

The Civilising Mission in Norwegian Cultural Policy¹ or Culture as an Instrument for Nation Building?

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Abstract

Taking the idea that, what has been termed, 'the civilising mission', inspired by the writings of Matthew Arnold, has been one of the most dominant rationales behind modern cultural policy in Europe as its starting point, this paper attempts to analyse to what extent this has been the case in Norway. The paper takes a historical perspective and focuses on policies and ideas in nineteenth century Norway, suggesting that, as part of a nation building project, a Norwegian 'civil servant' elite constructed a representation of the Norwegian peasant culture, and melded this together with a continental culture and used it as part of its civilising project. This representation, which initially was hegemonic was however first challenged by a national romantic culture and eventually toppled by a populist nationalist movement and lead to a change in cultural hegemony. Hence, the paper concludes that towards the end of the 19th century a different civilising mission took hold in Norway; one that took the people and their own expressions as its starting point.

Keywords

Norwegian cultural policy, cultural theory, cultural hegemony, nation building, cultural elite.

Introduction

Taking the idea of the 'civilising mission', inspired by critics from the 19th century - particularly Matthew Arnold, as the dominant rationale behind modern cultural policy in European democracies as a starting point, this paper attempts to lay the foundation for an analysis of to what extent this idea has influenced Norwegian cultural policy. To be able to say something about how this rationale has informed modern Norwegian cultural policy and its principle of the democratisation of culture, this paper will analyse the cultural ideas and policies that was prevalent in nineteenth century Norway until it gained full independence and became a state recognised by other states in 1905.² It is commonly acknowledged that this was the period when a Norwegian culture and identity as we today know it emerged³. This is also when the hegemony of a Norwegian elite, which was made up of a strata of civil servants, was challenged and eventually toppled with the introduction of parliamentarianism in 1884.

The paper starts by outlining Matthew Arnold's idea of culture followed by a brief discussion of cultural hegemonies. An account of the battles between cultural hegemonies in nineteenth century Norway follows, as well as a short presentation of important cultural policies that were implemented as part of this century's nation building project. In my conclusion I argue that an eventual civilising mission in Norway at the

beginning of the nineteenth century was partly based on Arnoldian principles. However, it differs from several other countries, like e.g. the UK in that rather than to base a national culture on continental cultural values and traditions the elite chose to construct a representation of the Norwegian peasant as bearer of liberal values in accordance with Enlightenment ideas as the basis on which to construct a new national cultural identity. This construction was eventually seized upon by dissenters within the civil servants and subsequently by the peasants themselves and lead to a significant hegemonic shift in their favour.

The Civilising Mission of Cultural Policy

Oliver Bennett argues that the dominant rationale for governmental intervention in culture in the UK and other European democracies since 1945 has been what he has termed the civilising mission⁴. In Britain this idea can be traced back to the nineteenth century and the writings of Matthew Arnold. Bennett argues, that modern cultural policy has been informed by other rationales as well, namely national identity and prestige and more recently the economic benefits that it has been claimed that investment in culture can yield. However, the rationale behind the foundation of most of the cultural institutions established since 1945 to administer culture and create cultural policy have according to Bennett, been based on an Arnoldian civilising mission. Bennett argues that "... no other form of cultural theory has achieved anything like the same degree of influence. In short, the dominant mode of thinking about policies for culture has remained, at least until relatively recently, trapped in the intellectual framework of the mid-nineteenth century"⁵.

The Legacy of Matthew Arnold

Matthew Arnold's seminal essay *Culture and Anarchy* was published in the UK in 1865. Here Arnold expresses his fear of what increased liberalism and freedom for the individual can lead to. Arnold is not opposed to a more liberal society with increased individual freedom nor does he negate typical enlightenment values such as; reason, people's emancipation to take rationale choices or the growth of democracy, as such. He is however concerned with what an increased freedom and liberalism should be filled with. He is critical of a prevalent notion that "... it is a most happy and important thing for a man merely to be able to do as he likes", without much consideration as to "... what he is to do when he is thus free to do as he likes".⁶ Arnold was afraid that this increased freedom for everybody (read the working classes or *the populace* as he called it) could lead to anarchy.

His answer to these potential difficulties is culture, which benefits both each individual citizen and society as a whole.

*"Culture, which is the study of perfection, leads us [...] to conceive of true human perfection as a harmonious perfection, developing all sides of our humanity; and a general perfection, developing all parts of our society"*⁷.

Although Arnold makes few references to specific cultural expressions or art forms in *Culture and Anarchy* it is clear that he is not referring to people's own expressions, but instead to what we today would refer to as art (Perfection and Intelligence or what Arnold calls Sweetness and Light). His culture is defined as

*"...a pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know, on all the matters which most concern us, the best which has been thought and said in the world"*⁸.

