

INTRODUCTION

Nordic historiography: from methodological nationalism to empirical transnationalism

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Decentring the national in history writing

‘History can be *living* politics, – so that the past issues and present-day controversies are entwined with each other to such an extent that one cannot separate them’, wrote the Norwegian historian Halvdan Koht in 1920 (Koht 1920: 2 [italics in the original]). According to him, this had been the case in nineteenth-century Norway, where history writing had become intermingled with the question of whether the Norwegians should strive for an independent nation-state or stay in a union with Sweden. The answer to this question determined whether the past was interpreted from a national or a regional perspective. Like most of their European colleagues, Norwegian historians mainly chose the former option.¹ The modern (scientific) discipline of history cultivated an intimate relationship with the nation-state, which has ever since had a profound impact on the choice of themes, basic concepts, theories of explanation and the construction of grand narratives.² To cite the historian Jarle Simensen, history ‘arose as the child – and tutor – of the nation state’, consequently making national history predominant in the profession (Simensen 2000: 90).

Simultaneously, however, diverse regional, international and global frameworks have continued living in the margins, or as an element of

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national history, occasionally gaining more ground when the benevolence of nationalism has been seriously challenged, such as in the aftermath of the horrors of the First and Second World Wars (Robin 2009: 486–87). One of the terms stemming from such alternative ways of framing the past is the adjective ‘transnational’. It first appeared in scholarly literature as early as 1862, when the German linguist Georg Curtius used it to buttress his argument that every language is fundamentally transnational (*etwas transnationales*). This first sporadic usage of the term already conveyed its basic meaning: the idea of going beyond or transcending national space, persons or notions of belonging. From the 1940s onwards, the term slowly started to gain in popularity. On the one hand, it was used in economic analyses to explain expanding capitalist practices, financial flows and the growing integration of trade and production that bound European countries together and with other areas of the world. On the other hand, it was adopted by those scholars of international relations and law who were critical of overly state-centric approaches and chose to focus on non-interstate, border-crossing relations between individuals, organizations and other phenomena. Nevertheless, it was only in the 1980s, boosted by debates on globalization, that the term ‘transnational’ really made its breakthrough in scholarly vocabulary. Initiated by anthropology, cultural studies and the sociology of migration, other disciplines such as history, geography, gender studies, religious studies and political science soon followed. As a result, the term eventually attained the position of the most commonly used term in the US academic world in the late 1980s and early 1990s (Saunier 2009).

Analogous to the adjective ‘national’ some 150 years ago, ‘transnational’ has consequently become a highly politicized term. Intermingled with diverse globalization discourses and understood as an ism, ‘transnationalism’ has increasingly been used to signify a worldview that, depending on the viewer, either favourably promotes the free circulation of people, ideas and goods or else threatens the sovereignty of nation-states (Saunier 2009: 1054; see also Robin 2009: 488–89). This choice also seems to determine, at least in part, the particular perspective according to which the past is interpreted. Generally speaking, post-nationalist scholars have claimed that the nation-state has monopolized the historical imagination to such a degree that historians have tended to ignore anything beyond the uniform, all-encompassing national narrative. Thus, the mission is to rescue the past from the nation, to cite the historian Prasenjit Duara’s famous rallying cry from 1995. In this situation, seemingly progressive identities are conceived of and offered to historians who abandon the national framework and strive for a type of world citizenship (Robin 2009: 488–91). In contrast, critics of the market-driven globalization hype have pointed out that nation-states, or at least some of them, have performed the role of welfare states, protecting

their citizens from the harsh inequalities and oppressions that reside outside the nation-state regime (e.g. Robin 2009: 491–93). From this point of view, post-nationalist detachment mostly means that, by the rationale of our times, professional historians should no longer focus on the nation-state and instead transform themselves into a free-floating, yet anglophone, global knowledge elite, detached from local loyalties and responsibilities. Since the national framework is still the framework of political democracy, some historians have interpreted this demand as an authoritarian attack on the traditional democratic core of historiography (Tvedt 2012: 500; see also Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 307).

The present volume stems from an awareness that ideological components are often mixed with methodological ones during transitory phases, or ‘turns’, such as the recent post- or transnational turn in historical research. In this situation, it is essential to distinguish between the ideological currents surrounding our rethinking of the past and the actual methodological benefits that no doubt can be found by decentring the national framework within history. The overarching aim of this volume is to contribute to this methodological enterprise – not by renaming things, but by writing the ‘societal history’ of historiography. This is an important task not only for the field of Nordic historiography, but for the ongoing global debate on the nature of historiography. To borrow Mattias Midell and Lluís Roura’s term, there is a certain *discourse of newness* (Midell and Roura 2013: 5, 22–23) that permeates so much of academic knowledge production, most explicit in the application genre formed by the (always fierce) struggle for funding. The notion that ours is an age of globalization demanding quick fixes – in this case, the abandonment of the national framework in historiography – bears some resemblance to the linear, and superficial, logic. The discourse of newness rests on the assumption that our experience in the present is uniquely rich compared to experiences in the past, and that it is also well reflected upon by us. It may, however, very well be the case that conceptual quick fixes to adapt to a perceived globalization on one level actually reinforce the hampering national framework on another. This risk is imminent because our knowledge of the global processes in the present and of our own position in it is incomplete. Globalization is certainly one of the most complex historical phenomena that there is, and as historians we hold a specific responsibility to provide a perspectival distance to discourses emanating from it. What this volume intends to show is that the tension between the global and the national in historiography is not a new challenge, but a durable dilemma that has been met with a plethora of different approaches by historians from a plethora of different positions in the past.

