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# ‘We Remain What We Are’ ‘Wir bleiben was wir sind?’ North Schleswig German Identities in Children’s Education After 1945

**Abstract:** *Like many other European Germans living beyond Germany’s borders, 1933–45, the German minority in Denmark supported the Nazi regime and its policy of territorial expansion. But unlike most German minorities of Europe, the Germans in Denmark avoided post-war deportation or forced assimilation. Able to stay in their native region, the minority reconstructed their civic life over the next 25 years. The minority regarded education as vital for securing the group’s long-term survival. The success of re-building schools, however, did not leave the minority unchanged. Over time, the identities that were constructed and communicated in the new schools changed as much as the society which surrounded them. The article explores this identity transformation through analysing the process whereby the education system was reconstructed, 1945–1970. The article shows that children and youths of the German minority in post-war North Schleswig attended schools that gradually replaced majority-minority hostility and national separatism with transnational inclusion.*

## Introduction

The post-World War II German minority experience in North Schleswig<sup>1</sup> both resembled and differed from other German minority<sup>2</sup> experiences in Europe. The minority in North Schleswig, like minorities in other regions, had its origins in the plebiscites of the Versailles settlement. In essence, the 1920 redrawing of the Danish-German border created the German national minority in Denmark. But the situation in North Schleswig differed from experiences in other regions bordering Germany mainly for two reasons. First, North Schleswig was never

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- 1 In modern English *Schleswig* is now the most common way of spelling the name of the former duchy. The old English spelling *Sleswick* is archaic, and the Danish spelling *Slesvig* is virtually unknown.
  - 2 In different European border regions, different terms were applied to describe the groups of people who self-identified as Germans, for example, ‘the German speakers’, ‘the ethnic Germans’ and ‘the German minority.’ In North Schleswig, the German group referred to themselves, and were referred to by the Danish majority and state, mostly as ‘The German Minority’ or ‘The German-minded North Schleswigers’ (In Danish, *det tyske mindretal*, and *tysksindede nordsleslesvigere* and in German, *die deutsche Minderheit* and *deutschesinnigen Nordschleswiger*).

re-annexed by the Third Reich, even though Denmark was occupied from 1940 to 1945. Second, the German minority was neither displaced nor forcibly assimilated after the Second World War, as was common practice in other nationally contested areas of post-war Europe.

The case of North Schleswig offers therefore the opportunity to study the post-war experiences of minority children and young people whose presence in their home region was unbroken since the plebiscites of Versailles. For the historian, this means that archival sources and the minority's own publications from the entire period 1920 to the present day can be consulted and subjected to historical analysis in order to understand North Schleswig German identity. That said, German minority identity should not be seen as a static and unequivocal phenomenon. Similarly, the lines between minority and majority were never clear-cut. Various degrees of interaction and individual variation characterised the conceptualisations, practicing and manifestations of North Schleswig German identity – even if the minority presented itself as a clearly defined and unequivocally German group.

‘We remain what we are’ was the title of an article from 1954 in the minority's annual publication, *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig*. Its author, teacher Hans Schmidt-Gorsblock, wrote that in 1945, it would have been ‘pointless to believe in German-ness (*Volkstum*) in North Schleswig.’<sup>3</sup> But then ‘the North Schleswig people's character (*Volkskarakter*) arose’ and the German minority secured its survival.<sup>4</sup> Indeed, nine years after the end of the Second World War, the German minority in Denmark was steadily reconstructing a civic life in North Schleswig. Schmidt-Gorsblock was correct in saying that a German minority still existed in North Schleswig. But its national identity changed substantially in the twenty-five years following 1945.

This chapter presents an interpretation of the changes to the North Schleswig German minority identities offered to children and youths through education after the Second World War. It seeks to elucidate what ideas and perceptions of self-understanding schools and the education system wished to communicate to children and young people. In particular, the chapter explores the relationship between North Schleswig German national identity and spaces, namely the region, the German kinship state and the host state of Denmark. National identities are often seen as static, but communications and assertions of identities studied over

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3 Hans Schmidt-Gorsblock, ‘Wir bleiben was wir sind’, *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1954), 21.

4 *Ibid.*

a longer period make clear that identities are fluid phenomena and subject to constant transformation and negotiation.<sup>5</sup>

The nation here is seen as an 'imagined community' as coined by Benedict Anderson.<sup>6</sup> The nation exists when a group of people believe they share the same 'system of ideas and signs and associations and ways of behaving and communicating.'<sup>7</sup> This group of people are of the same nation if they recognise each other as belonging to it.<sup>8</sup> Understanding the nation as a construction has significant implications for children's national identity. Jonathan Scourfield argues, for example, that 'national feeling is not natural or instinctive in children but cultivated in them (by adults), the nation's schools are places where dominant discourses of national identity and history are promulgated.'<sup>9</sup>

Scholars have already established the relationship between national identity and education. According to Eric Hobsbawm, for example, nations need the communication provided by mass-literacy and national education.<sup>10</sup> Ernest Gellner understands it as 'essential for nationalism to be kept and protected by a national education and communications system.'<sup>11</sup> And Panikos Panayi argues in his 'An Ethnic History of Europe since 1945, Nations, States and Minorities' that the nation state 'aims at standardisation ... achieved through the establishment of a series of institutions ... The most important of these institutions is a national education system, which spreads the knowledge of the national language and educates children primarily in the geography, history and literature of their own state.'<sup>12</sup>

Danish historian of childhood, Ning de Coninck-Smith, argues that 'the school constitutes an important element in histories of childhood.'<sup>13</sup> In particular in the twentieth century when, as she argues, education came to play a greater part in children's lives. According to de Coninck-Smith it was only after the Great War,

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5 Richard Jenkins: *Social Identity* (London: Routledge, 1996), 4–5.

6 Benedict Anderson: *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* (London: Verso, 1983).

7 Ernest Gellner: *Nations and Nationalism* (New York: Cornell University Press, 1983), 7.

8 *Ibid.*

9 Jonathan Scourfield: *Children, Place and Identity* (London: Routledge, 2006), 138.

10 Eric Hobsbawm: *Nations and Nationalism since 1780: Programme, Myth, Reality* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990), 9–12.