Central to Arnold are the great men of culture, who

“... are those who have had a passion for diffusing, for making prevail, for carrying from one end of society to the other, the best knowledge, the best ideas of their time; who have laboured to divest knowledge of all that was harsh, uncouth, difficult, abstract, professional, exclusive; to humanise it, to make it efficient outside the clique of the cultivated and learned, yet still remaining the best knowledge and thought of the time, and a true source, therefore, of sweetness and light”⁹.

The guidance from these great men of culture is essential for the populace to enable them to fill their new freedom with meaning. This is why the Establishment of society is of such importance and Arnold is very critical to any challenges being put to it. At the time of Arnold's writing the Anglican Church faced challenges from nonconformists who wanted to break with the church Establishment to pursue a more direct layman's worship. Arnold's answer to this threat is that;

“The great works by which, not only literature, art, and science generally, but in religion itself, the human spirit has manifested its approaches to totality, and a full, harmonious perfection, and by which it stimulates and helps forward the world's general perfection come, not from Nonconformists, but from men who either belong to Establishments or have been trained in them”¹⁰.

Although Britain as most other West European countries did not instigate a planned cultural policy based on parliamentarian or other representational democratic decisions until after World War II some cultural policy decisions were made already in the nineteenth century and in the first half of the twentieth. Bennett argues that Arnold's ideas have had a profound impact on these policies. Both the first general-director of the BBC, John Reith, who agreed that;

“... the BBC would be [...] ‘a drawn sword parting the darkness of ignorance’ and its function would be to ‘offer the public something better than it now thinks it likes’”¹¹.

As well as John Maynard Keynes, who on his inauguration of the Arts Council of Great Britain in 1945, said that the artist

“... walks where the breath of the spirit blows him. He cannot be told his direction; he does not know it himself. But he leads the rest of us into fresh pastures and teaches us to love and enjoy what we often begin by rejecting, enlarging our sensibility and purifying our instincts”¹²

Exemplify that central cultural policy makers in the UK have been influenced by Matthew Arnold's ideas about how culture can help people and turn a stream of “... fresh and free thought upon their stock notion and habits”¹³. This is what Bennett coins the civilising mission of cultural policies, and the ideas have been influential in Britain and beyond; often manifested through the central post-war principle in European democratic cultural policy of the *democratisation of culture*, where public money is being spent on making the so-called high arts available and accessible to the population at large¹⁴. Such policies are clearly informed by Arnoldian principles whether Arnold has been directly acknowledged or not¹⁵.

To argue that a rationale behind cultural policy is the mission to civilise is closely related to the role of the elite in society. Somebody wishes to ‘civilise’ others, and more often

than not the group who wants to 'civilise' represent some sort of elite, defined as a group of people with power and influence. Who constitutes an elite group will vary over time and space, but the rationale is that some (mostly minor) groups in society are more enlightened than others (the majority) and can contribute to elevating the latter in civilising terms. For Matthew Arnold this was absolutely essential. It was the role of the great men of culture, who were recruited from the Establishment, to disseminate culture to all parts of society. The Establishment would need a means though, through which they could exercise their authority. Hence, Arnold argues that a strong state is needed as a platform from, which culture can be disseminated.

Culture and Hegemony

Another writer who has embraced the cultural importance of the elite in society is T.S. Eliot.

Although a guardian of the world's great artistic achievements he did not quite agree with Arnold regarding the democratisation of culture. He also feared the equal opportunities proposed through the welfare state, but it was not so much the anarchical threat that concerned him, but the lowering of standards, which he perceived as a threat to the elite. Eliot argued that "the true purpose of education was 'to preserve the class and to select the elite'. The elite would preserve Culture – and Culture would preserve the elite"¹⁶. As opposed to Arnold's paternalistic 'care' for people and his argument about culture's inherently beneficial potential, Eliot sees culture as a way to preserve existing power-relations in society, where the dominant class must be in control. The preservation of the elite in a democratic country cannot be achieved through coercion though, so an overall national consensus about what matters, or a hegemony, needs to be achieved. Referring to Antonio Gramsci who coined the term 'hegemony' in a political sense, Hewison¹⁷ defines this term as

*"... the means by which a state is governed by a ruling class which exercises power through a leadership based on compromises with, and concessions to, other interests and classes that are calculated to produce consent, without it being necessary to deploy coercive powers which governments also have at their disposal"*¹⁸.

A national culture is useful in retaining hegemony through the "... ideas, images, and values which are embodied in its rituals and its historical memory – in its mythology"¹⁹. However, according to Hewison, national culture must be treated carefully by the dominant group in order for it to be an efficient tool for the country's leadership in retaining this hegemony. The higher classes of society must be employed in servicing but also in policing culture. However, it is important that the culture of the dominant class is not enjoyed exclusively by that class, but disseminated to the whole of society, so the dominant culture "... becomes identified with the culture of society as a whole"²⁰.