To begin with, we want to take seriously the post-nationalist demand to reconsider whether historians have overvalued territorial states and

national cultures in their scholarly practices. Although few Northern European academic historians nowadays study history with the obviously nationalist aim of legitimizing a particular nation-building project, it is certainly true that various nation-states still tend to serve as the constant unit of observation throughout all historical transformations, the ‘thing’ whose change history is supposed to depict (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 305). For instance, in Swedish historiography the idea of a ‘Sweden proper’, a nation-state defined by its contemporary borders, emerged after the Napoleonic Wars as the core unit for assessing the entire history of the Swedish Realm from the dawn of time to the present. This national definition of history has largely ignored the fact that the south-western part of present-day Finland was an integral part of ‘original’ Sweden from its consolidation in the fourteenth century until 1809. Similarly, Finnish historiography has long emphasized the existence of a separate Finnish nationality ‘under Swedish power’ and before the ‘Swedish conquest’ (see Engman 1994; Østergård 1997: 58–59; Jalava 2013: 253; Villstrand 2009). Likewise, many Norwegian historians took great pains to demonstrate the unbroken continuity of the history of Norway from the Viking era to the nineteenth century, thereby downplaying the significance of the nearly four hundred years during which the country was a part of the Danish Realm. Danish historians, for their part, adjusted their thinking at the turn of the twentieth century to explain a history of Denmark inside the more restricted borders that were established in the wake of the loss of the Schleswig-Holstein region to Prussia and Austria in 1864 (Kirby 1991: 10–11; Aronsson et al. 2008: 262, 266, 281; Jalava 2013: 253). Somewhat paradoxically, the intense inter-Nordic research cooperation since the 1960s has reinforced rather than transgressed the national perspective, precisely because its favourite method of comparison has been a systematic comparison on the level of the Nordic national welfare states (Mishkova, Stråth and Trencsényi 2013: 296–97).

As the historian Angelika Epple points out, the criticism of a narrowly national and/or state-centric framework does not necessarily mean that the historical significance of nation-states and the differences in local opportunity structures and political cultures should be denied. Instead, the issue at stake is that there are multiple relations between different localities and actors, and the national scale is only one of many possible spatial dimensions. Hence, in the present volume our overall objective is not so much to efface or underrate nation-states; rather, we no longer conceive of such entities as fixed, but as fluid, relational and historically changing (Epple 2012: 163–64, 168–70). While certain movements, flows and circulations in history have arguably *both* transcended *and* reinforced the boundaries between nations and states, we choose to use nationalism as a global

ideology as our starting point, i.e. we treat the national and the transnational as mutually supplemental perspectives rather than pitting them against one another – and hence explain the historicity of the national.

Instead of taking the path towards global historiography, which would render our empirical aim too unwieldy, we have chosen to develop the transnational dimension, focusing more intensively on the relational aspects that constitute the national, the international and the transnational. For our purposes, the term ‘transnational’ refers to the economic, social, cultural and political links between people, spaces and institutions that cross or transcend nation-state borders, whereas the term ‘international’ is related to the actions between national governments and actors or else concerns the toing and froing of items (people, goods, ideas, etc.) from one nation-state context to another (Vertovec 2009: 1–3; Iriye 2013: 15–16, 48–49). By using a combination of comparative and entangled histories approaches, we aim to develop a transnational perspective on the history of Nordic historiography that clearly demonstrates how the national fabric and local debates were – and constantly are – intertwined with particular actors, issues and processes that cut across the so-called international, the national and the local (see also Saunier 2013: 140). While nation-states will thus remain a part of the spatial dimensions within which we operate, we nevertheless believe that historical research and historiography as such can be denationalized such that the national dimension and nationalism are clearly set apart from one another.

Methodological nationalism: the historians’ besetting sin?

In academic historiography, the debate over the proper framing and role of nation/state/society has recently revolved around the term ‘methodological nationalism’. The term first arose out of heated debates in sociology and anthropology (see, e.g., Giddens 1973: 265; Smith 1979: 191; Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Chernilo 2008), and it has since then presented itself as a focal point in the challenges that globalization presents to historiography. This term refers to the tendency to equate nation-states with the social unit of society and to define them as closed containers of historical development. While nation-states with their contemporary borders have been taken for granted as ‘natural’ units for analyses and comparisons in the field of history, national historiography has tended to bypass, or frankly exclude, flows, linkages and identities that cross or supersede other spatial units or the phenomena and dynamics within them. Methodological nationalism has further been reflected in the national data sets and archival systems that have strongly structured knowledge about the world into separate national

compartments (see, e.g., Kocka 2003: 42–43; Werner and Zimmermann 2006: 33–43; Levitt and Khagram 2008: 6; Conrad 2010: 74–75; Amelina et al. 2012: 2–3). Indeed, national archives, museums and libraries can be seen as materializations of national consciousness, manifesting in a very tangible way the fact that the nation has a history ‘of its own’, that it ‘owns’ a history (Verschaffel 2012: 29–30; Porciani and Tollebeek 2012).

Simultaneously, however, it has also been argued that the social sciences in general and classic theories of modernity in particular have had a blind spot when it comes to understanding the rise of nation-states as well as nationalism and ethnicity. While the grand theorists from Marx and Weber to Durkheim and Parsons have considered nationalism to be a transitory stage on the way to a modern, rationalized and individualized class society, their schemes have been shielded from the overwhelming and obvious fact that nationalist politics and conflicts have shaped the whole history of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. In this sense, as the sociologists Andreas Wimmer and Nina Glick Schiller note, methodological nationalism may also refer to the ways in which the nationalist forms of inclusion and exclusion that bind modern societies together have served as an invisible, self-evident background even to the most sophisticated theorizing about the modern condition to such an extent that nation-state principles have vanished from sight altogether (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002: 303–4).

