

Háskóli Íslands

Hugvísindasvið

Sagnfræði

Different paths towards autonomy:

*A comparison of the political status of the Faroe Islands and
Iceland in the first half of the 19th century*

Ritgerð til B. A.- prófs

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Abstract

This dissertation is a comparison of the political status of Iceland and the Faroe Islands within the Danish kingdom during the first half of the 19th century. Though they share a common history, the two dependencies took a radically different path towards autonomy during this period. Today Iceland is a republic while the Faroes still are a part of the Danish kingdom.

This study examines the difference between the agendas of the two Danish dependencies in the *Rigsdagen*, the first Danish legislature, when it met for the first time in 1848 to discuss the first Danish constitution, the so-called *Junigrundloven*.

In order to explain why the political agendas of the dependencies were so different, it is necessary to study in detail the years before 1848. The administration, trade and culture of the two dependencies are examined in order to provide the background for the discussion of the quite different political status Iceland and the Faroes had within the Danish kingdom.

Furthermore, the debates in the Danish state assemblies regarding the re-establishment of the *Alþingi* in 1843 are discussed in comparison to the debates in the same assemblies regarding the re-establishment of the *Løgting* in 1844 and 1846. Even though the state assemblies received similar petitions from both dependencies, *Alþingi* was re-established in 1843, while the same did not happen with the *Løgting* in the Faroes.

Finally, the debates in *Rigsdagen* are examined. The main goal is to establish, why the two North Atlantic dependencies of the Danish kingdom took such different paths towards autonomy, the result being that Iceland is now a sovereign republic while the Faroe Islands are still a part of Denmark, albeit with Home Rule.

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Introduction:

If there is such a thing as a common memory among nations, a certain understanding exists between Iceland and the Faroe Islands that the countries have the same, or at least a very similar, history. Norse Vikings settled both Iceland and the Faroe Islands before both became part of the Norwegian kingdom in the 13th century and eventually followed Norway into a union with the Danish kingdom in the late 14th century, known as the Kalmar Union. As a Faroese student studying in Iceland, one often hears the notion of being “the little brother” of Iceland. As one of my fellow students told me: a guest from the Faroe Islands is not a foreigner, even though he may not be Icelandic.

There is no denying that the early history of the two countries is similar. Indeed, the Faroese settlement saga is commonly regarded as one chapter of the Icelandic sagas, albeit taking place in the Faroe Islands. In modern politics, there is also genuine friendship between the two Norse countries, although there are examples in which Iceland and the Faroes have different or even competing interests.

When the financial crash hit Iceland in 2008, the Faroes were the first country to offer a loan to Iceland. There are also examples of Faroese refusal to repair English trawlers during the Cod Wars. And when Faroese fishing vessels from time to time have been refused entrance in Icelandic harbours, the vessels have nonetheless received huge support from the Icelandic public as was for example the case with the trawler *Næraberg* in 2015.¹ However, the scholarship regarding a historical comparison between the two countries is limited. My aim is to add a contribution to that.

The focus will be on an important part of modern history, namely the years before 1848, when the Faroe Islands *were given* the Danish Constitution (*DA:Grundloven*), while Iceland refused to accept it, although both countries were part of the Danish kingdom. The fact that I say that the Faroes “were given” the constitution and not that they simply accepted it, is due to the modern political claim in the Faroes that the Faroese people never voted in favour of the constitution in any democratic manner. Indeed, the public was never asked for its approval, although it may be argued that the constitution has been accepted in practice, as the Faroes continue to function as part of the Danish kingdom.

However, I find the crucial event of 1848, when a constitution was made in the Danish kingdom to be an important reason for dissimilarities in the modern history of the Faroe Islands and Iceland. Although the main topic of this dissertation is the different political positions of the

¹ <http://www.ruv.is/frett/faereyingar-hissa-a-mottokunum>, 15/12 - 2017.

countries in 1848, I also aim to examine the years prior to 1848 and explain the differences between the independence movements in the two countries.

Furthermore, an account of the conditions of the two countries in the first half of the 19th century will be provided. It will mainly deal with the history of the Faroes, rather than the history of Iceland, as this thesis is being written at the Department of History of the University of Iceland. The need for an account of the history of Iceland in the first half of the 19th century is not pressing since a great deal of academic work has been published on the history of Iceland in this period.