11 Gellner, 52.

12 Panikos Panayi, *An Ethnic History of Europe since 1945: Nations, States and Minorities* (Harlow: Longman, 2000), 7.

13 Ning de Coninck-Smith: *Skolen, lærerne, eleverne og forældrene, 10 kapitler af den danske folkeskoles historie i det 19. og 20. århundrede* (Aarhus: Klim, 2002), 12.

and particularly after the Second World War, that education in Denmark surpassed child-labour as the main activity in children's lives.<sup>14</sup> Studying the education system of a national group therefore is a way of gaining some insights into the national identities of children and youths through an institution with primary influence children's daily lives.

This article is divided into two parts. First an introductory discussion presents the origins of – and the prelude to – the German minority in Denmark after 1945. This provides the necessary, specific framework within which the changes taking place after 1945 can be embedded. Second the article goes into greater detail and analyses more closely the changes to manifestations and communications of minority identity in the context of education. The discussion in the second part is based almost exclusively on analysis of primary sources, as the German minority in Denmark after 1945 remains virtually unexplored in international scholarship.

### **Schleswig between Danish and German nationalisms: The origins of the German minority in Denmark**

By the nineteenth century, conflicting Danish and German nationalisms challenged the stability of the Danish composite monarchy and its complicated structure. For centuries, the compound state of Denmark comprised the kingdom itself alongside the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. In 1815, Holstein alone entered the German Confederation and a growing national movement in the duchy aimed to release it from Copenhagen rule and establish closer ties with other German states.<sup>15</sup> In Denmark, a national movement actually favoured releasing Holstein from the monarchy too; but Schleswig was the source of conflict between the two movements.<sup>16</sup>

The movement in Holstein regarded the two duchies as inseparable and rejected the Danish claim that Schleswig was ancient Danish land. In Schleswig itself, the issue divided the local population who, up until then, navigated quite

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14 *Ibid.*, 75.

15 See Steen Bo Frandsen: *Holsten i Helstaten* (Copenhagen: Tusculanum, 2008).

16 For the most recent historical account of Schleswig in English see Peter Thaler: *Mind and Matter: The Duality of National Identity in the German-Danish Borderlands* (West Lafayette, Ind.: Purdue University Press, 2009). For an English introduction to the German minority in Denmark see Karen Margrethe Pedersen, 'A National Minority with a Transethnic Identity – the German Minority in Denmark', in Stefan Wolff, ed., *German Minorities in Europe, Ethnic Identity and Cultural Belonging* (Oxford: Berghahn Books, 2000), 15–28.

un-problematically between Danish and German influences. Both the Danish and German languages, for example, were used in different circumstances and did not necessarily indicate the speaker's national loyalty. Well into the twentieth century, in fact, neither High Danish nor High German was the first language of Schleswig's population; the overwhelming majority spoke the regional dialects Low Danish and Low German,<sup>17</sup> and even the use of dialect did not necessarily reflect the speaker's national loyalty.

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

Following this century-long period of national contestation over Schleswig, the 1920 border thus created a German minority in Denmark. The North Schleswig Germans that became Danish citizens descended mostly from regionally native sympathisers of the Schleswig-Holstein movement but also in part from Prussian or other German families that settled in North Schleswig between 1864 and 1920. Despite its strong ties to the region, the minority contested the legitimacy of the new border. In particular, it challenged the technicalities of the plebiscite. The minority disputed that votes in North Schleswig were counted *en bloc*, meaning that all constituencies in the region were regarded as one zone.<sup>18</sup> This way of counting resulted in a 75 percent Danish majority, but the larger towns and southernmost rural areas presented higher concentrations of German votes. In consequence several constituencies within the zone were ceded to Denmark despite having clear German majorities. Immediately after 1920, a revision of the border became a central ambition for the minority's political party.

The Danish annexation led to serious economic problems too.<sup>19</sup> Particularly in the larger towns, the minority were successful in trade, business and commerce;

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17 Low Danish is known as *Sønderjysk* in Danish and as *Platdänisch* in German. Low German is *Platdeutsch* in German. See Pedersen, 'A National Minority...'

18 A second plebiscite was held in South Schleswig where the constituencies voted separately, facilitating potential adjustments to the border. None of the constituencies in the second zone had Danish majorities apart from a few ones in the North Frisian Islands.

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

however, adapting their trade to new markets was problematic. The market town of Flensburg was now located just south of the border in Germany, forcing North Schleswigers to seek new connections to replace the old established one. In addition to this, the interwar global economic instability contributed to the overall experience that North Schleswig was far worse off in Denmark than in Germany. The economic problems were not exclusive to the German minority but affected the region overall. The economic problems only fuelled the minority's resistance to the new border, even if they did not seriously challenge the overall Danish position in the region.

Denmark, however, considered the plebiscite a triumph. The Danish majority in North Schleswig alongside the rest of the country celebrated the annexation as a reunification. But despite public support, many were aware that the new border was potentially problematic too.<sup>20</sup> A small Danish-minded minority remained in Germany but the new and much larger German one in Denmark now posed the greatest threat to the stability of the border. Danish authorities therefore sought to accommodate the minority's dissatisfaction, in particular in the area of education.<sup>21</sup>

The German minority enjoyed considerable freedom and state-supported options regarding the education of their children. The minority established German private schools, and the Danish state set up German streams in its public schools. The state provided German education in the countryside if more than 25 percent of families or at least the families of ten children requested it. In the towns, the state facilitated Danish and German streams in all public schools.<sup>22</sup> This made German education available throughout the region, in 59 private schools, 29 public schools and in one upper-secondary school.

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

The Nazi permeation of the minority had strong implications for the lives of children and young people. From the late 1930s onwards, education and leisure

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20 Karen Gram-Skjoldager, 'Grænsen Ligger Fast! Det Sønderjyske Spørgsmål I Dansk Udenrigs- Og Indenrigspolitik 1920–1940', *Skrifter udgivet af historisk samfund for Sønderjylland*, 95 (2006), 134–36.

21 *Ibid.*

22 Henrik Becker-Christensen: *Det tyske mindretal i Nordslesvig 1920–1932* (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 1990), 202–3.

activities were structured to mirror the organisations in Germany itself.<sup>23</sup> The organisations, *Deutsche Jungen- und Mädchenschaft Nordschleswig* closely resembled *Hitler Jugend* and *Bund Deutscher Mädel* in Germany. Like their *Reich*-German counterparts, the organisations called upon young people to engage in the national struggle. Such encouragements were published, for example, in the minority's monthly publication for young people, *Junge Front*.