In the Nordic countries, the history of historiography is one of those subfields of historical scholarship in which methodological nationalism – understood as the naturalization of nation-states as the self-evident, privileged units of historical study – has been a normal state of affairs. So far, research has mostly remained limited to the study of national historiographical traditions, and even explicit attempts to write a Nordic history of historiography have usually been organized as ‘anthology comparisons’, in which historians contribute from their distinctly national perspectives.³ Moreover, the few existing comparisons have, as a rule, been limited to the three kingdoms of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, which have mutually comprehensible languages, whereas Finland and Iceland have been left out of such (hi)stories (Meyer 2000; Torstendahl 2011).⁴

Our collective volume on the history of Nordic historiography is held together by a series of questions concerning methodological nationalism. First, we take a critical look at our scholarly predecessors. How was the national framework incorporated into their research practices and scholarly discourses? What efforts were made by past historians to distance themselves from narrowly nationalist perspectives? What options or alternatives were there to methodological nationalism, and to what extent is it fair to apply this label to our tradition? In other words, we want to offer a more

nuanced picture of the situation than merely drawing a rather simplistic black and white opposition between the late 'reactionary' national historians and present-day 'progressive' transnational historians.

Second, we aim to overcome methodological nationalism in our own research by emphatically focusing on the interacting processes, cultural transfers, network-building and border-crossing circulation of cultural products rather than on single, bounded national cases. Instead of just adding Danish history, Finnish history, Icelandic history and so on, and calling the sum total Nordic history, we have adopted the framework of the Nordic region, which is in turn put into a larger European framework and, to some extent, a framework focusing on the global circulation of ideas. Our common perspective can be described as *empirical transnationalism*,⁵ which is, above all, interested in analysing the concrete actors and mechanisms involved in transmissions and the determinants impacting such transmissions. For instance, we ask how certain ideas and practices have circulated through historians' networks, the channels through which historiographical products have flowed, how certain scholarly trends have been translated and adapted to different local conditions, and why certain ideas and practices have taken root while others have been ignored. In other words, the objective of our research has not been to take an ideological stand for or against the transnational approach as an alternative to a national or local approach, but to study the interaction between different levels without a priori giving greater analytic weight to one level over another. While drafting this volume, it soon became evident that individual historians would play a large role in our story, but, nonetheless, that is how it happened: national histories were written by individual historians under more or less unique conditions, and, particularly before the Second World War and the expansion of higher education, the number of professional historians was relatively small.

Empirical transnationalism is based on a critical assessment of some of the defining characteristics of the history of historiography as it developed as a research field in the latter half of the twentieth century. The first characteristic concerns the relationship between the history of historiography and philosophy. After the Second World War, the history of historiography was often perceived from a teleological, legitimizing standpoint. It was a story of the progress of historiography towards becoming a 'real' science. This entailed a teleological dependence on a stable, supra-historical definition of science, one based on definitions borrowed from other disciplines and often (if not always) provided by philosophy, that is to say, logical positivism. The 'postmodern' narrativist critique of historiography, provided by Hayden White and Frank Ankersmit, among others, probably owes much of its perceived controversiality to a sort of contrast

effect with the logical positivists' rigid definition of science. Chris Lorenz, Carlo Ginzburg and others have argued that Ankersmit and White simply repeat the position of positivism by inverting it (Ginzburg 1991; Lorenz 1998, 2014). The 'post-foundationalist' position adopted by Lorenz, for example, corresponds well with developments in the history of science. In the expanding field of science studies, physics models built by philosophers no longer serve as the blueprint that other disciplines should try to emulate, partly because physics itself now defies the philosophers' original models. The concept of science has taken on a broader meaning and has been subjected to massive historicization and philosophical critique.⁶

'Science' is no longer regarded as a stable concept, but rather as a multifaceted empirical phenomenon embedded in differing social, economic and cultural contexts. This is a development that the history of historiography can both benefit from and contribute to. We want to know more about the complex interplay of factors actually determining historiography. We hold no philosophical claims concerning the telos of historiography – hence the *empirical* in empirical transnationalism. The teleological view of historiography progressing towards a more advanced scientific state was an attempt to renew legitimacy for historians during the Cold War era, when history once again was challenged by social sciences on the rise. But according to Peter Edelberg's chapter in the present volume, it was also something more. In the chapter 'Trans-Nordic neo-empiricism in a European setting', he argues that the joint production of 'ahistorical' historical methodologies in the 1960s reflected not only narrow, scholarly questions but also the broad sociopolitical and temporal concerns of the Nordic welfare states. In this context, Popper's critical rationalism was tied to 'piecemeal social engineering' and an ideal philosophy for progressive middle-of-the-road historians of the period.