According to Arnold it was the role of the great men of culture, who were recruited from the Establishment, to disseminate culture to all parts of society. However, he did not subscribe to the idea that culture was to be used as a factor in conserving existing hegemonies. In fact, Arnold "...specifically rejects the idea of *possessing* culture, of culture 'as an engine of social or class distinction, separating its holder, like a badge or title, from other people who have not got it'"²¹.

Cultural Legacies in Norway

When analysing whether Arnold's civilising mission has influenced cultural policy in Norway two central keywords are the elite and the state. Norway did not become a modern independent nation-state, recognised by other states, until 1905. This was preceded by a long nation building project, which was initiated by the elite of the time. However, several groups in society used different discourses to make representations of Norwegian culture, during what has been termed the long eighteenth century²². This nation building project has been described as a hegemonic battle of the Norwegian²³.

So in addition to the elite and the state, this paper will use the notion of hegemonies when analysing Norwegian cultural policy. Given that the aim is to analyse to what extent the civilising mission has informed Norwegian cultural policy the main focus will be on the Norwegian elite, and the battle for hegemonies in the nineteenth century.

Both Geir Vestheim²⁴ and Per Mangset²⁵ argue that a central objective in post-war Norwegian cultural policy has been what is called the democratisation of culture. This may or may not have been influenced by an Arnoldian civilising mission, but Mangset argues that this democratisation is part of a paternalistic project where cultural policy makers decide which culture is best for the population. Robert Hewison juxtaposes this approach with another one and argues that there is a

"...difference between a view of culture that, following the definition offered by Matthew Arnold in 1869, [which] sees is as a 'pursuit of our total perfection by means of getting to know the best which has been thought and said in the world' and that other view which sees culture as the common expression of a people, where values emerge from below, and are not imposed from above"²⁶.

The latter view is what has been termed a cultural democracy²⁷. Geir Vestheim terms these two approaches to cultural policy the 'object-model' (where the people get educated through impulses from outside or above) versus a 'subject-model' (where the people or their representatives themselves acquire knowledge and administers the education work)²⁸. Although both Hewison, Mangset and Vestheim use these terms to analyse modern cultural policies (since 1945), they can be applied when analysing different hegemonies in the Norwegian nation building project in the nineteenth century as well. Very simplified we can call them a 'top-down' versus a 'bottom-up' approach.

Cultural Elites

A modern account of Norwegian history can start as early as in 1536, which is when King Christian III of Denmark reduced Norway's status to a province of Denmark. Prior to that Norway had been part of a troubled union first with both Sweden and Denmark and later with Denmark only. Norway was in the beginning of this new period as a province administered on a shoestring with very little resources allocated to it by the court in Denmark²⁹. However, as from about 1625 the state administration increased significantly and peaked at about 1,200 civil servants. These were to become the new elite and formed the core of a stratum of about 5,000 people who administered Norway. In fact so dominant was this group as researchers focusing on Norway's history have come to label the period from the early 17th century and onwards as the 'civil servant state' (*embedsmannstaten*)³⁰. Neumann points out that although this stratum also contained groups that are traditionally identified as bourgeois such as tradesmen or factory managers, the core was made up of the civil servants. A core which was neither bourgeois in the traditional sense nor aristocratic, but instead drawn from civil servants working on behalf of the Danish crown.

This elite was initially the undisputed 'bearer' of culture in Norway and was known as *øvrigheten* – (loosely 'the authorities') who governed the rest of the population, *almuen* – (loosely 'the populace')³¹. Norway had prior to the period of the 'civil servant state' only to a very small extent been influenced by European culture (meaning from Denmark and further south).

The authorities had according to Neumann two sociological characteristics. "First, they were part of a structure whose education and hierarchial structure tied their work and their cultural horizons directly to the King's Chancellery. ... Second, as the corps expanded, it did so as a result of a influx from Copenhagen and other cities in the Continental part of the Danish state (Elsinore, Kiel, etc.)³²". Hence, this group of people possessed a comparatively high level of cultural capital, in fact it was common for civil servants working for the Danish court to undertake a Grand tour of Europe (*dannelsesreise*), presumably to be educated in languages and the arts. Although Norwegian civil servants only rarely were granted such a tour they were part of a corpse for which European elitist cultural ideals were held in high esteem³³. This influx did of course also bring new cultural impulses. Hence, the culture of the Norwegian state-bearing civil servant elite was firmly rooted in continental culture.

After Denmark was defeated in the Napoleonic Wars it was in 1814 forced to give up Norway as a colony, which instead entered into a union with Sweden. By then 'the authorities' made up of the civil servants had consolidated their power in Norway to such an extent that they, according to Neumann, both had state-bearing potential and state-bearing aspirations. As the unchallenged elite, the civil servants managed, together with representatives from some other groups, to agree a Norwegian constitution on which much of the legal basis of the union with Sweden was based.