In order to examine and understand the development in the *Rigsdagen* (EN: *constitutional assembly*) in Denmark, which met in 1848 for the first time, an account of the economic, administrative as well as the cultural state of the two nations is essential. As we shall find, many of the differences between the representatives to the *Rigsdagen* in Denmark are quite logical, as the political status of the two Danish dependencies was less similar than one may assume they were in 1848.

It is perhaps necessary to state from the beginning that the difference between the two independence movements is significant. In the Faroe Islands, the independence movement is usually dated back to the end of the 19th century, 1888 to be exact, although before that a form of cultural nationalism and a movement towards free trade is discernible, which will be discussed in detail in this essay. Cultural nationalism in the Faroes was, however, not as developed as in Iceland at that time.

In Iceland, one can see clear signs of an independence movement in the 1830-40s, the goal of which was greater self-governance. One may rightfully doubt if there was any serious desire for full independence in the first half of the 19th century, but Icelanders were undoubtedly seeking greater autonomy for their country.

I have always found the word for independence in the Icelandic language, “*Sjálfstæði*”, which is the same word as in Faroese, “*Sjálvstýri*”, to be a misnomer for the relevant historical periods. Indeed, “*sjálfstæðisbaráttan*” and “*sjálvstýrisrørslan*” for the greater part of the period did not fight for independence at all – merely for a greater amount of self-governance.

However, the main question that I will try to answer in this study is the following: Why did Iceland and the Faroe Islands take such different paths towards independence in the first half of the 19th century?

In order to answer this question, it seems best to begin with a short account of the history of the Danish kingdom and the Peace Treaty of Kiel in 1814, when Iceland and the Faroe Islands formally became Danish dependencies.

Afterwards, an account of the differences between the administration, culture and trade of the two countries during the first half of the 19th century will be given. Subsequently the focus will be firstly, on the debates in *Rigsdagen*, the first legislature of Denmark, when it met for the first time in 1848-1849 and secondly, on the agenda of the representatives of the two dependencies of Denmark. The political status of the two dependencies was indeed different at times, but the popular belief that the two countries are similar does however not only justify a comparison – it demands it.

Literature and sources

There have been relatively few attempts to examine the similarities of the history of the Faroes and Iceland. There are, however, some exceptions. Since 1990 the University of Iceland and the University of the Faroe Islands have held academic conferences called “*Frændafundur*” every three years. Faroese scholars writing on the question of the Faroese independence movement also often make comparisons to the Icelandic experience. Apart from the work of the Faroese historian, Jákup Thorsteinsson, *Et færø som færø*, where a comparison between the status of Iceland and the Faroes within the Danish kingdom was made, other scholars, such as for example Hans J. Debes, former professor of history at the University of the Faroe Islands, also stated some similarities and differences between the two nations in his book *Nú er tann stundin komin*. Gunnar Karlsson, professor emeritus of history at the University of Iceland, mentions the Faroes and Greenland frequently, when discussing nationalism in Iceland, but few Icelandic scholars have raised this question.

In historical works on Danish history, references to the Faroe Islands are often negligible, which may be logical, as the Faroe Islands are admittedly only a tiny part of the Danish kingdom. However, Uffe Østergaard, professor emeritus in history at Copenhagen Business School and Aarhus University, recently published the article, “Danmark - småstat, imperium og kolonimagt”, in which he uses the Faroes as an example rather than Iceland, when he tries to define which parts of the Danish Crown were colonies and which were not. The article was published recently in a collaborative work about Danish colonial history, *Danmark: en Kolonimagt*.

When examining the constitution of Denmark and what course the Faroe Islands and Iceland took regarding it, the primary sources from the *Rigsdagen*, the name of the first Danish national legislature, have been useful. But to my great regret, it has not been possible to get access to all the transcripts of the state assemblies (Da: *stænderforsamlingerne*) of 1842 to 1846. I got access to parts of it in Fredriksberg Hovedbibliotek, the internet proved rather useful, but only

very small excerpts exist in the Faroes, where I have mostly resided during the writing of this thesis. However, although the main question in the end of the dissertation deals with the discussions in the *Rigsdagen*, some other Icelandic and Danish sources than those of the *Rigsdagen* itself have been useful in the discussion about the Icelandic and Faroese agenda in this assembly. None of the primary sources from the time are written in Faroese, as the Faroese grammar was not published until 1853 and only very few attempts had been made to write Faroese phonetically.