Another defining characteristic of the history of historiography 'in the old sense' has to do with its claim to depict international, general progress via national examples, usually referred to as 'paradigms'. Here, we emphasize that the international arena is not a neutral vehicle of progress, but is instead sustained by relations between nations, where some countries – usually the biggest, but sometimes just the lucky ones – have a tendency to get the upper hand. The assumption that international progress can clearly be discerned from a neutral point of view often underpins a teleological view of historiography and results in a certain intertwining of methodological nationalism and internationalism. For instance, in the classic textbook *Historiography in the Twentieth Century*, Georg G. Iggers divides the topic at hand into three distinctly national paradigms, a German, a French and a British one, thus equating modern historiography with these few national and dominating forms (Iggers 2005).⁷

This tendency to entangle the national and the international recurs in several chapters of our volume, for instance in Jon Røyne Kyllingstad's chapter 'Nationalist internationalism: Danish and Norwegian historical research in the aftermath of the First World War', in which he compares the internationalist initiatives of Danish and Norwegian scholars in the general chaos following the Great War. He notices certain Nordic similarities in the various attempts to promote small-state and progressive nationalism as examples of peaceful nationalism aided by historical scholarship. At the same time, however, there were important differences between the Danish and Norwegian attempts. A politically contentious issue pressed Danish historians into their transnational endeavour: the fate of the Schleswig-Holstein region, in which both Danish and German ethnicities were mixed. The research programme of the leading Danish historian Aage Friis was outlined as a sort of source-critical, objectivist diplomacy, designed to counteract chauvinist interpretations from both the German and Danish sides. This anti-chauvinism – anti-political yet very close to politics – was what the Danish historians offered to the world. Norwegian nationalist internationalism was a much broader and multidisciplinary endeavour, one in which a conception of Norwegian history rather than the actions of Norwegian historians was the decisive factor. Norwegian peace-promoting efforts in the 1920s were initiated through the founding of the Institute for Comparative Research in Human Culture (Instituttet for sammenlignende kulturforskning) in 1922 in Oslo. The plan was to bring leading international scholars to the Institute because Norwegian culture was considered to be particularly well suited to comparative research. This was, indeed, methodological nationalism of a very sophisticated kind, where the tension between localizing and universalizing tendencies seemed to have been resolved.

The harmonious mixing of nationalism and internationalism in Norwegian historical culture is evident also in Marja Jalava's comparison of the networks and methodologies of the early Norwegian and Finnish historians of society in the first third of the twentieth century. Historians from both countries shared methodological assumptions regarding the extent to which nationalism and internationalism were related. The national constituted the building block for, and also the stepping stone into, the international realm. Whereas the Norwegians managed to promote their nation as a constitutive part of the international realm, the Finns had a more unfavourable position both because political divisions in Finland were much more severe, particularly after the 1918 civil war, and also because the international realm itself had a certain *Drang nach Westen* as one of its constitutive traits. This is evident in what Jalava calls the 'politics of comparison'. It seems that the Finnish scholars were eager to compare their nation with their Western neighbours, while Norwegian scholars mostly avoided 'the East'

both in their methodological frameworks and in terms of networking. The fact that most Finnish scholars had command of the Scandinavian languages, but other Scandinavians did not know Finnish, further strengthened the lack of symmetry in comparative interests.

Simon Larsson's chapter 'Scientific historiography and its discontents: Danish and Swedish "aristocratic empiricism"', offers an example of the multilayered and spatial dimensions of transnationalism. The chapter circles around the intimate transnational network between Danish professor Erik Arup and Swedish professor Lauritz Weibull during the first half of the twentieth century. They both presented themselves as proprietors of a particular brand of anti-chauvinist, source-critical methodology, but while this identity was much more comfortable for Weibull, who was professor at the more peripheral University of Lund in the south of Sweden, this 'outsider' status with respect to the nationalist framework brought severe stress upon Arup, who was professor at the more central University of Copenhagen. While Weibull's methodological identity was reinforced by regional and transnational dimensions involving both modern Denmark and Sweden, Arup, who had started out as a transnational comparativist, became obsessed with the national framework at the peak of his career and deliberately promoted methodological nationalism.

Norden as a historical and historiographical region

The transnational perspective of the present volume focuses, above all, on linkages and networks within Norden, that is to say, its focus is on the present-day Nordic countries. The concept of Norden and the special qualities of being 'Nordic' (shared and non-shared concepts and identifications) must obviously be open to critical analysis, for otherwise we would simply be replacing methodological nationalism with methodological Nordicism. Particularly in the case of Denmark and Sweden, and to a certain extent Norway, the nineteenth-century historiographical constructions of the nation went hand in hand – and were compatible – with the construction of an overarching Scandinavian or Nordic nation and the idea of a shared Scandinavian or Nordic past. In many instances, as already mentioned above, the Scandinavian or Nordic region served merely as a more expansive way of framing the nation-states instead of adding an alternative spatial dimension to them. This is why the double bond of region-building as nation-building must be acknowledged, and vice versa (Mishkova, Stråth and Trencsényi 2013: 258–61, 264),⁸ which is the topic of Kristín Bragadóttir's chapter in this volume. By focusing on Danish and Icelandic historians' interpretations of Scandinavism she highlights the complex interplay of 'macro- and

micro-nationalisms' that have been characteristic of such nineteenth-century European pan-isms as Scandinavism.

