

## AN AMBIGUOUS RELATIONSHIP – SWEDEN AND FINLAND BEFORE 1809

The nature of the relationship between Sweden and Finland as parts of the same realm before 1809 is a matter of scholarly debate. I have treated the subject in various contexts, and I do not think I plume myself if I assert that my research has attracted some attention and also provoked a lot of discussion. Not all debaters have supported my view, and the purpose of the following elucidation is to answer some of the criticism. As a rule I find that the objections to my view are based on misunderstandings and therefore often miss the point.

The texts that have caused most debate are an article published in *Scandia* in 1998 and my dissertation, presented two years later. In the article I analyse the relationship between Sweden and Finland in the 1700s by trying to fit the Finnish nation into Anthony D. Smith's concept of *ethnie*. In the dissertation I treat the same issue on a more conceptual level. My aim there is to undertake an empirical rather than theoretical analysis. Not everyone has apprehended this difference, and although the results more or less correspond, one has to consider that the two studies are based on different methods that are not necessarily interchangeable.<sup>1</sup>

These investigations came about in a certain historiographic context. For a long time the prevailing view in the post-war period was that not only nationalism but also the nation as such were quite modern inventions. In line with recent research I have argued that although nationalism in the Western world

1. Jonas Nordin, 'I broderlig samdräkt? Förhållandet Sverige–Finland under 1700-talet och Anthony D Smiths *ethnie*-begrepp', *Scandia* 64:2 (1998); *idem*, *Ett fattigt men fritt folk: nationell och politisk självbild i Sverige från sen stormaktstid till slutet av frihetstiden* [Summary: A People of Poverty and Liberty: National and Political Self-Image in Sweden from the Late Age of Greatness to the End of the Age of Liberty (c. 1660–1772)], (Eslöv, 2000), esp. ch. 5.

is a phenomenon of the nineteenth century it nevertheless grew out of ideas that had a long history and had developed substantially during the preceding century.

In my investigations I demonstrate that historically *nation* must be understood as a cultural entity, or, in my summarized definition, as a group of people that can be distinguished from others through shared and specific cultural characteristics among which language is a key defining factor. Nation was thus a cultural and not a territorial concept. In addition I apply Ernest Gellner's definition of nationalism: 'Nationalism is primarily a political principle, which holds that the political unit and the national unit should be congruent.'<sup>2</sup> When presenting Gellner's influential definition I have emphasized that this view had no impact in the eighteenth century.

On the other hand I maintain that nationalism, as it evolved in the nineteenth century, was based on two preconditions: (1) the idea of the cultural nation, i.e. the notion of culturally defined and distinguishable peoples, and (2) the idea of a political people, i.e. that the ultimate political end was to promote the public good and that, consequently, members of society needed to have a say in politics, at least theoretically. Contemporaries who embraced this idea often referred to themselves as patriots.

In my dissertation I demonstrated that both of these ideas were widespread and fairly developed in the eighteenth century. Fully-fledged nationalism appeared only when they were consistently combined, which happened no earlier than in the nineteenth century. It is certainly hard to explain the force of this ideology in the new century if one does not acknowledge its long evolution. Traditionally the French revolution has been considered a key factor in the origin of nationalism. But from where did the republican and national fervour that spread rapidly within a few years originate all of a sudden? It makes more sense to interpret the outbreak of the French revolution as a symptom of on-going processes rather than their birth.

The disagreement that I have met has been directed to segments of my argument without taking my whole line of reasoning into consideration. In this article I will try to meet the objections from some of my opponents. Since I have presented my view on several occasions and supported it with a variety of evidence, I will this time keep the argument at a more general level. This also leads to occasional departures from the question of Swedish-Finnish relations, although I will return to that later in the article.

2. Ernest Gellner, *Nations and Nationalism* (Oxford, 1983), p. 1. Already Elie Kedourie opened his famous book on nationalism with a similar, though less stringent, definition: *idem*, *Nationalism* (London, 1960), p. 9.

## IN DEFENCE OF CONCEPTUAL CLARITY

The most energetic disapproval comes from Jouko Nurmiainen, who devoted a whole article in *Historisk tidskrift för Finland* to an attempt to undermine my – and, in part, also Juha Manninen's – theses.<sup>3</sup> It is evident that Nurmiainen wrote in an agitated mood and did not allow himself time to consider his thoughts before submitting them. His poorly reasoned article would barely be worth commenting upon if it was not for the fact that his objections are sometimes cited as significant correctives to my view. I will form the discussion around Nurmiainen's critique, occasionally supplemented with the views of other commentators.