Our young people must realise, that there are more important things than comfortable evenings and afternoons; than cafes and cinemas. They must feel that precisely they, in the border region, have as their task to lead the new times to breakthrough and victory.<sup>24</sup>

A clearly Nazified publication, the issues of the *Junge Front* in the late 1930s and 1940s asserted the minority's aim to mobilise young people in the national struggle for North Schleswig. *Junge Front* provided young people with news of the war effort as well as political justifications for Nazism and anti-Danish separatism.

The national mobilisation of young people reverberated on the Danish side too. In 1933, the association, *Det Unge Grænseværn* (Young Border Defenders), was formed as a counterpart to the increasingly separatist German minority. Throughout the 1930s, Young Border Defenders organised several mass-demonstrations and other activities in favour of the 1920 border. According to the association's own 1983 publication, as many as 40,000 young people may have participated in demonstrations against the minority's calls for a border revision in 1933. Photographic evidence indicates that Young Border Defenders was indeed a mass-movement.<sup>25</sup>

With both Danish and German national camps mobilised, the minority welcomed the German army when it occupied Denmark on 9 April 1940. Like other Germans minorities elsewhere in Europe, the Schleswig minority hoped that the occupation would lead to incorporation of their region into the Third Reich. The day was described like this in *Junge Front*:

German soldiers in North Schleswig! That means cheering and joy, for all who can say 'our soldiers', for all that belong to the German people [...] We are now under the *Führer's* protection! The feeling is so overwhelming that many, many tears ran down the faces of young and old this morning.<sup>26</sup>

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23 Nina Jacobsen, 'Tysk nazistisk ungdomsarbejde i Nordslesvig 1933–1945', *Sønderjyske Årbøger* (1996), 195–222.

24 Jef Blume, 'Junge Mannschaft', *Junge Front*, 2 (Feb. 1939), 9.

25 DUG: *Det Unge Grænseværn* (Flensburg: Duborgskolen, 1983), 13, 97, 99, 102, 107.

26 Nis Nissen, 'Sie kommen!', *Junge Front*, 4, (Apr. 1940), 2.

Particularly after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, the minority actively began to recruit young men to volunteer at the front.<sup>27</sup> As mentioned, the minority supported the German war-effort in an attempt to secure a change to the 1920 border. However, the German Nazi party perceived the situation differently, in particular with regard to the relationship between the German and the Danish nations. The historian Steffen Werther has argued that the Nazi perception of race led to a key difference between North Schleswig and the other German borderlands.<sup>28</sup> In the other borderlands, German minorities were perceived to be dominated by so-called inferior races. But in North Schleswig, the Germans lived together with their supposedly equally Aryan, Danish nation. Rather than bringing the minority back into the Reich, the Nazi regime wanted it to form the link between the two equal Danish and German nations. Consequently, according to Werther, it was actually Nazi ideology that prevented annexation of North Schleswig.<sup>29</sup> This was a unique case in Europe, and it was deeply regretted by the minority's various political and cultural associations.

Generally, the Danes did not reciprocate the Nazis's comparatively favourable view of the Danish nation and Denmark. Local resistance and animosity towards Germany and Germans grew considerably throughout the five years of occupation. The minority's support of the occupiers and its active participation in the war effort compromised the minority-majority relationship so much that, by 1945, Danish-German relations in the border region were at their nadir.

Whereas the Danish government officially tolerated the German occupation and formally discouraged the public from violently resisting it, the end to the occupation in May 1945 unleashed the accumulated Danish hatred towards Germany and Germans. In North Schleswig this led to mass-arrests of individuals associated with the German minority: around 3,500 were arrested out of whom 3,000 were sentenced. This corresponded to roughly one in four of all German minority males.<sup>30</sup> Furthermore, the liberation led to a complete and immediate stop of all German education, public and private. German property, including

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27 Henrik Skov-Kristensen: *Straffelejren*, (Copenhagen: Nyt Nordisk Forlag, 2011), 21.

28 Steffen Werther, 'An Unimaginable Community : The SS Idea of a 'Greater Germanic Reich' and the German Minority in Denmark', in Norbert Götz, ed., *The Sea of Identities: A Century of Baltic and East European Experiences with Nationality, Class, and Gender* (Huddinge: Södertörn University, 2014), 85–108.

29 *Ibid.*

30 Frank Lubowitz, 'Det tyske mindretal i Danmark 1945–1955', in Jørgen Kühl, ed., *En europæisk model? Nationale mindretal i den dansk-tyske grænseregion 1945–2000* (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 2005), 115–129.

private schools, was confiscated as compensation for the material damage caused by the German occupation. Most of the teachers in the German schools, public and private, were arrested, and those without Danish citizenship were deported. The fact that a large number of teachers held German citizenship had to do with the rural nature of North Schleswig; teachers were often recruited in the larger towns of Flensburg or Kiel.

The closing-down of German education was part of a much larger confrontation with the German minority. The Danish public was infuriated by the way in which the minority had expressed so blatantly their wish for annexation of North Schleswig by the Third Reich and by their support of the German war effort. The resistance movement arrested all those who they suspected had collaborated with the German occupation, and in North Schleswig Nazism had enjoyed considerably more support than in the rest of the country. In the 1939 general election, the National Socialist party achieved 31,032 votes; 1.8 percent of the entire Danish electorate. In North Schleswig the Nazi party achieved 4,474 votes; 4.7 percent of the regional electorate. The percentage of Nazi votes was already twice as high in North Schleswig as the national Danish average, however, an extra 15,016 votes for *Slesvigske Parti*, the German minority's political party, needs to be added to that number. By 1939 *Slesvigske Parti* was entirely Nazified, although its policies differed substantially from the Danish National Socialist Party, among other things, on annexation. This brought the combined percentage of Nazi votes in North Schleswig to 20.6 % and thus far above the national average.<sup>31</sup>

The large number of arrests meant that many German minority children and youths experienced the arrest and imprisonment of family members. Such experiences can be difficult to uncover, but oral histories can shed light where traditional sources cannot. A woman born in 1938 to a German-minded family recalled in 2014 the arrest of her father as follows:

As I answered the door, two young men stood outside, each with their automatic weapon [...] they asked: 'Is your father home?' And so I nodded [...] my father then swiftly passed me, went with them and he was gone [...] The Danes hated the Germans in 1945 [...] only the German minority was left in Denmark because the soldiers were long gone [...] they [the minority] were the objects of their [Danish] hatred and if he [the father] had made one attempt to escape they could have shot him dead.<sup>32</sup>

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31 For Danish election statistic see <http://www.dst.dk/Site/Dst/Udgivelser/GetPubFile.aspx?id=20218&sid=valg1939> (last visited 30 Nov. 2015).