In the eyes of scholars from outside the region, the Nordic countries often appear quite similar to one another. To cite the Israeli-American sociologist Amitai Etzioni, 'There is no region in Europe and few exist in the world where culture, tradition, language, ethnic origin, political structure, and religion – all "background" and identitive elements – are as similar as they are in the Nordic region' (Etzioni 1965: 220–21). To be sure, Nordic histories certainly have a number of common features. Already the long political history of Nordic composite states, ever since the founding of the Kalmar Union in 1397,⁹ makes it difficult to discuss the past of one Nordic country without mentioning any of its neighbours. Other features that have been used to justify the thesis of a specific Nordic developmental trajectory include such elements as the idea of an original peasant freedom and the strong role of the peasantry in local government; a socially inclusive and democratic concept of the people (*folk*; in Finnish, *kansa*) that diverges from more holistic and populist notions of German *Volk* and *völkisch*; the religious identity of *folk* and state, which is institutionalized in Lutheran state churches; the integration, more or less contested, of social movements (such as labour, revivalist and feminist movements) into the national narratives; and finally, the present-day issues of international migration and the history of minorities whose numbers have traditionally been relatively small. Moreover, the development of the Nordic countries into welfare states also followed rather similar patterns. In short, there is a long tradition of viewing the Nordic countries as one region based on considerable historical evidence (see, e.g., Sørensen and Stråth 1997; Götz 2003; Myhre 2012: 280).

At the same time, however, it has to be emphasized that these parallels are by no means self-evident given the diversity of the Nordic historical heritage. First, the Nordic countries have had diverse cultural and geographical inclinations (*Drang*) in the East–West/South–West axis. Roughly speaking, this axis separates the Atlantic, sea-facing Norden (Iceland, Norway and, with some reservations, Denmark) from the Baltic, land-based Norden (Finland and Sweden).¹⁰ Even today, these different inclinations are reflected in the fact that Denmark, Iceland and Norway are member states of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), whereas Finland and Sweden have remained militarily non-aligned countries. Second, the Nordic countries represent historically different ideal types of nations. Denmark and Sweden have a long history as composite states, Norway and Iceland have interrupted state histories, and Finland was never an independent state before 1917. Third, the past power relationships have been reflected in the construction of centres and peripheries within Norden. In historical scholarship, similar to many other academic fields, Copenhagen and Stockholm until

the Second World War played the role of centres to which more peripheral actors travelled to have access to source materials in the archives of the old capitals and, simultaneously, to appropriate new ideas to apply to local contexts. In the case of Norway and Iceland, Copenhagen was also the major university town until 1811 and 1911, respectively, when the present-day University of Oslo and the University of Iceland were founded.¹¹ Finally, the strong tradition of national(ist) history writing has tended to emphasize the uniqueness of each country, thus undermining similarities and emphasizing differences. According to one playful remark, this has resulted in the idea of ‘one Nordic model with five exceptions’ (see Østergård 1997: 42–47, 69–70; citation in Hilson 2008: 113).

In striking a balance between shared histories and imagined communities, a useful theoretical concept is the German term *Geschichtsregion* (‘history region’ or ‘historical region’), which has its origins in the interwar debate on how to define ‘Eastern Europe’. To cite the historian Stefan Troebst, the term ‘stands for the construction of a meso-region which over a long period of time is characterized by an individual cluster of social, economic, cultural, and political structures and which is larger than a single state yet smaller than a continent’. As Troebst emphasizes, it is, above all, a heuristic concept for comparative and entangled histories approaches in order to identify transnational or translocal structures, features and linkages common to a constructed meta-region that is, in general, not congruent with geographical or political boundaries. Thus, a historical region should definitely not be perceived in an essentialist or geo-determinist manner (Troebst 2003, citation on 173). On the contrary, the well-known dynamism and flexibility of such concepts as Norden, Scandinavia, the Nordic countries and Northern Europe over time should prevent scholars from resorting to the self-fulfilling prophecy of employing regional concepts.¹²

In addition to being a historical region, Norden can be defined as a historiographical region. To borrow from the historian Jan Eivind Myhre’s definition, this term refers to a meso-region whose countries, or parts of them, cooperate in terms of historical organizations, conferences, joint research projects and more informal networks. It may also refer to historical debates or discourses as to whether such regions exist in the first place and, if so, what they consist of. Historiographical regions are usually seen as having come about as a result of one or more of the following interrelated elements: mutually understandable languages, a common historical heritage or a common geopolitical situation (Myhre 2012: 280).¹³

Similar to the notion of Norden as a historical region, its history as a historiographical region is long and entangled. For instance, the histories written at the Royal Academy of Turku in Finland (the present-day University of Helsinki) from the seventeenth century until the early nineteenth century

belong to the genre of writing about the history of the Swedish Realm, while simultaneously following European trends of biblical and state histories quite closely (Tommila 1989: 23–41). Along with the rise of nineteenth-century ‘scientific’ history, the European intellectual impulses that shaped professional historiography in the Nordic region continued to be more or less the same from the time of German idealism and the critical spirit of *Historismus* onwards. In addition to wide-ranging personal contacts, the institutionalization of a transnational Nordic academic community took place at the turn of the twentieth century; it was initially based around and reinforced by the Congresses of Nordic Historians (*Nordiska historikermötet*), particularly since the 1920s. After the Second World War, the notion of a common Nordic historiographical region was further asserted, first through the founding of two English-speaking historical journals, *Scandinavian Economic History Review* (1953) and *Scandinavian Journal of History* (1976), and, second, by arranging Nordic Historians’ Conferences on Historical Method (*Nordiska historiska metodkonferensen*) from 1965 to 1993 and Nordic Women’s and Gender Historians’ Conferences (*Nordiska kvinnohistorikermötet*) from 1983 onwards. Furthermore, closer cooperation among Nordic historians has been encouraged through the incentive of public research funding for joint projects. The present volume is a prime example of this official promotion of inter-Nordic research cooperation, as it is based on a four-year research project funded by the Joint Committee for Nordic Research Councils for the Humanities and the Social Sciences (NOS-HS).¹⁴

Once again, it must be emphasized that this rich array of diverse inter-Nordic activities has by no means resulted in a ‘Nordic regime of historiography’ in the sense that one could define a distinctive ‘Nordic school’ of interpretation, theory or methodology. Somewhat paradoxically perhaps, as already mentioned, the undeniably strong sense of regional communal-ity in the Nordic countries has rather been based on the assumption of the distinctiveness of each Nordic nationality to the extent that the much-promoted idea of ‘Nordicity’ seems to reveal itself mostly through the separate nation-states. For instance, Finns have emphasized the Nordic nature of their history, society and culture in contrast to the East without any reference to similarity with Denmark.