This is Norway's first step towards becoming an independent state amongst equals. The constitution was informed by liberal values, which indicates that the Norwegian elite to a high extent were influenced by ideas from the enlightenment³⁴. Enlightenment ideas in this context implies, according to Sørensen that the human common sense is the master, and puts

*"... a strong emphasis on each individuals' freedom to make her own rational choices: a critique of established institutions in the political, social and spiritual field based on reason and full freedom to raise such critique. Last but not least: an optimistic faith in the future based on reason. Through the enlightenment ideas the human reason would create a better world. In a free society common sense would be victorious and vice versa"*³⁵.

The "Statists" Representation

For it to become a state amongst equals what was genuine about Norway, or what distinguished it from the rest of Europe, needed to be defined. One could assume that since the elite to such a high extent was influenced by trends in Europe (through the mentioned Grand tours and so on), that a Norwegian identity would primarily be based on continental culture; the culture of the cities. The core of the civil servants, who Neumann has coined the "statists", did after all not break their cultural ties with Denmark after 1814.

However, although the "statists" were the undisputed elite with the state-bearing potential and inspiration, the populace also had, compared with most other European countries, a strong position in society. The big bulk of the Norwegian society was in the

eighteenth century employed in the agricultural sector. People employed working the land in this way would in most other countries be termed peasants but this is not an entirely accurate description of this group in Norway³⁶.

Norwegian peasants³⁷ enjoyed a stature very different from their brothers and sisters elsewhere in Europe. They were not legally bound to their landowners, who rarely were big as in England for example. In fact many Norwegian peasants owned their own land. Hence, the Norwegian peasant was represented amongst the men who drafted the constitution of 1814. Almost half of all Norwegians gained the right to vote in 1814, which is a comparatively high proportion for that time, with the result that the majority of the electorate were made up of peasants³⁸. At the same time the elite was weaker than in many other countries, because it drew its power and legitimacy from filling an administrative role as supposed to the possession of land or other wealth.

So the civil servant stratum could not ignore the peasants. Instead many of them nourished a great admiration for them. As early as in the 1770s a group drawn from the elite called 'the Patriots' created a cultural construction of the Norwegian peasant, as bearers of liberal and individual freedoms and hence, made him a symbol of European enlightenment ideas of the time, and by 1814 the Norwegian peasant had become a political reality.

Throughout the first half of the nineteenth century the Norwegian elite continued to hail the Norwegian peasant as a bearer of Norwegian identity. But why is this? Why is it, as Neumann asks, that

*"... a project based on a common European development and central modernisation variables such as literacy, industrialisation and bourgeois culture is set against an isolationistic project based on a semi-literate language, disorganised agriculture and peasant culture"?*³⁹

Seip suggests that this may be as a response to a common experience amongst both the elite and the peasants; "... that the country was poor, underdeveloped, divided and under pressure from an external power [Sweden]"⁴⁰. Another suggestion may be that to focus on the raw, free and clean ambience of nature was very much a trend in romantic European thinking of the time. The North (meaning Norway) had since Montesquieu published his *L'esprit des lois* in 1748 been the subject of such sentiments. After having read the old Nordic sagas, which had recently been translated to several languages, he hailed the old Norsemen for their great democratic traditions with the Allting (where everybody had a vote) and that Norwegian peasants and women were free. He also mentioned that the Vikings had contributed to state-building in the areas they had conquered. Intellectuals such as Thomas Malthus and Mary Wollstonecraft visited Norway in the late eighteenth century and confirmed in their books how free the Norwegian peasant was compared to in many other countries⁴¹. Iver Sagmo argues that Norway became a travel destination for intellectuals from England and the continent when

*"... the enlightenment's cultural optimism about the future as well as a refined aristocratic culture was confronted with the argument that civilisation had corrupted the original pure and good human. Even though this "child of nature" in Rousseau's critical argument only filled the role as a regulatory idea, and was not meant as an empirical entity, informed by this idea people started to search for this human and meant that it would be found in the shape of the 'noble wild'"*⁴².

Historians have identified altogether 2472 books with travel-descriptions by mostly English and German visitors to Norway up to the year 1900⁴³. This was all part of a

romantic movement in Europe where people longed for the pure, free, clean and harsh nature, which there of course was plenty of in Norway.

These romantic ideas were influential on some of the members of the civil service strata of the time. The free peasant was seized upon as something uniquely Norwegian⁴⁴ and would come to inform a national romantic movement in Norway, whereby some of the civil servants elite

“... melded older identity elements into a new patriotism, whose ... main elements were the freedom of ideas of the European Enlightenment, and whose main symbol was the free peasant that European intellectuals had sighted in Norway and which the civil servants had made their own”⁴⁵.

