West German Republic. Although these two declarations were products of the consolidation within the Western Alliance in a Cold War context, their impact on the minorities in the Danish-German border region was substantial. The contemporary scholarship celebrates the declarations as a turning point, although such a conclusion is only possible with the benefit of hindsight. Especially south of the border, but also north of it, the minorities remained sceptical of what the implications of the declarations would actually be. As Fr. Christensen noted:

> Have the Danish people finally accepted that a German group lives within their borders, and will they grant this group free development of its cultural life, that is the spiritual and mental connection to the German nation?[39]

Well into the 1960s, the sustained connection to the German cultural sphere was the principal focus of German schools and in this regard, the minority's greatest obstacle was language. Without sufficient skills in the German language, it was argued, children of the minority would not be able to maintain a connection to the German nation or, as it was called, their spiritual homeland (*geistige Heimat*).[40] The school association coined the problem this way:

> It is well known that the German minority with only a few exceptions speak Low Danish at home. Only a fraction of the students that begin school understand German. Without German language there is no German life … Without German schools, no German daily, no German library, no German service and German church, and no German society.[41]

The minority coped with the collapse of their German kin-state by focussing on a regional belonging in North Schleswig and a spiritual connection to German language and culture. The survival of the minority, which in 1945 was far from inevitable, was now secured. But German life in North Schleswig still existed under pressure both from outside and from within. Even fourteen years after the war, the school association's annual account suggested that some parents still chose the Danish school over the German one:

> Alongside the many positive surprises regarding the school registrations, we have also experienced bitter disappointments when parents who both consider themselves to be German … register their children in the Danish schools. It is clear to us, that some parents do not dare registering their children with us … We hope for the day when parents free from fear can register their children in the German schools.[42]

---

[39] Fr. Christensen, Volkskalender, 1956, 92. Original quote: 'Hat sich das Dänische Volk endgültig damit abgefunden, dass es einen deutschen Volksteil innerhalb seiner Grenzen hat, und will es diesem Volksteil freie Entfaltung für sein kulturelles Leben, d.h. also für die geistig seelische Verbindung mit dem deutschen Volke bewaren.'

[40] Volkskalender, 1957, 83.

[41] Fr. Christensen, Rundschrieben, 1952, ADV, DSSV. Original quote: 'Es ist bekannt, dass die Heimdeutschen bis auf wenige Ausnahmen plattdänische Haussprache haben. Nur ein geringer Teil der Schulanfänger versteht deutsch. Ohne deutsche Sprache gibt es kein deutsches Leben … Ohne deutsche Schule, keine deutsche Zeitung, keine deutsche Bücherei, keine deutsche Predigt und keine deutsche Kirche, keine deutsche Gemeinschaft.'

[42] A. Lessow, Jahresbericht 1958/1959, ADV, DSSV: 'Wir haben bei den Schulanmeldungen neben manchen erfreulichen Überrachungen auch bittere Enttäuschungen erleben müssen, wenn Eltern, die sich beide als

It could be possible too, however, that some parents chose a Danish school over a German one for other reasons. The insular identity of the minority's core perhaps no longer suited the world-view of, in particular, youths and younger parents. By the early 1960s, most young parents were born either after 1920 or had no active recollection of the changing of the border. In other words, they were born into the minority and had no experiences of becoming one as a consequence of a border revision. Their principle experience as part of the German minority would have been the Nazi era and the troublesome years after the war. Some evidence hints that the old isolationist tendencies no longer appealed to young people.

The first graduates from the reconstructed Gymnasium broke, for example, the isolationist tradition when they graduated in 1962. The minority was thrilled to have upper-secondary school graduates in North Schleswig again after seventeen years of absence. The minority's daily *Der Nordschleswiger* wrote on the day of graduation of the importance of this first graduating class because 'obviously, the following, hopefully many, graduating classes will do exactly like the class of 1962. That is how traditions actually arise.'[43]

The minority establishment did not appear to have envisaged, however, that these new traditions would include graduates choosing to wear the same graduation caps as their Danish peers. The graduates were entitled to wear the traditional Danish graduation caps in the Danish red and white colours. The Copenhagen declaration of 1955 had ensured that a graduation diploma from the German Gymnasium was fully valid in both Germany and Denmark. Some in the minority especially now retired Fr. Christensen thought, however, that this was a step too far. He argued in the daily that, 'according to my opinion one approaches the Danes too much, that is when one expects their respect for our unconditional honesty … Do we not have our own?'[44]