The concept of region in overcoming methodological nationalism

The most obvious reply to the challenge that globalization poses to historiography would be to simply abandon the nation-state framework. The usefulness of global, long-term macro-history notwithstanding, our aim is,

in part, to qualify knowledge with respect to the national framework rather than abandoning it entirely. Since our aim is also to distinguish between the political currents and methodological benefits both inherent in any challenge of globalization, we have considered other ways to approach the problem than merely resorting to global history.

The concept of region is not in and of itself a sinecure to the maladies of methodological nationalism. This is evident from recent research, and perhaps one could argue further that regional history, just like universal history, often serves as an amplifier in projecting the national framework onto the larger screen of progressive civilization. But the lesson to be learned here is not that regionalism has been futile or compromised. Rather, it is a lesson that concerns one of the most basic assumptions about knowledge: that the general by default is worth more than the particular. This is arguably one of the notions underpinning the present temptation to simply abandon the national framework for more general ones, a temptation that promises an effortless conceptual escape from national narrow-mindedness to broad-minded global perspectives.

The movement from the particular to the general is, however, a false view of how progress works in empirical sciences, which both history and natural sciences belong to. Already at the end of the nineteenth century, historians dreamed of mimicking natural science in the sense that some general laws of history could be sought out and established. This yearning was based on a one-sided and static view of the natural sciences. Viewed dynamically, that is historically, it is evident that knowledge in the natural sciences has improved via a consistent interplay between the particular and the general. The perceived 'laws of nature' have crumbled time and again in the face of inferences from very particular experiments. We would like to launch regionalism as a sort of testing ground, a laboratory perhaps, where a discussion of the national and the global in historiography can be furthered, while at the same time avoiding the superficiality that might be the result of an all too effortless shift of conceptual frameworks.

Instead of just substituting a single one-sided methodology for another, our methodological strategy is to add alternatives and to counter methodological nationalism with plurality. A globalist, internationalist discourse cannot stand as the sole option. The regional alternative can be quite useful in the present situation, when the task is, on the one hand, to criticize methodological nationalism, and, on the other, to avoid conveying political messages in the language of methodology. The choice to regard Norden as a historical and historiographical region is not simply a device to limit our investigation; nor is it a postulate that transnational or translocal regions and region-building would be somehow more 'natural' or 'disinterested' than the nation-state and nation-building framework. Indeed, the construction

of diverse regional categories has been an inseparable part of empire-building and state-building during both the era of empires and the era of modern nation-states. Regionalist, imperialist and nationalist projects have been closely interwoven, and these distinctions often collapse when particular examples are addressed (Applegate 1999: 1164–65; Arias 2010: 30–31; see also Jalava 2013: 247–48).

The *raison d'être* of methodological nationalism was, and arguably is, identity formation. Popular Finnish historiography from the early nineteenth century until the end of the twentieth century was, according to Pertti Haapala's chapter in this book, quite successful as an aspect of methodological nationalism in this respect. Frank Ankersmit has recently argued that the quest for identity is essential to all writing of history. Several objections can certainly be raised to this perspective, and our view of identity formation is decidedly more on the constructivist and spatialist side than that of the neo-essentialist Ankersmit (Ankersmit 2012: 4). But he is still undoubtedly correct in suggesting that identity formation and historiography are tied so closely together that one cannot hope to 'solve the problem' once and for all. The ambiguity of identity – selective perceptions, cults of origin, the 'othering' of counterparts and so on – is a problem tied so closely to historiography that one cannot hope to escape it simply by abandoning the national framework or adopting an ontology that declares everything outside of the academy to be semi-real social constructs. The solution to this dilemma is to acknowledge the agency inherent in the writing of history and to acknowledge also the bias inherent in the methodological choices all historians have to make. This leads us to the second reason as to why we have settled for the concept of Norden instead of other existing alternatives, such as Scandinavia, Northern Europe or the prolific globalist discourse. We did this because the concept of Norden, in its modern political framework, holds a political bias that we prefer to the bias of existing alternatives. There is a certain Nordic legacy that we must consider when we ourselves engage in region-building in the historiographical field.

As already mentioned, international observers have often highlighted the similarities between the Nordic countries as the main reason for considering Norden a coherent region. This, however, is not our approach. Setting aside the many cultural similarities of the Nordic societies stretching from the twelfth century into the welfare states of the twentieth century, setting aside also the classical, the German and other pre-modern conceptions of Norden (Kliemann 2005), and focusing instead on the modern political concept (Østergård 2013), we think that such a Nordic legacy might consist of a successful mixing of the national framework and transnational reflexivity, a social and cultural process, rather than a fixed geographical space. This means, for example, that Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania

might belong to our historical and historiographical region, as we indeed look forward to in the continued transnational mapping of Nordic historians (Branch 1999).