Nurmiainen accuses me for giving 'nationalism', or even 'ethnic nationalism', an exaggeratedly long history. In his critique he seeks the support of Torbjörn Eng and Harald Gustafsson, among others. Nurmiainen credits them both for making explicit that they do not investigate ethnic nationalism, which they consider to be a modern phenomenon – but he fails to notice that I do so too. 'This dissertation will *not* be about nationalism', I establish at the beginning of my book. Just like Nurmiainen, I refer to Gellner's definition, and I go on to explain why it is not a valid concept for the period I investigate. The same goes for the *Scandia* article. There I discuss different theories of nationalism but dismiss their usefulness for my own purpose.<sup>4</sup> It is noteworthy that not even Nurmiainen's account of Eng's view is accurate. In the cited section Eng explains that he is not investigating pre-modern *identities*, which Nurmiainen translates as 'ethnic nationalism'. In actual fact this latter concept does not seem to be used by any scholar quoted by Nurmiainen. The fact that I am not studying nationalism is crucial to my conclusions, but this vital point has eluded more than one critic.<sup>5</sup> After this confused opening Nurmiainen goes on to claim that a proper historical analysis should only employ contemporary concepts. Therefore, he propagates the study of 'patriotism', which had nothing to do with nationality, according to Nurmiainen.

There is a lot to be said about Nurmiainen's affected and careless reading of my writings. To begin with, there is the obvious objection that one cannot prescribe a universal method to apply in all historical research – it naturally

3. Jouko Nurmiainen, 'Frågan om "etnisk nationalism", nationell självbild och 1700-talets Sverige', *Historisk tidskrift för Finland* 88:3 (2003), pp. 257–75.

4. Nurmiainen (2003), pp. 258–9; Nordin (2000), pp. 18–19, see also pp. 442–54; *idem* (1998), p. 197, 212.

5. See e.g. Marie Lennersand, 'Den svenska nationella självbilden under 1600- och 1700-talet', *Historisk tidskrift* 122:1 (2002), p. 92; Stellan Dahlgren in *Karolinska förbundets årsbok* (2000), pp. 279–81.

depends on the goal and purpose of the investigation. To put it bluntly: an analysis of National Socialism would not get very far by only employing the terminology of the Nazis themselves. On the other hand, students are sometimes forced to apply the criteria of Nazi racial policy in order to understand it. It will not do to dismiss the Nazis as having been wrong by just maintaining that Jewishness is a social construction and therefore does not really exist. Jewishness existed, and did matter, not least because the Nazis made it matter! We have to acknowledge this, both in order to understand anti-Semitism and to treat the victims of the Holocaust with proper respect.

I have deliberately drawn the argument to its limit to show why Nurmiainen's conclusion is untenable. He accuses Anthony D. Smith's concept of *ethnie* to be 'half racist' because it tries to grasp elements – historical memories, languages, cultural traits – that do not really exist. A. D. Smith is undoubtedly one of the most influential scholars in the study of national identities, although Nurmiainen dismisses *ethnie* as a concept 'not very much supported even within his own field of research'.<sup>6</sup> This is an altogether capricious remark, and even if Smith is not uncontested he is nevertheless a key figure in his field. To accuse him of racism is nothing but insolent.

In his critique of A. D. Smith, Nurmiainen emphasizes the rather trivial point that we are talking about 'imagined communities', a view shared by most scholars. A more important remark would be that they are communities all the same – and they do exist. Social phenomena are indeed more elusive, but they are no less real than material objects. They are part of the experience of being human and the main reason why we should even bother to study the humanities and social sciences. Equally, analytical concepts are no less legitimate than empirical ones, but they are often unduly confused. One needs to make clear in what way a concept is applied.

For this reason one cannot criticize the use of analytical concepts for not being empirical. But this is exactly what Nurmiainen does when he dismisses A. D. Smith: 'Smith's concept *ethnie* is a social scientific construction without immediate equivalent in the past'.<sup>7</sup> An historian's main objective is to understand the past on its own conditions, Nurmiainen argues, and therefore conceptual history is the only legitimate method of investigation. With this rigid approach it would, for instance, be impossible to write the history of homosexuality before the nineteenth century, of the Kurds in Turkey, or even

6. '[...] Smiths teori är inte särskilt starkt bärande ens inom hans eget forskningsområde'; Nurmiainen (2003), p. 274.