The Danish point of view in Schleswig took notice of the German graduates wearing the caps too. It did so with some surprise, however, the students themselves were not contested. Even the Danish-minority daily in South Schleswig wrote about it and noted:

> Certainly other people [the Danish majority] should not feel the need to prevent this! The Danish graduation cap does not become German because some Danish citizens of German identity wear it … Conversely, we must admit: we would not be happy to see our youths from the Danish upper-secondary school in Flensborg celebrate their graduation with a German graduation cap.[45]

---

deutsche bekennen … ihre Kinder in der dänische Schule anmeldeten. Darüber hinaus ist e suns klar, dass manche Eltern es nicht wagen, ihre Kinder zu uns zu schikken [sic.] … Wir hoffen auf den Tag, da die Eltern in völliger Freiheit vor Furcht ihre Kinder in die deutschen Schulen schicken können'.

[43] N.A.,Wieder deutsche Abiturienten', Der Nordschleswiger, 15 Jun. 1962, Original quote: 'Denn es ist klar, dass die folgenden hoffentlich vielen Studentenjahrgänge des Deutsches Gymnasiums es genauso Machen werden, wie der Jahrgang 1962. So entstehen nun einmal Traditionen'.

[44] Fr. Christensen, Die rot-weißen Mützen, Der Nordschleswiger, 26 Jun. 1962. Original quote: 'Man tritt nach meinem Gefühl damit den Dänen zu nahe, d.h. wenn man von ihnen Respekt für unsere unbedingte Ehrlichkeit erwartet' ... ‚Haben wir nichts Eigenes?'.

[45] N.A., Studenterhuen, Flensborg Avis, 22 Jun. 1962. Original quote: 'Så er der da sikkert ej andre, der føler lyst til at troppe op med et forbud eller lignende! Den danske studenterhue bliver selvfølgelig ikke tysk af, at den også bæres af danske statsborgere med tysk indstilling' … 'på den anden side: Vi må ærligt indrømme, at dvi ikke ligefrem ville glæde os over at se sydslesvigske unge fra vort danske gymnasium på Duborg Banke i Flensborg fejre deres studenter-eksamen med en tysk studenterhue.'

The debates over the graduation caps illustrate the changes to North Schleswig German identity starting in the early 1960's. As ideas of European integration, in particular in West Germany, grew stronger, this began to influence the focus of the German minority schools too. The pro-European outlook still retained, however, a strong regional dimension. In 1965, the minority for the first time added this international dimension to their focus on giving children access to the wider German cultural sphere:

> The students that leave our schools are at home in both languages and both cultural spheres of our border region. Exactly that makes them capable of working here in their native region where two nations meet for the construction of a future Europe.[46]

The changes made possible by the Copenhagen declaration in 1955 were visible by 1965. Twenty years after the end of the second Wold War, the German minority had completed the material reconstruction of their school system, and for the first time since 1945, the numbers of new students stagnated.[47] The stagnation was met with reflection in the school association but understood primarily as a result of the successful reconstruction of the school system over the past twenty years.

In addition, however, the minority started focusing on new conditions challenging the German schools. In this respect the schools became even more inclusive not only of the European dimension but also of a Danish one. In 1968, the purpose of the German education system was defined this way:

> At the foreground of our effort is always the student with whom we are trusted. To equip him with the necessary knowledge and skills, to educate him to become an independently thinking and pro-active human, who is at home with the German language and connected to the German community, but to whom also the Danish language and cultural sphere is not foreign. That is the goal our school and education work in North Schleswig.[48]

In 1970, twenty-five years after the end of the Second World War and fifty years after the plebiscite that followed from Versailles, hostility between Danish and German could still be found in the border region, especially, in the private sphere. Some of those that had served time in the prison camp, possibly, would still consider themselves victims both of a Germany that let them down, and a Denmark that did not recognise their loyalty ambiguities. Equally, those who had witnessed German troupes being welcomed by the minority most likely found it difficult to accept that the changes to the minority's identity were genuine.