The Peace Treaty of Kiel and the decline of the Danish kingdom

The history of the Danish kingdom in the 19th century is a history of a colonial empire in decline. In the 18th century at its peak, the Crown of Denmark comprised the twin monarchies of Denmark and Norway, the North Atlantic dependencies of Iceland, the Faroes and Greenland, trading stations in India and on the Guinea coast, the Nicobar Islands and three sugar islands in the Caribbean.² The Napoleonic wars had left Denmark in defeat. When the Peace Treaty of Kiel was signed on the 14th of January 1814, Denmark lost Norway to Sweden. The treaty marks the beginning of the decline of the Danish kingdom and is of the utmost importance regarding the political history of the North Atlantic dependencies.

Britain and Denmark signed the treaty in Kiel after negotiations between Denmark, Britain and Sweden. All of Denmark's dependencies, except for Heligoland, were returned to Denmark, and in exchange, Denmark promised to join forces with Britain against Napoleon. The same day Denmark signed a treaty with Sweden, by which Denmark ceded Norway to Sweden. In article IV of the agreement, it was explicitly stated that the North Atlantic dependencies, originally Norwegian, would be part of the Danish kingdom.³

Historians have discussed why the North Atlantic parts of the Danish/Norwegian kingdom remained part of Denmark. One interpretation has been that the Danish diplomat, Edmund Burke, simply outmanoeuvred the Swedish diplomat, Baron Gustav of Wetterstedt, who did not have sufficient historical knowledge, and believed Burke, when he said that the islands had never belonged to Norway.⁴ One example of this interpretation is the book *Freden i Kiel 1814*, written by Georg Nørregård in 1954. He stated:

Et afgjort kup udførte Burke, da han fik Wetterstedt til at gå ind på, at Grønland, Island og Færøerne udtrykkelig blev undtaget fra afståelse sammen med Norge. Wetterstedts historiske kundskaber var så utilstrækkelige, at han virkelig troede på, at disse Nordhavsøer aldrig havde hørt til Norge.⁵

While Nørregård's interpretation of the events may not be factually wrong, it lacks the coherency of the political context in which the treaty was signed. As Anna Agnarsdóttir points

² Anna Agnarsdóttir, "The Danish Empire: the Special Case of Iceland", p. 59.

³ Anna Agnarsdóttir, *Great Britain and Iceland*, p. 236.

⁴ Anna Agnarsdóttir, *Great Britain and Iceland*, p. 237.

⁵ Nørregård, *Freden i Kiel*, p. 170.

out the historical knowledge of the Swedish diplomat would undoubtedly have “been brushed up,” if Sweden had any interest in obtaining the North Atlantic islands.⁶ The fact that Wetterstedt did not know about the history of the islands only shows that no preparations had been made in Sweden for obtaining the islands.

The Danish historian, Ole Feldbæk, presented different interpretations of the matter in his article “De nordatlantiske øer og freden i Kiel 1814”, in which the aim was to reconstruct the negotiations themselves. He stated that one of the reasons that the North Atlantic islands had not been included in the cession of Norway to Sweden was that from the Swedish perspective, Norway was simply the mainland proper. The Swedish definition was as follows:

Kongeriget Norge, nemlig til de her opregnede Bispedømmer og Stifter: Christiansand, Bergen, Aggerhuus og Trondhiem [sic], med Nordlandene og Finmarken lige indtil Grændsen af det Russiske Rige.⁷

It is clear again that the fate of the North Atlantic islands had not been discussed in Sweden before the negotiations – the reason was probably that the king of Sweden wanted a geographically united kingdom, which was better suited for military defence.