32 Female born 1938, Oral History Interview by Tobias Haimin Wung-Sung (12 Aug. 2013).

Oral histories should not be mistaken for precise accounts of what happened at a given time and place. The historian Lynn Abrams has argued that ‘memory is about the relationship between material facts and personal subjectivity, and it is precisely that interplay between what we remember and how we remember and why we remember that is of interest to oral historians.’<sup>33</sup> In this case, the striking level of detail recalled almost 70 years later, tells us that these experiences stuck with the individual and became part of her identity.

Furthermore, this oral history interview focused on everyday life in the 1950s and 1960s, and not specifically on the experiences of the wartime and postwar period. The fact that the conversation drifted to the chaotic postwar period only accentuates the importance of this period vis-à-vis identity. Finally, the conclusion that the minority was ‘the object of the resistance movement’s hatred’ was clearly not reached by the child at the time. The fact that such a conclusion is presented here in connection with the story about the arrest of her father suggests how she later made sense of the dramatic events.

The woman’s father was eventually convicted and served time in prison. But even those German-minded who distanced themselves from Nazism faced danger too, as a man, also born in 1938, explained in another oral history interview in 2013:

We lived on a farm in Broager, not far from Flensburg Bay [...] in the German minority there were some organisations that really were Nazi [...] but all that my parents kept themselves away from. And then we had a neighbour on one side and a neighbour on the other, and they were both members of the resistance movement, and my parents knew that very well. They were not friends but they had a good relationship with each other, and I will say this: that they actually protected my parents when it came to the trials. It was quite dangerous to be German in May ‘45’<sup>34</sup>

Local resistance movements were in charge of this showdown only in the period immediately after the capitulation. After a formal judicial system was re-installed, all arrested were given individual trials and sentences. Even though the British Foreign Office suggested solving the problem by exchanging populations with the Danish-minded minority in South Schleswig, the Danish government in Copenhagen always refused this.<sup>35</sup> Despite clear anti-German sentiments overall

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33 Lynn Abrams: *Oral History Theory* (London: Routledge, 2010), 81.

34 Male born 1940, Oral History Interview by Tobias Haimin Wung-Sung (30 Jul. 2013).

35 See, in particular, Johan Peter Noack: *Det Sydslesvigske Grænsespørgsmål 1945–7* (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 1997) or, for an account in English, Robert Bohn, ‘From Wartime Enemies to Alliance Partners: The Remodelling of West Germany’s Political Relationship with Denmark and Norway after the Second World War’, *Contemporary European History*, 15, Special Issue 4 (2006), 539–51.

in Denmark in 1945, the government aimed to solve the situation in a way that adhered to the country's legal principles. From the general point of view of the minority, however, the application of *ex post facto* laws challenged the legitimacy of the trials. The minority disputed the verdict of guilty for acts that had not been criminal or illegal at the time. The convictions of young men who had volunteered to serve in an armed group of civilians in North Schleswig who had never actually seen battle were particularly disputed.

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

With the wartime political and cultural leadership imprisoned, a democratically oriented group of prominent North Schleswigers assumed the official leadership. The reorganised minority became based on a secret society of well-to-do men from Haderslev, the so-called *Haderslebener Kreis*. In 1943, these men claimed to have written a manifesto in secrecy that mapped out the minority's future relations with Denmark in case Germany should lose the war. The manifesto declared absolute loyalty to the Danish state and recognised unequivocally the 1920 border, and it became the new ideological basis for the reconstructed minority identity.

### **From isolation to inclusion: German minority identity and the reconstruction process of German education in North Schleswig**

After liberation, the Danish position on the future of German education was ambiguous.<sup>36</sup> According to a teacher quoted in the Danish teaching union's official periodical, *Folkeskolen*, in the summer of 1945, there were five distinct views about the future of German education in North Schleswig. These were: one,

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36 For a discussion of Danish majority education policies in North Schleswig see Erik Nørr, 'Nationalpolitik og skolebyggeri. Det hemmelige statstilskud til gennemførelsen af folkeskoleloven i Sønderjylland 1937–1970', *Sønderjyske Årbøger* (2014), 235–287.

that all German education should be banned; two, that German public schools should be banned; three, that German private schools should be banned; four, that state funding of German private schools should be terminated; and five, that no bans should be enforced as lack of support would lead to the termination over time of German education.<sup>37</sup>

The new post-war leadership of the German minority was clearer on the matter. It argued that loyalty could best be secured if German education continued in the Danish state schools. Waldemar Reuter of the restructured school association contacted the Danish authorities in Copenhagen and argued that:

Under all circumstances, we are very much interested in nurturing a spirit of loyalty in our schools and we believe that the state school provides the strongest guarantee for loyalty.<sup>38</sup>

In December 1945, a law replacing the flexible interwar structure established the ways in which the German minority children could be educated.<sup>39</sup> The law facilitated the possibility of re-establishing German private schools, but these would first have to be built or re-purchased. In addition, the law allowed for special German-speaking classes in the state schools, although none were ever formed. Danish teachers refused to teach any classes in German. In 1945, the only option for most German families was therefore to transfer their children to the Danish schools.