7. '[...] Smiths begrepp *ethnie* är en socialvetenskaplig konstruktion utan direkt motsvarighet i det förflutna'; Nurmiainen (2003), p. 263.

of economic development in a long-term perspective. How could we analyse what has not yet received a name, those whose existence is denied, or processes of a type that have not existed under a common label in the past? In many instances it is certainly true that the existence of a concept transforms our way of thinking about a specific phenomenon. It is equally true that a concept does not necessarily signify the same phenomenon over time, however old and stable it may seem. We should, for instance, not fool ourselves that being a Christian was the same thing in the years 100, 1000, and 1700. But above all it is true that history as a discipline would be much impaired if we were only allowed to apply contemporary concepts to our investigations.

Historians' enquiries into the past may have many purposes. We often raise questions for their own sake, in order to know more. At other times we might need to establish how a certain phenomenon came into existence. This is why I have tried different methods when writing about Sweden and Finland in the past. In the *Scandia* article I tried a pronouncedly analytical method, whereas the book was more dedicated to empirical concepts. Nurmiainen fails to notice this difference and treats them alike. In his plea for conceptual history he thoroughly confuses his critique by recurrently talking about 'nationalism'. Since I do not use this word and explicitly deny the relevance of the concept for the periods I have investigated, it is difficult to understand exactly what his critique is really about. He even identifies a certain type of 'modern nationalism', without explaining what it is and how it differs from what, then, must be understood as older types of nationalism.<sup>8</sup>

Nurmiainen also criticizes, or rather carps at, my chapter on 'projects for Swedification' (*försvenskningsförslag*) in Finland.<sup>9</sup> It is either an utterly careless reading of my text or a deliberate attempt to misinterpret me. Either way it is both negligent and dishonest. What I establish through quotations and argument is that there certainly were those who advocated a linguistic transformation in Finland, in order to strengthen the bonds between the two parts of the realm. I do not try to estimate the prevalence of these views and I expressly point out that they had little or no practical outcome. But, in line with my main argument, the sheer existence of these views show that people acknowledged the existence of the cultural nation.

In this connection Nurmiainen chooses to misunderstand my argument on the use of French at the time. In a footnote remark I wanted to play down the role sometimes attributed to French in contemporary politics. It was definitely, as I also pointed out, significant as a social marker. At the farewell audience

8. Nurmiainen (2003), pp. 263–4.

9. Nurmiainen (2003), pp. 270–1; Nordin (2000), pp. 295–300.

for the Austrian envoy to Sweden in 1779, State Secretary Johan von Heland, because of his rank, had to deliver the Queen's response, although he did not command French. To the great amusement of the courtiers he got the words mixed up in the speech he had tried to memorize. The Countess Cederhielm was also ridiculed for her poor French: 'at least at court one has the right to demand, that living and universally recognized languages would be spoken tolerably'.<sup>10</sup> Despite the mockery these examples show that French was not mastered by everyone, even in polite society. Neither was it a requisite to command foreign languages in order to make an ordinary career in state bureaucracy – if you were not specifically into foreign affairs, that is.<sup>11</sup> The archives preserve no series of minutes or other official documents from the time written in a foreign language.

Regardless of social demands and the linguistic proficiencies of the people, Swedish was the only official bureaucratic language. When the newly ascended King Fredrik I, who was German-born and did not speak Swedish, chaired his first meeting with the Council in 1720, one of the secretaries began recounting an errand in German. He was immediately halted and it was entered in the protocol that all matters were to be presented in Swedish as thitherto.<sup>12</sup> King Gustav III could also serve to prove my point. He wrote much of his correspondence with his associates in French, but the minutes of the official sessions he chaired record no French statements by him. This is quite contrary to the situation in Denmark, where, at least until 1772, both the kings and large portions of the civil administration kept their official papers in German. Correspondingly, the language of command in the Danish army was German, just as Swedish was used in Sweden even in the Finnish regiments. In both cases the soldiers learned their drill through a few simple commands and necessary phrases in the foreign tongue.<sup>13</sup> That Swedish was the only bureaucratic language is even more conspicuous in court hearings. Even when the accused spoke Finnish, court proceedings were always recorded in Swedish with the

10. 'Men vid hof har man mera rätt at begära, at de nu lefvande och nästan allmänt vedertagna språken någorlunda böra talas'; Gustaf Johan Ehrensvärd, *Dagboksanteckningar förda vid Gustaf III:s hof*, 1: journal för åren 1776 och 1779 (Stockholm, 1877), pp. 238–9, cit. p. 158.