The preconditions for a 'post-imperial' Norden were created in the crucial years of 1809 and 1814. The struggle for supremacy in the Baltic Sea region between Sweden and Denmark had from the early sixteenth century been the decisive political conflict in the area. It had waned gradually since the end of the Swedish Realm in 1721, and the Russian Empire had since then emerged as the dominating military force in the region, pushing the former 'arch-enemies' into similar positions. The new 'Scandinavian' spirit still reverberated with imperial aspirations. Finland belonged to the Russian Empire beginning in the year 1809, and Sweden consequently adapted a loose and dim union with Norway, as had Denmark with Iceland. Political amateurs dreamed of a new Scandinavian 'superstate', and the Danish monarchy was quite interested in gaining Swedish support for the upcoming conflict over Schleswig-Holstein, still a part of Denmark until its defeat by Prussia and Austria in 1864. After that, imperial reverberations gave way to cultural and political emancipation processes that were, at least in certain circles, quite vacuous. Many aspects of these processes simply mirrored a lust for entertainment and spectacle among the nobility, such as the 1901–1926 Nordic precursor to the Winter Olympics, *Nordiska spelen*, which were usually held in Stockholm (Ljunggren 1997). But prominent intellectuals rarely took part in these types of activities. In Nordic historiography, there was no topos of *translatio imperii* like, for instance, *Byzance après Byzance* (1935), which the Romanian scholar Nicolae Iorga produced for the Balkan region. The purpose of the regional dimension at the beginning of the twentieth century was not to present a unity, cooperative framework with respect to the outside world, as with the economic cooperation underpinning the present-day European Union. To be fair, the Nordic regional dimension has never been very strong compared to the national dimension. Nonetheless, its potential helped to increase self-reflexivity within and between existing nation-states. The independence of the various Nordic countries seemed natural at this point, and such an awareness promoted mutual recognition of common interests. An interesting tension between the historical and the historiographical region evolved, which, in some cases, served to balance out nationalism in the above-mentioned sense. An example of this evolving process is provided in Ingi Sigurðsson's chapter 'The impact of Grundtvig's ideology on Icelandic historiography'. Sigurðsson's chapter focuses on the importance of Grundtvigianism, a particular brand of Danish historical nationalism, for the country of Iceland, where it was institutionalized based on the Danish folk high school movement and at the emerging University of Iceland in the capital city of Reykjavik. As it

turned out, the originally Danish idea was ultimately used to combat Danish imperialism. This demonstrates the extent to which a certain type of nationalism had become self-sufficient and self-regulatory in the historiographical region of Norden.

The most typical feature of the transnational historiographical region most probably has to do with the networks formed between historians. Several chapters in our volume touch upon this theme, but none more diligently than Pelle Oliver Larsen's 'Nordic networks at work: power struggles in the Scandinavian historical field, 1935–1942'. Larsen's study focuses on the competition for professorial chairs in the Scandinavian countries. As it turns out, there were no transnational applications for professorial chairs, although expert reviewers were often recruited from the neighbouring countries in an attempt to add objectivity to the often-infected disputes for chairs. Attempts were made to form transnational networks to control the Nordic field of historiography, and sometimes the expectations regarding social relations were fulfilled, while at other times historians were disappointed.

A different type of network existed between the Swedish economic historian Eli F. Heckscher and the Finnish historian Eino Jutikkala. Sweden, in particular, was similar to the UK in that the disciplines of history and economic history had been divided into separate departments. Therefore, Heckscher, Sweden's most respected historian at an international level in the twentieth century, was in many ways an outsider among the national community of historians. His wide-ranging ideas on how to reconcile the national and the international contexts found their most natural Nordic counterpart in Jutikkala. Despite being almost thirty years his junior, Jutikkala similarly was subject to the relative outsider status of an economic historian, particularly during his early career, and so he considered Heckscher something of a role model.¹⁵ In the chapter 'The rhythm and implicit canon of Nordic history by Eli Heckscher and Eino Jutikkala', Petteri Norring compares the periodizations that both historians used in their respective histories, demonstrating that there were important similarities between them: both tried to reconcile the framework of the nation with the supposedly universal condition of modernity. They also had a strong awareness of methodological nationalism in their own respective Swedish and Finnish traditions, which they aimed to overcome.

The connection between an outsider status and a receptiveness to new research ideas is further strengthened in Mervi Kaarninen's chapter on the Nordic female historians. Since Norden as a historiographical region – similar to academic historians' communities in general – was a strictly male-dominated arena up until at least the 1960s, women were usually marginalized from the tradition of constructing grand national narratives.

Thus, it is no coincidence that one of the very earliest pioneers of transnational history in Norden was a female historian, Ingrid Semmingsen (née Gaustad), who made her scholarly breakthrough in 1938 on the history of emigration from Norway to the US.