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

Where there is government support for the destruction of a people, where even state violence against a people takes place, as in ancient times, the family alone assumes the responsibility for the education of the young. In particular the mothers are responsible for nurturing the language and for passing it on.<sup>40</sup>

The perception that government policies were violent attacks against the minority was an exaggeration. In fact, the Danish government made several attempts to reach a lasting solution even before December 1945; but navigating between securing the minority's rights and keeping in tune with public Danish opinion was a difficult task. In the summer of 1945, the Danish secretary of education, A. M. Hansen was quoted in *Folkeskolen* as saying that it was 'inevitable that certain

37 N.N., 'Mindretallets tyske skoler i Sønderjylland', *Folkeskolen*, a (1945), 187.

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

39 Lov no. 610, ADV, DSSV.

40 *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1946), 93.

changes [would] be made to the structure of the minority's education system [...] And there [were] many pressing issues that [could not] be overlooked. On the other hand, [he hoped] that Denmark [would retain] its leading position regarding liberal treatment of minorities.' He added: 'We should not be influenced by Nazi thought or its methods.'<sup>41</sup>

In December 1945, the secretary was quoted again, arguing that 'one should aim to preserve as much as possible of what was good about the 1920s, a solution of which we have always been proud.'<sup>42</sup> Finally, another member of the Danish parliament, Frede Nielsen, said in 1946 that: 'here and there certain circles of Danish-minded people have attempted to prevent the establishment of German private schools. This kind of behaviour is unacceptable and it is poisonous for the new law that is supported by an overwhelming majority of the [Danish] population.'<sup>43</sup>

*Folkeskolen* followed closely the debate in other media on the future of German minority education in North Schleswig. It reported, for example, that the German secondary school that had been closed in Aabenraa continued its activities in a private villa 'with teachers that acted subversively during the occupation and used materials that even in Germany [were] not allowed.'<sup>44</sup> The same article quoted a large Danish daily, *Kristelig Dagblad*, which claimed that 'many schools in North Schleswig have continued their activities using books and other materials which were used until the very last day before the capitulation! In such books one finds fragments of speeches given by Hitler and Göring; Nazism is glorified, and history is falsified. We need a cleansing – and a very thorough cleansing. This is a national duty.'<sup>45</sup> Finally, *Folkeskolen* quoted an article from another Danish publication, *Grænsevagten*, exemplifying another critical stance on German education. It argued:

Does one really claim that it is the duty of Danish councils with Danish money to continue this tragicomic linguistic abuse of Danish-speaking children? It is surely beyond unreasonable. If the German-minded yet Danish-speaking minority really must destroy the mother tongue of their own children in the holy name of freedom, they can do so in private German institutions.<sup>46</sup>

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41 N.N., 'Ugens Emner', *Folkeskolen*, b (1945), 143.

42 N.N., 'Skoleforholdene I Sønderjylland', *Folkeskolen*, (1945), 470.

43 Jakob Petersen, 'Personligt memorandum: Mindretallets stilling nord for grænsen', 1 Jul. 1951, RA 1055, 1055/6 Undersøgelse – danske foreninger og det tyske mindretal, Landsarkivet for Sønderjylland (LAS):

44 N.N., 'Tyske Skoler', *Folkeskolen*, c (1945), 170.

45 Ibid.

46 Ibid.

The difference between the positions of the two politicians and the views reported in *Folkeskolen* and *Grænsevagten* illustrated the nature of the dilemma regarding the Danish majority discourse on the future of German education in North Schleswig. Furthermore, it illustrated the incompatibility between the positions of some politicians and the general public. In August 1945 *Folkeskolen* featured a long article in which it explained its own position (thus that of the Danish teaching union) on German education. Besides arguing in similar ways to the ministry of education, *Folkeskolen* raised the issue of the potential repercussions on Danish minority education in South Schleswig. It stated that 'it is a difficult task and it is not made any less difficult by the presence of the Danish minority south of the border. Can one expect to uphold rights, which we are unprepared to grant the German minority north of the border?'<sup>47</sup> *Folkeskolen* concluded that 'one can only hope that the questions will be solved ... in ways that are not shaped by the passionate feelings of the moment, but rather by solid analyses build on knowledge and justice.'<sup>48</sup>

Notwithstanding, the situation in North Schleswig was indeed both violent and hostile when seen from a German perspective. In 1945 and 1946, Danish clandestine groups carried out a number of reprisals, destroying or vandalising several buildings and memorials associated with the minority and with Germany.<sup>49</sup> This included, for example, the bombing of a German 1864-war victory monument in Dybbøl and the landmark 'Bismarck Tower' north of Aabenraa. Furthermore, the hostile atmosphere between Danes and Germans in the border region made it outright dangerous to work to reconstruct a German school system. In June 1946, Peter Jepsen of the school association received a letter from an anonymous group threatening that:

[i]f you do not immediately abandon your plans for a [German] school, from this day on you will not be able to consider yourself safe either day or night [...] it may not be that we bomb you; we can also seize you [...] For example, I am the owner of an electrical iron ring which can be fitted to the head and connected to a current.<sup>50</sup>

In 1945 and 1946, German minority education and the minority as a whole were under pressure from the Danes. However, a distinction needs to be made between the positions of the government and some politicians and the positions of the resistance movement and some other groups. The context within which the reconstruction of

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47 N.N., 'De Tyske Skoler i Sønderjylland', *Folkeskolen* (1945), 207.

48 *Ibid.*

49 See Inge Adriansen, *Erindringssteder i Danmark* (Copenhagen: Tusculanum, 2010)

50 Letter from 'de 18' to Herr Peter Jepsen i Uge, 10 Apr. 1946, ADV, DSSV.

the minority's schools took place was in other words both accepting of the minority's right to live in North Schleswig but also hostile at same time.

In addition to the outside pressure coming from parts of the Danish majority, the German-minded group was also under pressure from within. As discussed above, many North Schleswig Germans had strong ties to the region where Danish and German culture, language and identity had existed side by side for generations. The fact that the minority shared their regional vernacular speech with the Danish-minded population meant that they could transition into the majority relatively easily. From a Danish perspective, assimilating into the majority was regarded as unproblematic: the German-minded were only re-discovering their real national identity.