It could be argued that there was a civilising element in the plans and discourse of the civil servants and that this was rooted in Enlightenment ideas of the time but rather than copying other elite cultures from Europe the emphasis was on building an alternative Norwegian culture based on Norwegian cultural heritage and history where the Nordic myths, ideas of democracy and the status of the Norwegian peasant were central. However, the initial focus on the peasants was a construction in an attempt to create a national culture, but one where the elite culture was still assumed to be superior. Someone like the historian and later newspaper editor P.A. Munch for example declared that although the hegemonic elite culture should absorb elements from the national peasant culture it was certainly not at the expense of the former. The superiority of the elite culture was indisputable⁴⁶. Others argued even more clearly and deliberately that the elite had a mission to civilise the populace. The academic and author Johan Sebastian Welhaven, argued in 1834 that the art had to come out of its private and dilettant forms, so that

“... the enjoyment of the lower classes little by little breed... under the eyes of a finer audience as well as under their management – the light must here, as everywhere, come from above”⁴⁷.

This is expressing a need to civilise people where the elite should disseminate what was predominantly a continental culture. Such objectives were not surprising, given the background and aristocratic connections of the elite. This hegemony with an elite culture firmly rooted in continental values but with representations of the peasant to evoke national feelings, was relatively unchallenged during the first three decades of the nineteenth century. In Gramscian terms concessions were made in an attempt to produce consent with the peasant, but without letting the ‘superior’ continental culture go.

National Romanticism

Looking back one could easily think that such a nation-building project devised by the elites but emphasising the values and culture of the peasants (i.e. the majority) would be bound for success. However, the *statists* were faced with dissenters from within the civil servants who were less occupied with a liberal *representation* of the Norwegian peasant. This group wanted to go further and explicitly rejected any cultural ties with Denmark (i.e. the continent). One prominent representative of this group was the author Henrik Wergeland who postulated Norwegian history as falling into two half circles, one representing Norway’s proud medieval Viking heritage prior to its union with Denmark and the other its history since 1814. What was left in the middle should best be forgotten. It meant a radical break with Danish culture where “Norwegian culture, which had survived in the nooks and crannies of Norwegian valleys and fjords, had to be

resuscitated⁴⁸. Again, the peasant was central though not in an elitist representation, but because their culture was real and unspoilt by 400 years of Danish colonisation. This representation was initially advocated by a marginal group, who was still mostly drawn from the civil service elite. Such a national romantic idea was also in line with some of the influential ideas in continental Europe at the time. Both Jean Jacques Rousseau's focus on feelings, where the original and uncorrupted human unaffected by the development in society was praised as well as Johann Gottfried Herder's idea of a nation's common culture, based on the people's way of life, were influential⁴⁹.

This resistance and the subsequent tension have, according to Sørensen to do with the rivalling intellectual ideas of the time; enlightenment versus romanticism. Although it can be argued that the enlightenment ideas were hegemonic in Norway it faced resistance from movements that were influenced by Romanticism. A Romanticism where the focus

“... is on man's non-rational qualities: feelings, sincerity, passion, naturalness, organic and often mystic connections between groups of people and between people and nature. Tradition was given a much more harmonious sound in romanticism. Selected parts of the past was idealised, especially important was a longing back to the middle-ages, or to be more precise an idealised representation of it⁵⁰.

Or as Neumann phrases it; a change

“... from an Enlightenment celebration of the people's potential for learning to a celebration of the people's innate qualities”⁵¹.

By the 1840s this national romantic representation of Norway as a 'nation', which rests on 'the people' and not on the elite versus 'the populace' is about to become hegemonic. In a Gramscian hegemonic sense, it makes further compromises to produce consent, but the civil servants are still the only state-bearing strata, and hence the approach is still 'top-down' and in accordance with Vestheim's object-model.

A New Hegemony

This hegemony were soon to be joined and challenged by a third representation of the nation. One which went much further than the *Romantic Nationalists* in their suggestions and demands. This was the first Norwegian social or political movement since 16th century, which was not exclusively made up of representatives from the elite. This movement, which Neumann terms *Populist Nationalists* did have support from elites in the capital Christiania, but had emerged from and had its roots in the countryside and the cities of the western part of Norway. Their main objective was that Norway needed its own language and they claimed that Norway currently was made up of two cultures and even more importantly two nations. People who lived in the cities could perhaps be called Norwegian, but only in a political or geographical sense, not in a national one. The elite culture of the cities was still hegemonic but was regarded as suspect due to its connections with Danish culture and hence, diametrically different from the other culture, the people's culture. The *populist nationalist's* confidence and power stemmed partly from the fact that Norwegian municipalities had got local self-government in 1837 and the main focus of this forum was certainly not nation building but local initiative and activities⁵². Where the elite previously had been able to build on a cultural atmosphere “... where the rural was annexed by the city's elites”, the peasants had now come up with their own alternative⁵³. This was the peasant's expressions, based on their own values emerging from below. Some of the myths in the representations of the elite had become reality.

The *statists* felt, with reason, very threatened by this last representation, and countered these movements

“... by stressing how Norway’s ties to Denmark had secured Norway’s partaking of ‘the boons of civilisation’. What the bearers of this representation feared was above all isolation – that Norway in its hankering after what was specifically national should end up as a province cut off from the rest of European civilisation”⁵⁴.