On the structural level, however, there was little doubt that the changes were genuine. By 1970 the school association stated more unequivocally than ever before that they fulfilled a dual mission seeking to both introduce the student to German language and culture but also to

[46] A. Lessow, Volkskalender, 1965, 79. Original quote: 'Die Schüler, die unsere Schulen verlassen, sind in beiden Sprachen und in beiden Kulturkreisen unseres Grenzlandes zu Hause. Gerade das aber befähigt sie, hier in ihrer Heimat wo zwei Völker sich begegnen, mitzuarbeiten an dem Bau eines zukünftigen Europas'.
[47] Volkskalender, 1966, 75.
[48] Schlussbetrachtung, Volkskalender, 1968. Original quote: 'Im Vordergrund unserer Bemühungen steht immer der uns anvertraute Schüler. Ihn mit den notwendigen Kenntnissen und Fähigkeiten auszurüsten, ihn zu einem selbständig denkenden und handelnden Menschen zu erziehen, der in der deutsche Sprache Heimlich ist unter sich mit der großen deutschen Gemeinschaft verbunden weiß, dem aber auch die dänische Sprache und Kulturwelt nicht fremd ist, ist das Ziel der deutschen Schul und Erziehungsarbeit in Nordschleswig'.

prepare them for a future in the Danish state.[49] This dual mission, it argued, was carried out 'without closed nationalism but in close connection to our nation and with ever more determination to connect the two nations of our border region'.[50]

Conclusion

Being the meeting place of Danish and German cultural and political spheres, the national belonging of Schleswig became contested in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. The border drawn in 1920 between Denmark and Germany carved out North Schleswig from the former duchy and created a strong and separatist German-minded minority in Denmark. Accommodated initially by the Danish state, the minority strongly supported the Nazi regime. As the Second World War ended in 1945, liberal minority policies were turned into extreme Danish hostility towards the minority.

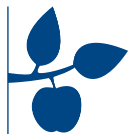
Although the German minority did not share the destiny of many other ethnic Germans in Europe, the reconstruction of its civic life after 1945 took place under pressure. The threat to the minority's continued existence was not only due to the pressure coming from the Danish state and majority. It was also due to the fact that many North Schleswig Germans passed into the majority. This identity transformation was possible because North Schleswig Germans shared many cultural traits with North Schleswig Danes, such as the regional vernacular. Moreover, the Danish perception of the German minority remained that, in reality, they were Germanised Danes who had forgotten their true national heritage.

The reconstruction of a German education system and the identity communicated in German schools were imbedded in this context. North Schleswig German identity as communicated in schools was always tied to a belonging to the German cultural sphere. But other layers were added to this self-perception of identity. In the early years after the war, the minority focused on its regional ties verbalising for the first time their belonging to North Schleswig as an independent region. As the pressure on the minority diminished, it began to include a European dimension to its identity. This change was connected to the international political situation which created a gradually increasing sense of unity in Western Europe. Western European integration changed completely the relationship between Denmark and Germany, so that the centuries-old national dispute between them became politically redundant.

Despite the strong affiliations with Nazi Germany, the fact that North Schleswig was never re-annexed during the Second World War made a difference. Immediately after capitulation in 1945, a fraction of the minority, un-associated with Nazism, was able to claim the leadership and representation of the minority as a whole. Stressing their loyalty to the Danish state and unequivocal recognition of the 1920 border, they defined North Schleswig German identity as fundamentally anti-separatist. Throughout the post-war period, their leadership remained un-challenged. After 1945, nobody would publically voice any desire for a change of the border. Rather on the contrary, the fact that annexation had remained absent came to be seen as a blessing in disguise. Despite imprisonment and the experiences of some degrees of harassment, the minority could stay and reconstruct their lives and institutions.

[49] Volkskalender, 1970, 97.
[50] Ibid., 98. Original quote: 'ohne engen Nationalismus aber in enger Verbundenheit mit unserem Volk in steter Bereitschaft zwischen beiden Völkern unseres Grenzlandes verbindend zu wirken.'

Reconstruction in the 1950s and 1960s, however, did not take place in isolation. The changes were substantial, and the children attending German schools before 1945 were offered a completely different identity than the children who attended minority schools in 1965. Communications of North Schleswig German identities transformed from being separatist and isolationist to embracing North Schleswig's national diversity and ideas of European integration. Even though the German minority thought they would 'remain what they were', in reality, their national identity as North Schleswig Germans changed as much as society around them.



University of Southern Denmark