The Danish view that the German minority could assimilate into the majority if they so desired also came to the fore in the Danish schools that took the children from the German schools that had been closed. During an oral history interview in 2013, a German minority man born in 1940 remembered his experiences in a Danish middle school in Sønderborg as mostly pleasant. The teachers, he recalled, treated him and other German minority children very well indeed. He remembered too, however, the feeling that the Danish school paid special attention to him and the seven other children in the class who came from German-minded homes. He was under the impression that teachers sought quite deliberately to influence influencing him in a national sense.<sup>51</sup>

Written accounts support the argument that Danish schools welcomed former German students and that the Danish schools consciously took measures to integrate the new students. In the winter of 1945, *Folkeskolen* described the situation in North Schleswig, this time focusing on the integration of German minority pupils in the Danish schools. A school inspector from Aabenraa expressed his satisfaction with the developments and was quoted reporting that 'the integration of the German pupils [had been] successful beyond our expectations.'<sup>52</sup> He elaborated on the success by adding that:

I am pleased that the pupils from the German schools have not attempted to keep themselves isolated for example during the breaks. They tend to stick to the groups in which they have been placed and I am under the impression that the relationship is good. The pupils are fortunate in that they are all of different ages and this has been important. They have been placed in a way which – so to speak – drowns them in Danish pupils. In the classroom they have all been seated next to Danes. Naturally, some of the new students

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51 Male born 1940, Oral History Interview by Tobias Haimin Wung-Sung (30 Jul. 2013).

52 N.N., 'Tyske Elever', *Folkeskolen*, e (1945), 147.

have had trouble keeping up, especially if they come from German-speaking homes and are used to the gothic alphabet only.<sup>53</sup>

In a personal memorandum, librarian and chairman of *Sprogforeningen* (the Danish language association), Jakob Petersen made the Danish efforts even more explicit. Petersen wrote the following in 1951, but reflected upon the situation in 1945:

It is well-known that many in this country thought that the German minority was doomed, and that whatever was left of it would be taken care of by the Danish school system in a relatively short time. There was no doubt that the Danish-speaking children from German-minded homes enjoyed the Danish schools [...] The problem was that the same trust could not be extended to the children's parents and with that the battle was lost.<sup>54</sup>

In the first five years after the Second World War, the minority's greatest tasks were first to re-establish its institutions and second to keep German-minded North Schleswigers loyal. Changing from a German to a Danish national identity, however, was not unique to North Schleswig only: south of the border, a similar situation unfolded too. In the early years after the war, German-minded South Schleswigers joined the Danish minority in vast numbers. From a German point of view, however, this transition was ill tolerated. The following quotes provide an idea of how the minority viewed the parents of children placed in the Danish school. Commenting on the situation south of the border in 1949, the new head of the school association, Fr. Christensen, expressed his discontent in the following way:

Also amongst the German North Schleswigers such treason exists. Characterless weaklings exist in all places and at all times. Those who are not with us are against us.<sup>55</sup>

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

Is it really the case that the German people have weaker characters than the Danes that, like a dog, they lick the boots of he who steps on them, that in times of hardship they follow the herd uncritically and thoughtlessly, that their German-ness is only a varnish that can be scratched off?<sup>56</sup>

Fr. Christensen reacted so strongly because he did not accept that national identity could be changed. Born in North Schleswig in 1882, Christensen lived most of his life in the region, apart from shorter periods of time spent in Germany. He

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53 Ibid.

54 Jakob Petersen, 'Personligt memorandum: Mindretallets stilling nord for grænsen', 1 Jul. 1951, LAS, RA 1055, 1055/6.

55 Fr. Christensen, 'Heimdeutschtum', *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1949), 35.

56 Fr. Christensen, 'Vertraulich Rundschrieben', 26 Jan. 1953, ADV, DSSV.

belonged to the circle of people who favoured good relations with the Denmark and the Danish majority. Nevertheless, he vigorously opposed those who did not see the Danish and German nations as two clearly distinct and separate groups. As head of the German Language and School Association until 1955, he was probably the main early influence on the formulation and dissemination of a new German identity for post-war minority children and youths. Under his leadership of the school and language association, German minority identity was to remain unequivocally German in clear distinction from the Danish neighbour.

Christensen and the school association were not anti-Danish. Rather the contrary. In 1949, He wrote that:

To improve our relationship with the Danish people is our most urgent task, but to speak of this has rhetorical meaning only in so far as our equality as citizens is not recognised.<sup>57</sup>

In 1951, after highlighting the fact that over 3,000 German minority children were still attending Danish schools, Christensen made his view even more explicit:

None of this is a criticism of Danish schooling as such, everything is to be understood in relation to the educational questions of the German minority. The Danish schools are good and right for the Danes the way they are. We are different and hold different views regarding many important questions of schooling and education. We need German schools.<sup>58</sup>

By the early 1950s, the school and language association's building and establishing of new private schools gathered momentum. The association opened eleven schools in the month of January 1950 alone. In April, three more schools opened and in August an additional four followed.<sup>59</sup> The schools opened in 1950 raised the total number from five to twenty-three. The school and language association were able to increase the number of schools so significantly mostly because the Danish government agreed, in 1949, to let the minority re-purchase thirteen confiscated schools. Yet even though, the Danish state showed more willingness to accommodate the minority's efforts, there was still the question of financing the expansion of the school system.

The school and language association worked on different levels in order to secure financial means. The association's archive contains copies of leaflets which encouraged members of the association and the minority in general to donate

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57 Christensen, 'Heimdeutschtum'.

58 Fr. Christensen, 'Neuer Anfang unseres Bildungswesens', *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1951), 26–31.

59 *Ibid.*

money privately.<sup>60</sup> One leaflet said that ‘the schools can receive some funding from the Danish state, but we have to build and equip them with our own means.’<sup>61</sup> In addition the association corresponded directly with the ministry of finance in Copenhagen, attempting to persuade the government to return as many buildings as possible that previously housed the closed-down schools.<sup>62</sup> Finally, the association continued to look to Germany for support. In 1949, for example, it received 100,000 DM in from the state of Schleswig-Holstein, constituting roughly one third of the total amount needed to re-purchase the thirteen schools.<sup>63</sup>

In terms of the Association’s position vis-à-vis the national struggle in the border region, the schools were founded on the principle that the German- and Danish-minded in North Schleswig were two distinct groups that should be able to live side-by-side but not necessarily interact much. The schools wished to offer this understanding to German children, as made clear in 1952:

The children must achieve a clear awareness of the fact that our homeland (Heimat) is not Danish land and never has been. For one thousand years, it was neither German nor Danish and here we have something to preserve.<sup>64</sup>

With this statement the school and language association also referred to a regional conceptualisation of North Schleswig, which actually served two different purposes. First, it still rejected the Danish conventional wisdom that North Schleswig was Danish only, but second, it denounced the opposing idea that it unambiguously belonged to Germany. The new conceptualisation thus defined a space towards which the German minority could direct its loyalty.