An impressive feature of the Nordic historiographical region manifested itself in the efforts to revise history textbooks conducted by the Norden Associations (*föreningarna Norden*) between the years 1919 and 1972, which is discussed by Henrik Åström Elmersjö in his chapter (see also Åström Elmersjö 2013). The idea to revise existing history textbooks developed early on the associations, which were devoted to general pacifism and internationalism throughout the 1920s. Åström Elmersjö argues that methodological nationalism was built into the organizational structure of the project, and to some extent this was evidently the case. To some extent, the work of the Norden Associations was commendable with respect to its transnational and progressive purposes because of the fact that there was no central Nordic committee, but five national committees dedicated to cooperation. The committees systematically sought out controversial topics from a historiographical standpoint in the other countries' textbooks. They then produced written criticisms, which often met with 'counter-criticisms' from the responding party. Interestingly enough, it was the clash of perspectives rather than some harmonizing agreement that was presented to the public. The transnational historiographical dialogue itself – rather than consensus – was regarded as the central value of the project, and it thus transcended the traditional notions of objectivity by way of performativity and perspectivism. The dialogical framework exposed and clarified implicit methodological nationalism in all five Nordic countries without any intention of escaping to the global level. Although the history textbook revision process ended in 1972, there is still much to learn from this enterprise regarding how to overcome methodological nationalism. Instead of focusing on general, abstract agreements reflecting how prior historians were unable to transcend their national biases compared to our present efforts, the case of the textbook revision process suggests that we need to keep the discussions relatively specific. This means that empiricism rather than a general, and much more abstract, conceptual discussion is called for. It also indicates that the transnational potential of the Nordic regional framework has not yet been exhausted, but can be put to use to solve problems other than the ones dealt with by the Norden Associations. A transnational framework has an inherent, demythologizing potential with respect to the situated methodologies of historians focusing purely on the nation-state.

Last but not least, however, we would like to emphasize that the purpose of this volume is not to produce some verdict on the nation-state, be that favourable or unfavourable, but rather to further the debate on

methodological nationalism and the position of the nation-state in historiography. Global and domestic politics, local power struggles and the geopolitical position of one's native country obviously have had – and continue to have – an impact on what a historian accepts or rejects in his or her studies and the types of network-building in which he or she is able to participate. In the end, it is decisive how the work is received by the academic community and within the broader ideological environment. Moreover, since the cooperation of Nordic historians has often been, particularly in historical organizations and congresses, mediated through the various nation-states, it is useful to conceptually distinguish between the terms 'transnational' and 'international', although, in practice, they have often overlapped in historical studies, and cooperation among nations (i.e. internationalism) has also fostered interpersonal connections across national boundaries (i.e. transnationalism). Above all, however, it is worth keeping in mind, as the 1920 citation from the Norwegian historian Halvdan Koht in the first sentence of our introduction points out, that history – be it national, transnational or global – can be a type of *living* politics such that past issues and present-day controversies are intimately intertwined with one another. In this sense, as the historian Arif Dirlik puts it, the past is not just a legacy but also a project, and it is our duty as historians to ask ourselves what our project might be (Dirlik 2005: 410).

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Notes

1. In the similar case of Finland, historians developed an idea whereby the geographic and natural area and its people made up the nation and its history, i.e. any type of history other than national history was almost a logical impossibility. This was explicit in the influential works of Zacharias Topelius (Tiitta 1994; see also Pertti Haapala's chapter in this volume).

2. A wider European view of this relationship is presented in Berger 2015.

3. For a general critique of an excessively nationalist emphasis in Nordic historiography, see, e.g., Kirby 1991: 10–11; Hilson 2008: 13–16. See, however, Aronsson et al. 2008 for a good (albeit sketchy) initial effort at writing a Nordic historiography.

4. In the history of the welfare state, a more universal Nordic approach has been applied by, e.g., Christiansen et al. 2006.

5. For more on the term 'empirical transnationalism', see Levitt and Khagram 2008: 5–6, 12.

6. Traditional philosophy of science has lost ground to science and technology studies (STS). Scholars in this field have come to view science in a thoroughly historicist manner, focusing on the social and cultural embeddedness of scientific conduct and objectivity claims. See, e.g., Proctor 1991; Porter 1995; Daston and Galison 2007. Peter Novick's (1988) *That Noble Dream* should be seen as an early precursor to these works in the field of the history of historiography.

7. The first English version of the book was published in 1997 and an edition that included a new epilogue by the author was produced in 2005.

8. In general terms, the Scandinavian region consists of Denmark, Norway and Sweden, whereas the Nordic region also includes Finland and Iceland.

9. The Kalmar Union (1397–1523) was founded as a counterforce to the Hanseatic League, and it joined under a single monarch the three kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden (then including Finland) and Norway (then including Iceland, Greenland, the Faroe Islands and the islands of Shetland and Orkney).

10. Denmark's border with Germany has tied it more closely to continental Europe than is the case with Iceland and Norway, whereas the latter has an Arctic connection to Russia. See Neumann 1994: 62–64; Østergård 1997: 70.

11. Uppsala University in Sweden (founded in 1477) and the University of Copenhagen in Denmark (founded in 1479) were founded in the Catholic Middle Ages, although they were soon closed due to the political turbulence of the period and reopened only in 1595 and 1537, respectively. The Royal Academy of Turku in south-west Finland (the present-day University of Helsinki) was founded in 1640 and was among the oldest universities of the Swedish Realm. For instance, it is twenty-six years older than the University of Lund, which was founded in 1666 (Svensson 1987: 16–20).

12. For more on the concept of Norden, see, e.g., Stråth 2009; Jalava 2013; more generally, see also Schenk 2004.

13. Diverging from Myhre, the concept of a historical region (history region) is here separated from the concept of a historiographical region because, while a meso-region may arguably have a common past, there may presently be no cooperation whatsoever between countries that once formed a territorial unit.

14. For more on inter-Nordic cooperation in history, see, e.g., Jalava 2013: 254–56; Mishkova, Stråth and Trencsényi 2013: 296–97.

15. Jutikkala was initially nominated an extraordinary professor of economic history at the University of Helsinki's Faculty of Social Sciences in 1947, and he managed to obtain a full professorship in Finnish history at the Faculty of Arts only in 1954.

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