11. If anything the prerequisite was Latin. As from 1719/1720 and 1749/1750 exams for the civil service demanded university studies, in which Latin kept its grip, just as in elementary schools. This education on classical foundations explains why Latin loan words were more frequent in official language than French even at the end of the century.

12. Minutes of the Council of the Realm, 28 March 1720, vol. 131, Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives), fol. 697r–v.

13. Ole Feldbæk (ed.), *Dansk identitetshistorie*, 1: fædreland og modersmål 1536–1789 (Copenhagen, 1991), e.g. pp. 185–90; Nordin (2000), p. 298.

help of a translator. The new Swedish Law Code of 1734 was translated into Finnish only in 1759, and the translation was merely intended as an aid. It did not have official status and could not be used in courts. The medieval land and town laws were never printed in Finnish.

Nurmiainen totally misses my point when he rhetorically asks if it was the desire of the Swedish Crown to transform Finland into a separate cultural or ethnic unit within the realm. Torbjörn Eng makes the same erroneous conclusion when asking why Finland, if it really was conceived as a separate entity, was not expressly so defined and set aside by the Swedish government.<sup>14</sup> I cannot see the relevance of these objections. Like Eng I find that such measures, if anything, would have been both provocative and counter-productive to the Crown's interests. Structural and latent differences are rarely displayed explicitly – in that case they would be organized and open. What I try to trace, rather, are unconscious beliefs that were perhaps never articulated. One may certainly contend, as I also do, that Finland was never deliberately oppressed. But I find it untenable to hold that the structural pattern I have sketched in no way affected people's views on the order of things. In one context I have argued that the relation between Swedes and Finns resembles modern gender issues.<sup>15</sup> In today's Sweden it is hard to find any legal distinction between the sexes or any express valuation of men over women. Notwithstanding, it is easy to find sociological differences between the sexes in most areas of society. Equally, you cannot deny the existence of prejudices against, for instance, homosexuals in society by only looking at legislation. Formal circumstances rarely catch the whole picture in these issues.

To conclude the discussion of Nurmiainen's utterly confused attack I also want to comment on his suggestion that one should use 'patriotism' as the relevant concept for eighteenth-century politics. Nurmiainen understands patriotism as 'not only civic liberties and republics, but also sound rule, the native country and human virtues in general'.<sup>16</sup> Disregarding the fact that *patriot*

14. Torbjörn Eng, *Det svenska väldet: ett konglomerat av uttrycksformer och begrepp från Vasa till Bernadotte* [Summary: Swedish Forms of Dominion: A Conglomerate of Expressions and Concepts from Vasa to Bernadotte] (Uppsala, 2001), pp. 221–2, 291–6. It is, admittedly, difficult to ascertain to what extent Eng actually agrees or disagrees with me since large parts of his discussion are based on my research. His conclusions are also more or less the same as my own. My confusion thickens when I read Jan Samuelson's summary of the debate. I discern my own view in his outline, but find it attributed to Eng and curiously enough set in express opposition to myself; Jan Samuelson, *Eliten, rikets och riksdelen: sociala nätverk och geografisk mobilitet mellan Sverige och Finland 1720–1820* (Helsinki, 2008), pp. 21–2.

15. Jonas Nordin, 'Finland och riket: formell och strukturell ojämlikhet', in Max Engman & Nils Erik Villstrand (eds.), *Maktens mosaik: enhet, särart och självbild i det svenska riket* (Helsinki & Stockholm, 2008), p. 223.

16. Nurmiainen (2003), p. 274.



was a more frequent term in Swedish debates than *patriotism* I agree on this. In fact I refer to all of this, and much more, when I speak about the political people and the topic is extensively dealt with in my dissertation's most exhaustive chapter, entitled 'Civil society and patriotism'.<sup>17</sup> Once more: it was when these ideas were combined with the ideas of a cultural nation that nationalism was born. This happened in the nineteenth century, no sooner.

It should also be mentioned that Nurmiainen's view on 'patriotism' has been adopted by Charlotta Wolff, who, in addition, has connected it to contemporary 'cosmopolitanism'. Wolff has tried to construct a dichotomy between her view and mine which I do not apprehend myself. I do not deny the existence of cosmopolitan ideas, but I do not regard them as especially characteristic for the eighteenth century; neither do I see them as given opposites to national identities. People have always been capable of keeping more than one idea at a time in their heads. Moreover, since identities are not fixed but rather are contextual, it is the circumstances that determine which out of a multiple set of possible identities is activated in a given situation.<sup>18</sup>

Wolff's negligent reading of my dissertation goes to the point that she claims that I 'use the concept "*ethnie*" in something reminiscent of an attempt to support nationalism with historical legitimacy'.<sup>19</sup> In fact my book is not about nationalism, I rarely mention A. D. Smith in it, and not once do I use the term *ethnie*. Her misunderstandings on these points are most certainly influenced by Nurmiainen's article.