However, as Gunnar Karlsson points out, the situation nonetheless left Iceland, the Faroe Islands, and Greenland in a special position. As he states:

As a consequence, Iceland, the Faroes and Greenland acquired an inaccurately defined and somewhat different status under the Danish monarchy. The inhabitants of these islands formed three ethnic minorities in the kingdom, and all of them were to use their individual ethnic distinctions to demand a separate constitutional status, Home Rule, and in Iceland’s case, complete secession and establishment of an independent state.⁸

Iceland became independent in 1944 and the Faroes and Greenland received Home Rule in 1946 and 1979 respectively. It should however be stated that the suggestion that the treaty of Kiel had the same – if any – direct influence on Faroese Home Rule as in Iceland, is at its best only partially true. The Faroes gained Home Rule after having voted in favour of independence

⁶ Anna Agnarsdóttir, *Great Britain and Iceland*, p. 237.

⁷ Feldbæk, “De nordatlantiske øer og freden i Kiel 1814”, p. 30.

⁸ Gunnar Karlsson, “The Emergence of Nationalism in Iceland”, p. 33.

in 1946. Like Iceland, the Faroes had been without contact with Denmark during World War II and to the surprise of the unionist parties in the Faroes and the Danish Crown, the Faroese population voted for independence with a slim majority, when a referendum was held in 1946 – a referendum, which not will be discussed here.

However, the peace treaty of Kiel of course had indirect influence on Faroese Home Rule, as it made a distinction between the dependencies and the rest of the kingdom. Although the North Atlantic dependencies were assumed by the Danes during the negotiations in Kiel, the negotiations had provided a legitimization for the argument that the dependencies were not Danish. The Icelanders, as will be made clear later, argued successfully that they had the right to decide their position within the kingdom themselves, because of the special position Iceland was left in after the Peace Treaty of Kiel.

The loss of Norway to Sweden was however, not the end to the decline of the Danish kingdom – it was merely the beginning. In 1839 Serampore was sold to the British East India Company, and in 1845 Tranquebar was sold as well. In 1868, Britain received the Nicobar Islands from Denmark free of charge. The forts on the Gold Coast of Africa were sold to France in 1849. The islands in the Caribbean were sold to the United States in 1917.⁹ The fate of the remaining territories, Schleswig-Holstein, Iceland, the Faroes and Greenland, however, became a central political question throughout the 19th century. Schleswig-Holstein had been a continuous headache for those who advocated constitutionalism within the kingdom. The duchies were lost to Prussia after the war in 1864, which was an embarrassment to the Danish kingdom, and truly marks the final decline of the Empire,¹⁰ the nadir coming in 1918 when Iceland gained sovereignty.

However, the history of the first half of the 19th century in Denmark, and for that matter Europe, is the history of a gradual shift from absolutism towards more democratic political systems. As a consequence of the growing opposition against absolutism, various absolute monarchs re-established consultative state assemblies in their kingdom. The state assembly was for example re-established in Prussia in 1823. And due to the unstable situation in the duchies of the Danish kingdom, where nationalists were demanding more autonomy and the effects of the July revolution in France in 1830, the pressure on the monarchy was growing. The following year,

⁹ Anna Agnarsdóttir, “The Danish Empire: the Special Case of Iceland”, pp. 69-70.

¹⁰ Gustafsson, *Nordens Historia*, pp. 189-192.

in 1831, four state assemblies were established in Denmark – one for Holstein, one for Schleswig, one for Jutland and one for the islands, including the Faroe Islands and Iceland.¹¹ Holstein was the King's principality, but was also part of the German Confederation. The principality furthermore had been promised some degree of popular representation at the Congress of Vienna in 1814-1815. It was difficult to render representation to Holstein, without the other parts of the Danish kingdom receiving the same, and therefor the four assemblies were established. Nationalists in Holstein and Schleswig had wished for a combined assembly, but by establishing four assemblies, the king had managed to separate Schleswig and Holstein without giving special treatment to any parts of his kingdom.¹² It was only wealthy landowners, amounting to three percent of the population, who had the right to stand for election and vote in elections to the assemblies. The state assembly met for the first time in 1835-36, the electoral term was six years and the assembly met bi-annually.¹³