So to summarise, there were three discourses representing three different stances in the nation building project in nineteenth-century Norway. The *statist* stratum whose culture was hegemonic from 1814 up to the 1840s. “The nation consisted of a leading civil servant stratum as well as the populace. Norwegian culture was the culture of the civil servants, and the culture of the civil servants was a seamless part of European culture”⁵⁵, but with an added focus on the construction of a peasant culture. The second one is informed by romantic ideas where the nation is ‘the people’ including both the civil service stratum and the populace. “This representation stresses how the romantic turn to the people is an all-European phenomenon”⁵⁶. The third one is the *populist nationalists* who see the civil stratum as an obstacle for real democracy.

The *romantic Nationalists* and the *Populist Nationalists* eventually forge an alliance, which led to the formation of the party ‘the Left (*Venstre*), which went on to take control of the parliament in 1884. This again led to Norway leaving the union with Sweden and becoming an internationally recognised nation state in 1905. The alliance eventually split exactly because the civil servants’ state bearing role came under siege by the national populists.

So what happened to the civil service stratum? With increased democratisation, first with a democratic takeover of Parliament in 1884 and independence from Sweden in 1905 their state-bearing rationale vanished and they were forced to join a democratic battle as any other group in society. Consequently they formed the basis of their own political party “the Right” (*Høyre*) and otherwise retreated back to their posts in the Norwegian bureaucracy.

Cultural Policies and the Mediation of a Norwegian Culture

So far the focus has mostly been on how different strata of society used cultural elements in different nation-building projects, through representations, constructions and ideas but less on concrete cultural policy measures. Although Norway did not have a clear cultural policy programme until after 1945, some institutions were established in nineteenth century. Examples are the National Gallery (1836), the National Stage in Bergen (1876) and the National Theatre in Oslo (1899)⁵⁷. However, several of them were not initiated by the state and did not receive public funding until way into the next century. Presumably referring to some of these privately funded cultural institutions both Mangset⁵⁸ and Bakke⁵⁹ argue that the bourgeois elite of the nineteenth century established their own cultural institutions, to present their own culture to themselves. Bakke goes as far as saying that “Cultural values and everyday life among people in rural areas – judged by many to be the location of genuine Norwegian culture – were more or less ignored by the city establishment” of the time, and that this was a period of cultural exclusion⁶⁰. This may be the case in the beginning of the century but it ignores many of the other important cultural policy initiatives that were initiated at the time.

As mentioned earlier the elite was interested in representations of the peasant culture. But,

“It was not the peasant culture as a total way of life, which triggered interest, but those elements in this way of life that carried cultural continuity. Those part of the peasant culture that could build a bridge to the middle ages and independence for country and people, was attractive with an objective to create a platform of common culture”⁶¹.

But to be able to create tangible representations of this rediscovered peasant culture, knowledge about it needed to be collected and acquired. The culture had its artistic expressions, but many of them, apart from crafts and architecture, did not exist in a tangible form but was passed on orally from generation to generation. The Norwegian nation builders realised that this culture needed to be collected before it was too late. Thus, throughout the first half of the nineteenth century a range of scholars travelled through the rural parts of Norway collecting legends, fairy-tales, ballads and folk-music. The most well-known are perhaps Asbjørnsen and Moe, who collected a range of fairy-tales, many of which still live on in the Norwegian public psyche. This work was also inspired by continental ideas of the time, and this was certainly not a uniquely Norwegian project. Both Goethe and the Grimm brothers from Germany are cited as inspirations⁶². It is peculiar to note that these activities received public funding through scholarships from the University of Oslo, and was as such one of very few cultural policy initiatives of the time.

The nation building period from the 1830s and onwards was also an immensely rich period in Norwegian artistic life. A range of artists both within literature, the visual arts (mostly painting) and music grabbed the new national romantic movement passionately and created artworks that became known internationally. Names as Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, Henrik Ibsen and Edvard Grieg are perhaps amongst the most famous.

Apart from this manifestation through new art works, the national culture was also mediated through institutional channels of which the most important one was the school system. At the beginning of the nineteenth century the school syllabus was based on a Danish curriculum but by 1900 it was replaced by a purely Norwegian one. The level of Norwegian history, heritage and culture in the school curriculum was central to the school debate throughout the nineteenth century. Another important institution for the mediation of Norwegian culture was the voluntary organisations. Henrik Wergeland for example had been a keen supporter of using voluntary organisations to educate and civilise the masses.

Finally there were the museums. The University Museum of Antiquities was established in 1817 and had as its most important task to document medieval history, and hence, contribute to the representation of this period. Norway did not have many other publicly funded museums until 1880, when several folk-museums were established to display Norwegian architectural heritage. Again, the main focus was on peasant and rural culture. A National Gallery was established in 1836. Hodne argues that all these activities, which had been initiated by the elite to

“... create a national basis, through collection and registration [of folk-art], artistic activity and research, which gave the population a cultural consciousness, had now through different channels, become the people’s cultural property”⁶³.