## THE CONGLOMERATE STATE

Leaving Nurmiainen's critique I would like to turn to another question of related interest to the subject: the concept of the *conglomerate state*. This has sometimes been propagated in opposition to my view, in spite of the fact that I deal with the Swedish 'conglomerate' in a separate chapter of my dissertation. But let us, at least for the sake of argument, accept that there are different views on how exactly this conglomerate state should be interpreted.

17. See also Jonas Nordin, 'Om kärleken till fäderneslandet och dess utövning', in Åsa Karlsson & Bo Lindberg (eds.), *Nationalism och nationell identitet i 1700-talets Sverige* (Uppsala, 2002).

18. Charlotta Wolff, *Vänskap och makt: den svenska politiska eliten och upplysningstidens Frankrike* [Résumé: Amitié et pouvoir : l'élite politique suédoise et la France des Lumières] (Helsinki, 2005), e.g. pp. 15–18. Cf. Jonas Nordin, 'Resorna till Frankrike gav rätt attityd', *Svenska Dagbladet* 22 September 2005.

19. Nordin 'använder sig av begreppet "*ethnie*" i något som påminner om ett försök att ge nationalismen historisk legitimitet'; Wolff (2005), p. 355, n. 80.



In a Scandinavian context the concept of conglomerate state has above all been introduced by Harald Gustafsson and it has gained general acceptance among historians.<sup>20</sup> Undoubtedly it is a useful concept in analysing the early modern state, but I nevertheless want to point out the risk of a *Verfremdungseffekt* when it is rigidly applied to the past. The conglomerate state is often presented as an analytical opposite to, and qualitatively different from, the 'modern' unitary state. In reality, many, if not most, European states ought to be characterized as conglomerate states even today, among them the Federal Republic of Germany, where the *Bundesländer* have wide-ranging autonomy and where the cleavages between the former BRD and DDR are still to be bridged; France, with its overseas *départements* and overseas colonies; Russia, also a federal republic with a number of regions that have disparate ties to the central authority, and not all of them being territorially adjacent to the motherland; the United Kingdom of Great Britain, where already the name indicates the composite character of the state – and even more, the Commonwealth of Nations, which today consists of 53 independent states sharing the same head of state, like a Holy Roman Empire on a global scale; Spain, with a far-reaching regional autonomy and enclaves both in France (Llivia) and on the African mainland (Ceuta and Melilla); Belgium and the Netherlands share the Baarle-Hertog and Baarle-Nassau regions, where bits of land belonging to the one state are embedded in the other, resembling on a small scale the patchwork normally associated with the Holy Roman Empire. The supposedly unitary Nordic countries have their composite character as well: Denmark with its special relations with the Faeroe Islands and Greenland; Norway with Spitsbergen (Svalbard); Finland with the Åland Islands. Even Sweden has its own 'feudal' enclave, although, admittedly, an infinitesimal one: the so called *Suveränitetsholmarna* ('Sovereignty Islets') in the Rivers of Torne and Muonio are a remnant of the Peace Treaty in Fredrikshamn 1809, and control over these islets is still shared by the Swedish and Finnish governments.<sup>21</sup>

The list could be continued. One must furthermore remember that we are not living at the end of history, so in that sense too we can only speak of 'modern states' in conditional terms. For instance, we need to consider the influence

20. See e.g. Harald Gustafsson, 'Conglomerates or Unitary States? Integration Processes in Early Modern Denmark-Norway and Sweden', in T. Fröschl (ed.), *Föderationsmodelle und Unionsstrukturen: über Staatenverbindungen in der frühen Neuzeit vom 15. zum 18. Jahrhundert* (Vienna & Munich, 1994); *idem*, *Gamla riken, nya stater: statsbildning, politisk kultur och identitet under Kalmarunionens upplösningsskede, 1512–1541* (Stockholm, 2000).