The state assemblies, however, were short-lived, as the Danish kingdom finally turned towards constitutionalism in 1848. The shift to constitutionalism was like the re-establishment of the state assemblies, a natural result of the general state of affairs in Europe. The February revolution in Paris in 1848 had shocked the whole of Europe. In Denmark young educated men like their peers in the rest of Europe were demanding constitutionalism, while actual uprisings took place in the duchies. In the end, the new king of Denmark, Frederik VII, gave in to pressure. A new government was formed in March 1848, and elections for the *Rigsdagen* were set to be held the same year. The *Rigsdagen* started to work on a new constitution and completed the so-called “*Junigrundloven*” on the 5th of June in 1849, which the King signed.¹⁴

The Faroes and Iceland had representatives in the *Rigsdagen*, and the position of these representatives will be examined in detail later. The question in the *Rigsdagen* of 1848-49 was always to which parts of the kingdom was the constitution to apply? Denmark, even though it was not at its peak in 1848, still consisted of different regions, with different cultures and was geographically disparate. Furthermore, in Iceland and Schleswig-Holstein especially, but perhaps also to some extent in the Faroe Islands, cultural nationalism was growing, and as we shall see, the dependencies would in time demand some degree of self-determination.

¹¹ Einar Laxness, *Íslandssaga s-ö*, p. 57.

¹² Gustafsson, *Nordens Historia*, p. 187.

¹³ Einar Laxness, *Íslandssaga s-ö*, p. 57.

¹⁴ Gustafsson, *Nordens Historia*, p. 188.

Next an account of the Faroese and Icelandic administration, culture and trade will be given to set the background for the discussions in the *Rigsdagen*.

The history of the Faroe Islands in comparison to Iceland in the first half of the 19th century

Administration

When negotiations for the establishment of *Rigsdagen* commenced in 1848, the Faroe Islands and Iceland were governed as *amts* (EN: county) but in rather different ways. The Faroe Islands were administered by a *amtmand* (EN: governor), a representative of the king who had broad powers in the islands' internal affairs. The Crown had a monopoly on all trade to, from and within the Faroes, as will be discussed in detail later.

At the same time in Iceland, although still a Danish *amt* with a *stiftamtmaður* (EN: governor), *Alþingi* had already been re-established in 1843, albeit without the same powers as the original legislative and judicial assembly, but only as a consultative assembly. However, there is a distinctive difference between the Faroes and Iceland, the latter had an independent consultative assembly, while the other was still part of one of the Danish state assemblies.

In 1816 the old Faroese legislative-assembly, *Løgtingið*, was abolished, as *Alþingi* had been formally in Iceland by 1800.¹⁵ It is unclear how far back *Løgtingið* dates. Original Faroese sagas have been lost and consequently, the history of the settlement of the Faroes is based on the Icelandic sagas: *Flateyjarsaga*, *Óláfs saga Tryggvasonar* and one older manuscript registered as AM 62 fol. However, according to Hans Andrias Sølvará, associate professor at the University of the Faroe Islands, the judicial assemblies in the Faroes date back to the time of settlement around 800 and that an *Althing* functioned in the Faroes from 1000-1200, which had legislative and judicial powers,¹⁶ like its Icelandic counterpart. In the years from 1274 to 1350, after the Faroese assembly passed the Norwegian *landslóg*, the assembly became a *Løgting* under Norwegian law, although the assembly probably had some special status within the Norwegian kingdom, as the *Løgting* was never specifically mentioned in the Norwegian *landslóg*.¹⁷

When the *Løgting* was abolished in 1816, it had lost power over the years to Danish government officials.¹⁸ Abolishing the Faroese assembly meant that all local influence on Faroese matters formally slipped out of the hands of the local inhabitants. Along with the assembly, the position

¹⁵ Thorsteinson, *Et færø som færø*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁶ Sølvará, *Løgtingið 150*, p. 37.

¹⁷ Sølvará, *Løgtingið 150*, pp. 41-42.