The regional focus that considered North Schleswig to be a distinct, clearly defined unit was new. Previously, the German minority at large had self-identified either with the Schleswig-Holstein movement or the greater German nation. This new North-Schleswig focus was particularly clear in a memorandum by Fr. Christensen from 1953 which called for a history of the region to be written. Christensen envisaged a book covering twenty-eight topics, starting with the first human settlements on the edges of the ice-cap. Further chapters included the

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60 Der Deutsche Schulverein für Apenrade, ‘Helft mit am Aufbau einer deutschen Schule in Apenrade’, 1946, ADV, DSSV.

61 Ibid.

62 Dr Reuter, Deutscher Schul- und Sprachverein to Finansministeriet, 21 Nov. 1948, ADV, DSSV.

63 Fr. Christensen, ‘Neuer Anfang unseres Bildungswesens’, Deutscher Kalender für Nordschleswig (1951), 28.

64 Fr. Christensen, ‘Rundschrieben’, 1952, ADV, DSSV.

early-medieval 'Danish conquest' and 'North Schleswig architecture, marshland and great men'. It would conclude with the nineteenth-century 'national awakening' and the 'Prussian period [between 1864 and 1920] with its good and bad features.'<sup>65</sup>

From the early 1950s onwards, the minority focused on consolidating their identity with the region, and all previous talk about changing the border disappeared completely. The impact of this on older children and youths was clear. With only kindergartens and primary schools in North Schleswig, efforts were made to keep children and youths in the region. The educational options were organised to lead to professions relevant for a life in rural North Schleswig. Focus for boys was on agriculture and the trades, and for girls overwhelmingly on housekeeping. From 1951 onwards, preparation for professional life could take place in the new vocational training and boarding school in the small town of Tinglev, a minority stronghold, just north of the border. Originally a school of education for young people and adults, the reorganised boarding school offered six-month programmes for 14 to 18-year-old boys and girls as well as agricultural training programmes for young men over the age of 18.<sup>66</sup>

Keeping young people in the region became one of the minority's main concerns. In the *Volkskalender* of 1956 (written in 1955), the concerns were articulated in this way:

All education, in so far as it causes young people to leave the region, is damaging to us, under some circumstances perhaps even deadly. It is better to be a smallholder in one's homeland [Heimat] than a steward in Zealand. It is better to be an office clerk in the homeland than office manager in Copenhagen.<sup>67</sup>

This quote illustrates how even if greater opportunities were to be found elsewhere in Denmark, the minority still urged youths to stay in North Schleswig. These priorities were connected to the fact that German secondary education no longer existed after 1945 when the German Grammar school (*Gymnasium*) in Aabenraa had been closed down. In 1955, however, the minority regained the right to offer education that qualified students for higher education. With money raised primarily in Schleswig-Holstein, the minority managed to initiate the reconstruction of a grammar school that was ready in 1958. The right of German schools to set

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65 Fr. Christensen, 'Rundschrieben', 1953, ADV, DSSV.

66 Nachschule Tingleff, dir., 'Nachschule Tingleff', Museum Deutsche Volksgruppe, Sønderborg, Denmark.

67 Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig (1956), 95.

exams was reintroduced in connection with the Copenhagen Declaration, which clarified the rights and obligations of the Danish state and the German minority.

In reality the Copenhagen Declaration was just one element in a much larger settlement that facilitating West Germany's entrance into NATO.<sup>68</sup> It mirrored the Bonn Declaration, which clarified the relationship between the Danish minority south of the border and the West German Republic. Although these two declarations were products of the consolidation of the Western Alliance in the context of the Cold War, their impact on the minorities in the Danish-German border region was substantial. Contemporary scholarship celebrates the declarations as turning points, although such a conclusion is only possible with the benefit of hindsight. Especially south of the border, but also north of it, the minorities remained sceptical of what the implications of the declarations actually were, as Fr. Christensen noted:

Have the Danish people finally accepted that a German group lives within their borders, and will they grant this group free development of its cultural life, that is the spiritual and mental connection to the German nation?<sup>69</sup>

Another principal focus of German schools was on strengthening the connection to the German cultural sphere. In this regard, language was the minority's greatest obstacle. Without sufficient skills in the German language, it was argued, children of the minority would not be able to maintain a connection to the German nation or, as it was called, their spiritual homeland.<sup>70</sup> The school association formulated the problem in this way:

It is well known that the German minority with only a few exceptions speak Low Danish at home. Only a fraction of the students understand German when they start school. Without knowledge of German, there is no German life [...] Without German schools, no German daily, no German library, no German service and German church, and no German society.<sup>71</sup>

The minority coped with the collapse of the Third Reich by focussing on a regional belonging in North Schleswig, a legal commitment to Denmark, and a spiritual connection to German language and culture. But sources suggest that – even

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68 Karl Christian Lammers, 'Living Next Door to Germany: Denmark and the German Problem,' *Contemporary European History*, 15, 4 (2006), 453–72.

69 Fr. Christensen, 'Stand und gesetzliche Grundlagen der deutschen Schule Nord-schleswig,' *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1956), 89–92.

70 Arthur Lessow, 'Das deutsche Schulwesen in der Entwicklung,' *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1957), 83.

71 Fr. Christensen, 'Rundschrieben,' 1952, ADV, DSSV.

though the relationship between Danes and Germans improved tremendously in the post-war decades – German life in North Schleswig was still subject to both external and internal pressures. Fourteen years after the war, the school association believed that some parents still chose the Danish school over the German one because they felt pressured to do so by the Danish majority. The new head of the school association, Arthur Lessow, argued:

Alongside the many positive surprises regarding the school registrations, we have also experienced bitter disappointment when parents who both consider themselves to be German [...] register their children in the Danish schools. It is clear to us that some parents do not dare to register their children with us [...] We hope for the day when, free from fear, parents can register their children in the German schools.<sup>72</sup>

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

The first graduates from the reconstructed high school, for example, challenged the isolationist tradition when they graduated in 1962. The minority was thrilled to have secondary school graduates in North Schleswig again after a seventeen-year absence. The minority's daily, *Der Nordschleswiger*, wrote on the day they graduated how important this first cohort of school leavers was because 'obviously we hope that many more graduates will follow and so as the class of 1962. That is how traditions actually arise.'<sup>73</sup>

The minority establishment did not appear to have envisaged, however, that these new traditions would include graduates choosing to wear the same graduation caps as their Danish peers. The graduates were entitled to wear the traditional Danish graduation caps in the Danish red and white colours. The Copenhagen declaration of 1955 had ensured that a graduation diploma from the German Gymnasium was fully valid in both Germany and Denmark. Some in the minority, especially the now retired Fr. Christensen, thought that adopting the Danish tradition was a step too far. He argued in the daily that, 'in my opinion we accommodate

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72 Arthur Lessow, 'Jahresbericht', 1958/1959, ADV, DSSV.