21. See 'Suveränitetsholmarna i Torne och Muonio älvar 1929–1947', 1920 års doss., HP vol. 1915 (cf. also HP vol. 1916), UD:s arkiv (The Foreign Ministry's Archive), Riksarkivet (Swedish National Archives).

of the supranational European Union. My point is that there is no difference in kind but only in degree between the early modern and the modern state in this respect. There is no uniform and self-explanatory modern state as opposed to a heterogeneous early-modern state. From a strictly analytical viewpoint the conglomerate state is a normal case even today. How, then, are we to assess the state in the past?

There is no denying that the conglomerate-state concept can be a useful tool in describing the empirical reality of the state in early-modern times. But it should not necessarily be seen as a contemporary ideal or something that was considered neither natural nor desirable. Many rulers put deliberate effort into integrating their territories in order to gain a more well-ordered and easily-governed state. In return, equally many strived to keep enemy powers in a state of disintegration. Neither of them was necessarily very successful, but, here too, we ought also to look at how people understood the world, and not only how it was shaped in reality. It is not the universal purpose of modern historical scholarship only to analyse how things actually *were* in a Rankenian sense, but equally often how they were *considered*. Let me give three examples of varying character to underline my point.

The Danish king's relation to the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein is as archetypical an example of feudal territorial and seigneurial confusion as there is. This was due to historical circumstances stretching back to the Middle Ages, but it was by no means an ideal situation for the kings of Denmark. They incessantly strived to tie these territories closer to Denmark proper. Sweden, allied to the Danish king's adversary, the duke of Holstein-Gottorp, accordingly found it consistent with its interest for the border between Denmark and the Holy Roman Empire to be kept in its fragmented state. A memorandum read to the King's Council in 1688 stated that it was of vital importance that Denmark did not achieve regular borders (*jämna gränser*) in the south. 'Therefore, the interest of Sweden demands, even if it were not the Duke of Holstein's [interest], that Denmark is kept in continuous occupation with the Holstein dispute.'<sup>22</sup> The conglomerate character of its territory was something that sustained Denmark's weakness, one reckoned.

Conversely, after initiating a successful integration policy for the newly acquired Scanian provinces in southern Sweden, the Swedish Crown tried to repeat the same procedure in the Baltic provinces, especially Livonia. Even the

22. 'Därför fordrar Sveriges intresse, fast det ej vore hertigens av Holstein, att Danmark hålles alltid i verk med holsteinske tvistigheterna'; Georg Landberg, *Den svenska utrikespolitikens historia*, 1:3: 1648–1697 (Stockholm, 1952), p. 237. Cf. also Knud J. V. Jespersen in *Dansk udenrigspolitikens historie*, 2: revanche og neutralitet 1648–1814 (Copenhagen, 2002), pp. 130–1.

same people who had conducted the process in Scania were put in charge. This clearly shows the systematic and careful considerations behind the actions. It was a deliberate policy, not an unintended consequence of simple resource extraction.<sup>23</sup> In the terminology of theories of power one aimed at exchanging control through coercion, deprivation or payment for more long-ranging norm systems. Or, to put it in Bertrand Russell's words, one endeavoured to bring about 'the production of intended effects'.<sup>24</sup> In this instance, one should therefore definitely speak about state building rather than state formation. The fact that the Baltic provinces were soon withdrawn from the Swedish Crown by military force in no way undermines this conclusion.

Although the conglomerate state was a normal condition in early-modern times – as it arguably still is today – it was not necessarily how it was perceived. Pre-modern people looked at the world with simplifying glasses, just as we often do today. On the one hand, people knew that the Holy Roman Empire consisted of an almost boundless palette of overlapping political units. On the other hand, one habitually referred to this territory as Germany only, and to its inhabitants simply as Germans.<sup>25</sup> This simplified way of comprehending the world is clearly visible in a Danish map (Fig. 1) from the first years of the nineteenth century. Here the European patchwork quilt has been reduced to no more than sixteen easily separated territories. As a matter of fact, a map of the 'tidy' Europe after World War I would be more complex. It is also worth noting, that although this is a Danish map, Norway is treated as a separate kingdom (to which Iceland belonged). Many modern historians employ different circumlocutions to grasp the whole Danish conglomerate – for instance, 'the whole-state', or 'the Oldenburg Monarchy'. Contemporaries had no problems with calling a spade a spade.

23. Alvin Isberg, *Karl XI och den livländska adeln 1684–1695: studier rörande det karolinska enväldets införande i Livland* (Lund, 1953); Jonas Nordin, 'Conquering Without Bloodshed: Swedish Rule in Livonia and Scania', in Ilgvars Misāns & Horst Wernicke (eds.), *Riga und der Ostseeraum: von der Gründung 1201 bis in die Frühe Neuzeit* (Marburg, 2005), pp. 358–66.