¹⁸ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, p. 28.

of the leader of the assembly, *løgmaður*, was also abolished, but the position of *løgmaður* as the chief-judge in the assembly had been replaced by the *sorinskrivari* (judge) in practice at the end of the 18th century and very few cases were brought before the *Løgting* the last years it functioned. After 1816, the *sorinskrivari* took over the last powers of the institution, which were strictly judicial,¹⁹ as in Iceland. Jákup Thorsteinsson claims that the abolition of the *Løgting* happened as a part of the reform of the administration of the Danish kingdom, when Iceland, Norway, Bornholm and finally the Faroe Islands lost their assemblies in order to unite and modernize the Kingdom.²⁰ Although this is certainly true, it is a rather simplistic interpretation as the Icelanders wished for the abolition of *Alþingi* themselves. *Alþingi* was not the same institution it had been in medieval times, and the wish for reform in the judicial matters in Iceland was in accordance with the rest of the Danish/Norwegian kingdom. But there were practical reasons, which contributed to the abolition of *Alþingi*, such as not holding the assembly at *Þingvellir*, Reykjavík now being preferred.²¹

Apart from the *amtmaður* and the *sorenskrivari*, the administration in the Faroes consisted of a *landfúti*, who was the chief of police or bailiff in the islands and looked after the king's revenue. Under the administration of the chief of police were six *sýslumenn* (county magistrates). These were typically wealthy local landowners.²²

In 1821 the Faroe Islands formally became an independent *amt* after having been part of the Icelandic *amt* from 1720 to 1776 and the *amt* of Zealand until 1816. Hence, the governor of the islands was the same as in Iceland from 1720 to 1776 and the same as in Zealand from 1776 to 1816. After the Icelandic governor was ordered to reside in Iceland in 1770, it became near impossible for him to fulfil his Faroese duties. Thus, the duties of the governor were looked after by a substitute in the Faroes and an official in Denmark. After the Governor of Zealand took over the duties, the Faroese *løgmaður* Johan Michael Lund, took office, before he moved to Norway in 1804.²³ It should perhaps be mentioned that the last *løgmenn* of the islands were lawyers, because by the end of the 18th century all the King's officials had to be trained in law. Hans Andrias Sølvará claims that either the requirement of legal education or a simple lack of interest meant that the last *løgmenn* of the islands before the abolition in 1816 were foreigners.²⁴

¹⁹ Sølvará, *Løgtingið 150*, pp. 58-60.

²⁰ Thorsteinsson, *Et færø som færø*, pp. 40-42.

²¹ Anna Agnarsdóttir, "Aldahvörf og umbrotatímar", pp. 22-24.

²² Thorsteinsson, *Et færø som færø*, pp. 43-44.

²³ Sølvará, *Løgtingið 150*, pp. 70-71.

²⁴ Sølvará, *Løgtingið 150*, p. 60.

As mentioned, the Faroes became an *amt*, when E. M. G. von Løbner, who together with Jørgen Frantz Hammershaimb practically had been working as the *amtmaður* of the islands since 1805, was appointed as the actual *amtmaður* of the Islands in 1821.²⁵ Løbner lived in the Faroes and had been the commandant of the fort in Torshavn before he was appointed *amtmaður*.²⁶

Although the Faroes became a Danish *amt* in 1821, the islands still enjoyed a special position, as no Danish law would be enacted in the islands without the acceptance of the *amtmaður*. This meant that the *amtmaður* was substantially influential, as he effectively became the only consultative authority in the islands. After the *Løgting* had been abolished, there was no other institution to which the King's officials could turn for information about the Faroes.²⁷

It should also be added that when the King had to choose a representative of the islands in Danish assemblies, it was always a Danish official with experience of working in the Faroes, who was chosen as the representative. The first time a Faroese person represented the Faroes in a Danish assembly seems to have been when Niels Winther was elected to represent the Faroes in *Rigsdagen* in 1852.

In Iceland, the story was quite different. According to Gunnar Karlsson most of the officials in Iceland were born in Iceland, and as an example, he shows that out of the 78 county magistrates in Iceland from 1721-1790, only three were born outside Iceland. Furthermore, he states that more than half of other high crown officials were Icelanders.²⁸ *Alþingi* had been abolished in 1798, 18 years before the *Løgting*, but it was also restored in 1843, the *Løgting* not until 1852. It is also noteworthy Iceland had never been a fief of one family like the Faroe Islands, as was for example the case with the Gabel father and son in the Faroes. They were given the islands as entail as is explained in the next chapter about the trade monopoly of the Crown in the Faroe Islands.