These organisations are therefore manifestations of changing cultural hegemonies. Institutions, which were established as part of a hegemonic nation building project, with

the objective to civilise, empowered the people to express themselves and hence, lied the foundation for a new hegemony, based on the people's own expressions.

Conclusion - A Norwegian 'Civilising' Mission?

It can be concluded that there was indeed a civilising project in Norway in 19th century initiated by a civil servant elite. This had continental culture and enlightenment values as its starting point, but realised that a representation of the peasant was necessary as part of a nation building project. However, since 'the populace' was not sufficiently enlightened, the civil servants were of the opinion that they had to carry the state, and guide 'the populace' according to Arnoldian principles. This view was hegemonic during the first half of the century.

When the *national romantics* and their representation of the nation became hegemonic however the focus shifted away from continental values and the peasant culture was even more romanticised. It was still a civilising project though, where the civil servants were the only one with a state-bearing potential.

When the *populist nationalists* entered the arena and later forged an alliance with some of the civil servants in the formation of *Venstre*, we saw a significant shift towards culture as a common expression, where values emerge from below. Vestheim supports this view, when he argues that the enlightenment of the people went from his already mentioned 'object-model' to a 'subject-model'⁶⁴.

Sørensen argues that although the civil servants lost the battle their emphasis on Enlightenment ideas and a civic orientation lived on in the politics of *Venstre*. However, culturally Norway took a big turn away from the embracing of continental culture, to one, which instead focused on what was typically Norwegian. As Seip argues "The city culture lost in a political power game, which has been important to this day"⁶⁵. The downfall of the civil servant state lead to a new cultural hegemony, which, for the time being at least, was based on people's own expressions. Consensus was achieved but not on the elite's terms.

Bennett argues that in addition to the civilising mission, governments do also get involved in culture for the potential economic benefits, but also as a way to further national identity and prestige. The economic justifications are of less relevance for nineteenth century Norwegian cultural policy. However, it seems obvious from the focus of this paper that furthering and strengthening a national identity was a stronger rationale behind Norwegian cultural policy in the nineteenth century than a civilising mission in the true Arnoldian sense. However, these rationales are related in that, initially at least, certain representations emerged from above where, as Neumann argues, the

*"... civil servants programmatically defined their role as being that of running the state, and the role of the state of 'leading and correcting' public opinion so as to bring about progress"*⁶⁶.

So from this account of the Norwegian nation building project and cultural policies in the nineteenth century, it seems that a different civilising mission took hold in Norway. One, which to start with resembled, to a certain degree, Arnold's emphasis of the power of culture, but which changed during the course of the century to focus less on the elite's notion of culture to one, which used local culture as a central part of a nation building project. As mentioned earlier a national culture is according to Hewison useful in retaining a cultural hegemony, through a historical memory and mythology. Given that

the Norwegian elite did not have their own Norwegian historical memory, one had to be constructed. This memory and mythology was captured and made real by the peasants and formed the basis for a new hegemony.

Notes and References

- ¹ This paper is based on research carried out for my PhD dissertation at the Centre for Cultural Policy Studies at University of Warwick, and is such a work in progress. Feedback and comments are encouraged and can be sent to me via email; egil.bjornsen@warwick.ac.uk
- ² As mentioned in the previous footnote this paper is part of a bigger project, which research objective is to analyse on which rationales Norwegian cultural policy is based. Following on from this, there will be other papers, which will focus on Norwegian cultural policy after 1905, but this falls outside the remit of this paper.
- ³ Seip, A. 1994. "Jakten på nasjonal identitet: Kultur, politikk og nasjonsbygging I Norge I årene omkring "Det nasjonale gjennombrudd" 1830 – 1870. *Nytt Norsk Tidsskrift*, Vol. 3, n^o 4, p. 281 - 294.
- ⁴ Bennett, O 1995. "Cultural Policy in the United Kingdom: Collapsing Rationales and the End of a Tradition", *The European Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol, n^o 2 p. 199-216; Bennett, O 1997. "Cultural Policy, Cultural Pessimism and Postmodernity", *International Journal of Cultural Policy*, Vol 4, n^o 1: p. 67-84.
- ⁵ Bennett (1995), p. 210.
- ⁶ Arnold, M. 1994. *Culture and Anarchy*, ed. By S. Lipman, New Haven: Yale University Press, p. 50.
- ⁷ *Ibid.*, p 8.
- ⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.
- ⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.
- ¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-10.
- ¹¹ Quoted in Bennett (1995), p. 208.
- ¹² Quoted in Bennett (1995), p. 209.
- ¹³ Arnold (1994) p. 5.
- ¹⁴ Vestheim, G. 1995. *Kulturpolitikk I det moderne Noreg*. Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget; Mangset, P. 1992. *Kulturliv og forvaltning: Innføring I kulturpolitikk*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget.
- ¹⁵ What is meant here is that similar rationales can be traced in the cultural policies of several countries in Europe. These may or may not have been directly influenced by Matthew Arnold's writing (e.g. I have found no such traces in writings about Norway thus far) and chances are that they just as much have been influenced by the writing of Friedrich Schiller (who also influenced Matthew Arnold) and others.
- ¹⁶ Eliot quoted in Hewison, R. 1995. *Culture and Consensus: England, art and politics since 1940*. London: Methuen, p. 53.
- ¹⁷ Hewison uses the Gramscian notion of hegemony to analyse British cultural policies of the twentieth century. However, I believe it is relevant to use this theoretical framework to analyse the culture of other places at other times.
- ¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
- ¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.
- ²¹ Arnold, quoted in Bennett, O., forthcoming, 'Beyond Machinery: The Cultural Policies of Matthew Arnold', in *The Case for Public Support of the Arts*, Craufurd D. Goodwin & Neil De Marchi, (Toronto: University of Toronto Press), p. 18.
- ²² Iver Neumann, in his book "Norge – en kritikk", describes the long eighteenth century to last from around 1814 to 1914.
- ²³ Sørensen, Ø., 2001, 'Hegemonikamp om det norske: Elitenes nasjonsbyggingsprosjekter 1770 – 1945, in Sørensen, Ø. *Jakten på det norske: Perspektiver på utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet på 1800-tallet* (Oslo: Gyldendal Norsk Forlag).
- ²⁴ Vestheim (1995).
- ²⁵ Mangset (1992).
- ²⁶ Hewison (1995) p. 34.
- ²⁷ Mangset (1992).
- ²⁸ Vestheim (1992) p. 89.