24. Bertrand Russell, 'The Forms of Power', in Steven Lukes (ed.), *Power* (New York, 1986), p. 19. Cf. also Robert Dahl, 'Power as the Control of Behavior', in *ibid.*, pp. 37–58.

25. Cf. any major geographical work from the time, e.g. *Atlas Geographus: or, A Compleat System of Geography, Ancient and Modern*, 1 (Savoy [London], 1711) ch. XXIII, or *Neu-eröffnetes AMPHITHEATRUM, Worinnen Nach dem uns bekanten gantzen Welt-Kreisß, Alle NATIONEN Nach ihrem Habit, in saubern Figuren repräsentiret* (Erfurt, 1723[–1728]).



Fig. 1. 'Grundtegnings af Europa', published in Denmark in 1800.

Photo: Det Kongelige Bibliotek, Copenhagen.

## FINLAND'S SPECIAL POSITION WITHIN THE REALM

When analysing the worldview of people in the past one should not look at how things actually were, but rather how they were perceived. The conglomerate-state concept tends to overemphasize the cosmopolitan character of peoples' identities. Sweden was certainly a multi-national state, both in the seventeenth and eighteenth centuries. But it was clear to most individuals that the Swedes were the leaders among this blend of peoples and that the interests of Sweden proper always had priority. Sweden was the immediate subject whereas the provinces, and even Finland, although part of the realm, were objects. A few quotations may exemplify this point. Sweden's disastrous war with Russia in 1741–43 was commented on in an anonymous pamphlet censored by the authorities:

*I believe that the Russian, after his, through this Peace, acquired advantages at Land and at Sea, can become the possessor of the whole of Finland as well*

*as Bothnia, when he so pleases; that Finland from now on will be more of a burden than of profit to Sweden [...]*<sup>26</sup>

Some thirty-five years later Gustav III's chamberlain Gustaf Johan Ehrensvärd wrote in his diary:

*Finland's predominance in trade towards Sweden is already so obvious, that Sweden within a few years most probably will experience even more dreadful experiences thereof [...] when adding the Finns' innate inclination towards independence, the measures taken by Russia to give them the same, as well as their innate hatred and jealousy against Sweden, it is clear that this political problem will soon be solved. When Finland, alongside its foreign trade and its predominance in this matter in relation to Sweden, gets its own foreign trade marketplaces [uppstäder], better roads and communications, it will probably soon be a country that can stand on its own.*<sup>27</sup>

Someone might object that these examples are not representative – the one comment being suppressed by the authorities, the other being hidden away in a diary. But we do have the same opinion directly from the horse's mouth. In a public speech to 'the people of Finland' Gustav III expressed exactly the same view. It was meant as a warning against all thoughts of independence or alliance with the Russian enemy:

*Always bear in mind the benefits you have experienced through your union with Sweden: the true knowledge of the Great Lord, enlightenment and education, public institutions, profitable trades and improved manners.  
– Remember how often Swedish blood has been shed in your defence, and how inadequate your own capability will always be in this. Behold the destiny of*

26. 'Jag tror, at Ryssen, efter thes igennem thenna Friden wundne Fördelar til Landz och Siöes kan blifwa ägare af hele Finland, och öfwer Bottn, när honom behagar, at Finland hädan effter blifwer mera Swerriges Rike til Last, än någon Nyttä'; *En redlig swänsk patriots politiska tros bekiännelse*: [Printed anonymously in Denmark 1743].

27. 'Finlands öfvervigt i handel emot Sverige är redan så känbar, at Sverige inom få år lärer däraf göra ännu bedröfligare erfarenhet. [...] när man härtill lägger finnarnes medfödda hog för independence, de steg som Ryssland gjort at skaffa dem den samma, och deras medfödda hat och jalouise emot Sverige, så lärer detta politiske problem snart vara upplöst. När Finland jämte sin utrikes handel och sin öfvervigt i den samma gentemot Sverige får egna upstäder, mycket vägar och communicationer, lär det snart kunna blifwa ett land, som kan bestå af sig sjelf'; Ehrensvärd, 1 (1878), p. 342.



*those countries, the fate of Poland, Courland, and Crimea, whom the promise of an imagined independence has led to impotence, destitution and misery.*<sup>28</sup>

In all these cases Finland is clearly treated as an appendage to Sweden, rather than an integral part. I could produce many more examples of similar kind, but I find it more relevant to emphasize the point that the existence of these views did not in any fundamental way affect the relationship between Sweden and Finland as long as there was peace and quiet. It did not lead to any oppression or systematic maltreatment of the eastern part of the realm.