73 N.N., 'Wieder deutsche Abiturienten', *Der Nordschleswiger* (15 Jun. 1962).

the Danes too much, that is when one expects their respect for our unconditional sincerity [...] Do we not have our own traditions?<sup>74</sup>

The Danish minority in South Schleswig also noted how the German graduates wore the red and white caps. It expressed some surprise, but did not challenge the German minority students. The Danish-minority daily in South Schleswig wrote about the incident as follows:

Certainly other people [the Danish majority] should not feel the need to prevent this! The Danish graduation cap does not become German because some Danish citizens of German identity wear it ... Conversely, we must admit: we would not be happy to see our youths from the Danish upper-secondary school in Flensburg celebrate their graduation with a German graduation cap.<sup>75</sup>

The debates over the graduation caps illustrate the changes to North Schleswig German identity starting in the early 1960's. German-minded youths no longer regarded it as necessary to live in isolation from the Danish majority. Even the first graduates from the reconstructed high school – the elite of minority youth – did not consider their identity compromised or threatened by adopting the tradition with the caps. A few years later, in 1965, the school association for the first time explicitly added this dimension to its traditional focus on giving children access to the wider German cultural sphere:

The students that leave our schools are at home in both languages and both cultural spheres of our border region. Exactly that makes them capable of working here in their native region where two nations meet.<sup>76</sup>

Twenty years after the end of the Second World War, the German minority had completed the material reconstruction of its school system but for the first time since 1945, the number of new students stagnated.<sup>77</sup> The school association reflected upon the stagnation but perceived it primarily as the result of having completed a successful reconstruction of the school system.<sup>78</sup> The minority started focusing on new conditions challenging the German schools, and in doing so, the school association only became even more inclusive of its Danish dimension. In 1968, the purpose of the German education system was defined as follows:

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74 Fr. Christensen, 'Die rot-weißen Mützen', *Der Nordschleswiger* (26 Jun. 1962).

75 N.N., 'Studentenhuen', *Flensburg Avis* (22 Jun. 1962).

76 Arthur Lessow, 'Schlussbetrachtung', *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1965), 79.

77 Arthur Lessow, 'Schlussbetrachtung' *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1966), 75–77.

78 *Ibid.*

Always in the foreground of our efforts is the student who is entrusted to us. To equip him with the necessary knowledge and skills, to educate him to become an independently thinking and pro-active human, who is at home with the German language and connected to the German community, but to whom also the Danish language and cultural sphere is not foreign. That is the goal of our school and education work in North Schleswig.<sup>79</sup>

By 1970 the school association stated more unequivocally than ever before that it pursued a dual mission in seeking both to introduce students to German language and culture and to prepare them for a future in the Danish state.<sup>80</sup> This dual mission, it argued, was undertaken 'without recourse to an exclusionary nationalism but in close connection to our nation and with ever more determination to connect the two nations of our border region.'<sup>81</sup>

## Conclusion

After a century of national contestation over Schleswig, the border drawn between Denmark and Germany in 1920 carved out North Schleswig from the former duchy and created a strong and separatist German-minded minority in Denmark. Although accommodated by the Danish state, the interwar minority retained separatist aspirations. It strongly supported the Nazi regime and it agitated for the region's incorporation into Nazi-Germany. Immediately after Germany's capitulation in 1945, elements within the minority untainted by Nazism assumed leadership of the North Schleswig Germans. Stressing their loyalty to the Danish state and unequivocal recognition of the 1920 border, they defined North Schleswig German identity henceforth as fundamentally loyal to Denmark and anti-separatist.

The German minority in Denmark did not suffer the same fate as many other Germans who lived in European borderlands, but the liberal minority policies of the interwar years were changed after 1945, and the reconstruction of German education after 1945 took place under pressure. From the winter of 1945, a new law established that German education could take place only in private schools. These would first have to be (re)built as pre-war buildings were confiscated by the Danish state. This meant that a large number of children were transferred into Danish schools. According to the minority, this severely compromised its chances of long-term survival.

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79 Arthur Lessow, 'Schlussbetrachtung', *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1968), 74.

80 N.N., '50 Jahre deutsche Schularbeit', *Deutscher Volkskalender Nordschleswig* (1970), 95–98.

81 *Ibid.*

The pressure on the minority came not only from the Danish majority. The fact that many North Schleswig Germans voluntarily chose to assimilate into the majority threatened the minority's continued existence and was fiercely contested by its leadership. This identity transformation was possible because North Schleswig Germans shared many cultural traits with the majority North Schleswig Danes, for example, their regional vernacular speech. Furthermore, many Danes accepted the transformation because they continued to see the minority as Germanised Danes who had merely forgotten their true national identity.

The reconstruction of a German education system was embedded in this context. North Schleswig German identity as communicated in schools was always tied to German language and culture, but other layers were added to their self-perception of identity. In the early years after the war, the school and language association continued to stress the clear distinction between majority and minority, between Danes and Germans. From the early 1950s, however, the minority began to focus more on its regional ties, verbalising how it belonged to North Schleswig as an independent region influenced by both Danish and German culture. As the pressure on the minority diminished, the school and language association began to articulate a Danish dimension too by the 1960s.

The reconstruction process of the education system from 1945 to c. 1965 included substantial changes to North Schleswig German identity: the children who attended minority schools in 1965 were offered a completely different minority identity from that which had been offered to children attending German schools before 1945. The transmission of North Schleswig German identity was no longer separatist and isolationist but, rather, now embraced North Schleswig's national diversity. The new identity was inclusive and even took pride in asserting the role of the minority as a group that understood both the Danish and the German nations. Even though the minority thought they would always 'remain what they were', in reality their national identity as North Schleswig Germans had changed as much as the society of which they formed a part.