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- ²⁹ Neumann, I., 2002, 'This little piggy stayed at home: Why Norway is not a member of the EU in European Integration and National Identity: The challenge of the Nordic states, L. Hansen and O. Wæver (London: Routledge).
- ³⁰ Slagstad, R., 1998 *De nasjonale strateger*. Oslo: Pax; Nerbøvik, J, P. 1986. *Norsk historie 1870-1905*. Oslo: Det Norske Samlaget.
- ³¹ Neumann (2002), p. 92.
- ³² Ibid.
- ³³ Only civil servants who originated from Denmark or other European countries from, which the Royal court in Copenhagen recruited such staff, were normally sent on such Grand tours.
- ³⁴ Sørensen (2001).
- ³⁵ Ibid., p. 22.
- ³⁶ In fact "... the core of the peasant myth is a figure that is difficult to conceptualize with the term 'peasant', which connotes subordination in a feudal order. The Nordic peasant is rather somewhere between a yeoman and a freeholder in an English context, moving toward farmer around 1900" (Bo Stråth and Øystein Sørensen, quoted in Neumann, 2001, 93).
- ³⁷ Despite Stråth and Sørensen's re-description I will continue to use the term 'peasant' in the absence of a better term.
- ³⁸ Ibid., p. 26.
- ³⁹ Neumann, I., 2001 *Norge – en kritikk: Begrepsmakt i Europa-debatten*. Oslo: Pax, p. 69.
- ⁴⁰ Seip (1994).
- ⁴¹ Neumann (2001).
- ⁴² Sagmo, I., 2001, 'Norge – et forbilde eller et utviklingsland?: Folk og land I første halvdel av 1800-tallet – sett med tyske reisendes øyne, in Sørensen, Ø. *Jakten på det norske: Perspektiver på utviklingen av en norsk nasjonal identitet*, pp. 75-76.
- ⁴³ Sagmo (2001).
- ⁴⁴ Sørensen (2001).
- ⁴⁵ Neumann (2001), p. 95.
- ⁴⁶ Sørensen (2001).
- ⁴⁷ Welhaven, quoted in (Seip, 1994).
- ⁴⁸ Neumann (2002) p. 95.
- ⁴⁹ Hodne, B., 1995 *Norsk nasjonalkultur: En kulturpolitisk oversikt*. Oslo: Universitetsforlaget, p. 28.
- ⁵⁰ Sørensen (2001), p. 22-23.
- ⁵¹ Neumann (2002) p. 94.
- ⁵² Seip (1994), p. 290.
- ⁵³ Ibid.
- ⁵⁴ Neumann (2002), p. 100.
- ⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 97.
- ⁵⁶ Ibid.
- ⁵⁷ Vestheim (1995), p. 23.
- ⁵⁸ Mangset (1992).
- ⁵⁹ Bakke, M., 2003, 'Cultural Policy in Norway', in Duelund, P, ed., *The Nordic Cultural Model*. Copenhagen: Nordic Cultural Institute, pp. 147 – 180.
- ⁶⁰ Ibid. , p. 152.
- ⁶¹ Hodne (1995), p. 41.
- ⁶² Hodne (1995).
- ⁶³ Ibid., p. 60.
- ⁶⁴ Vestheim (1995).
- ⁶⁵ Seip (1994), p. 292.
- ⁶⁶ Neumann (2002), p. 95.