However, the existence of these mental structures can help to explain why it was *Finland* – whole and proper, more or less to the same extent that we know it today – that Russia wanted to separate from Sweden from the 1740s onwards. Furthermore, it seems reasonable to argue that this protracted mental division between the two parts of the realm made the forced divorce in 1809 easier to accept for both parties.

When I have presented these and other similar examples earlier people have objected that my argument is teleological and that if we studied, for instance, Dalecarlia (*Dalarna*) or Northern Sweden (*Norrland*), we would find much the same phenomenon.<sup>29</sup> This might sound compelling, but the truth is that these objections have always been mere postulates and never supported with any evidence. As a matter of fact even I initiated my research with much the same preconception, but I never found any proof to support this view and thus had to abandon it. I do not deny that certain provinces in *Svealand* and *Götaland* also could stand out for special reasons, but I do maintain that Finland taken as a whole had a special position, even when compared to other regions in the Swedish realm. Torbjörn Eng has attempted to refute this argument by quoting some examples where Finland was *not* mentioned separately.<sup>30</sup> However, not once does he discuss the circumstances when it in fact *was* mentioned, and how this should be interpreted. It is obvious that a division into two parts was frequent in great many contexts. I will only give

28. 'Ihogkommen de förmoner, Eder förening med Sverige Eder tilskyndat; den store Gudens sanna kännedom, uplysning och kunskaper, nyttiga inrättningar, lönande näringar och förbättrade seder. – Ihogkommen huru ofta Swears blod runnit til Edert försvar, och huru otillräckelig Eder egen förmåga dertil altid blifwer. Betrakten de Länders öden, Pohlen, Curland och Crims belägenhet, hwilka löftet om en inbillad sjelfständighet förledt til wanmagt, nöd och elände'; Address to His Majesty's loyal subjects in the Grand Duchy of Finland, 6 December 1788, quoted from Reinhold Gustaf Modée (ed.), *Utdrag utur alla ifrån år 1787 utkomne publique handlingar*, etc., 14, (Stockholm, 1804), pp. 256–7.

29. E.g. Lennersand (2002), pp. 96–7; Nurmiainen (2003), p. 269; Samuelson (2008), e.g. pp. 20–3.

30. Eng (2001), pp. 293, 295–6.

two randomly chosen examples. The Instrument of Government of 1634, for instance, declared that '[n]o one, who is not resident within Sweden's and Finland's separate and through age established borders, should have anything to say in the Diet or in other deliberations on governing [...]'.<sup>31</sup> Sweden and Finland were legally indivisible, but in spite of this it was obviously considered appropriate to name them separately. Equally, some 160 years later Gustav IV Adolf issued new regulations for the army and navy in 'Sweden, Finland and Pomerania'.<sup>32</sup> Whereas Pomerania had separate legal status that was perhaps worth emphasizing, Finland had not.

This intuitive distinguishing between Sweden and Finland by no means led directly and inevitably to the splitting of the realm in 1809. But it did make the separation easier and it ensured that the division would follow boundaries that had been mentally established for a long time. With boundaries I do not mean barriers, but clear conceptions of the extent of the two entities, considered both as nations and as territories.

The relationship between Sweden and Finland was multi-faceted. Although there is no doubt that Swedes and Finns were regarded as separate nations and Sweden and Finland were often treated as two amalgamated entities, there are no predetermined conclusions to be drawn from this. On an individual level many people born in Finland most certainly did not regard themselves as different from any other Swedish subjects, and most people on both sides regarded Finland as naturally belonging to Sweden. Nevertheless there was an ambiguity between Sweden and Finland which is not comparable to the relation between any other parts of the realm.

31. 'Ingen, som icke är bofast innan om Sveriges och Finlands enskildte och af ålder fattade gränster, hafve något ord på riksdagar eller i andre rådslag om regementet [...]', The Instrument of Government of 1634, § 46; Emil Hildebrand (ed.), *Sveriges regeringsformer 1634–1809 samt konungaförsäkringar 1611–1800* (Stockholm, 1891), p. 32.

32. *Kongl. Maj:ts förnyade krigs-articlar, til efterrättelse för arméen och flottorne i Sverige, Finland och Pomern*. Gifne Stockholms slott den 6 maji 1795 (Stockholm, 1795).