²⁵ Sølvará, *Løgtingið 150*, p. 71.

²⁶ Thorsteinson, *Et færø som færø*, p. 43.

²⁷ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, p. 29.

²⁸ Gunnar Karlsson, "The Emergence of Nationalism in Iceland", p. 51.

The trade monopoly

The trade monopoly in the Faroes had been administered by different families rather than companies as had been the case in Iceland, since it was established in 1524 until 1709, after which the monopoly belonged directly to the King. In 1524 Jørgen Hansen, the bailiff (FO: *fúti*) of Bergen, was granted the exclusive concession trade in the Faroe Islands, when he received the islands as a fief.²⁹ There were exceptions, as for example when the Faroese trade was part of the Icelandic trading company from 1620-1662. But in general, the control of the islands shifted between different landowners, who had received the Faroes as a fief. As John F. West states in his book *Faroe – the emergence of a nation*: “The Faroese monopoly, from its inception in 1535³⁰ until 1709, was granted to various individuals or companies, usually against a fixed annual payment into the royal treasury.”³¹

From 1709 and until the monopoly was abolished in 1856 it belonged directly to the king. He delegated the work to a chosen official in the islands. The purpose of the monopoly was primarily to secure a stable trade route to the islands.³² The trade was almost always conducted at a loss, but at times the royal monopoly gained profits as it for example did from 1723 to 1777. The profit was due to a sudden demand for woollen socks, but when the demand disappeared, the profit turned into a great deficit.³³

From 1768 to 1788, the Faroe Islands were a safe haven for British smuggling activities. For a great part of the second half of the 18th century, Britain was at war with France. To finance the war, there was a high duty on imports to Britain. Because Denmark did not take part in the wars, many Danish businessmen became rich by smuggling products from the colonies to Britain. In 1768 Niels Ryberg, a Danish business man,³⁴ opened a trading concern in Torshavn, where American, Irish, Scottish and Norwegian ships sailed to with products from the colonies, and thus the Faroe Islands were enriched by exporting rum, gin, tobacco, tea, and cognac illegally to the British market.³⁵

Rybergs Handel, as the trading concern was called, provided the islands with a lot of work and interaction with the outside world. Ryberg even started to process herring and cod, which today

²⁹ Mortensen, Joensen and Petersen, *Føroyar undir fríum handli*, p. 9.

³⁰ John F. West and Mortensen disagree on the formal establishment of the monopoly

³¹ West, *Faroe - the emergence of a nation*, p. 34.

³² Østergaard, “Danmark - småstat, imperium og kolonimagt”, p. 41.

³³ Mortensen, Joensen and Petersen, *Føroyar undir fríum handli*, p. 51.

³⁴ Engelstoft, “Niels Ryberg”, *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*,
<http://denstoredanske.dk/index.php?sideId=296714> 28/11-2017

³⁵ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, p. 60.

counts among the most valuable Faroese exports. The concern closed in 1788, when the high tariffs on import in Britain were abolished and the concern's source of revenue in smuggling thus ceased to exist.³⁶

In 1789 a royal resolution stated that a committee was to investigate the monopoly in the Faroe Islands due to its great deficit. The *landfúti*, Jørgen-Frantz Hammershaimb, and the commandant at the fort in the islands, Captain Born, were among the committee members, and both left for Copenhagen. The committee reached the conclusion that the monopoly should be abolished within few years. Furthermore, a fixed pay rate on the commodities (FO: *takstur*) from 1691 should be transitioned out within a year.³⁷ However, not all Faroese inhabitants were pleased with this idea. Inhabitants of Eysturoy, one of the larger islands, wrote a protest, in which they petitioned the King not to abolish the monopoly and to show mercy on the poor population in the Islands.³⁸ This localised protest, without doubt, serves to show the division between the different islands in the Faroes and is an example of how geography is a contributing factor to the emergence of even such a small nation as the Faroese. The fact that *Rybergs Handel* had been established in Torshavn enabled the inhabitants of the capital to gain most by the trade, was perhaps a reason for the dissatisfaction in Eysturoy, or it may at least be interpreted as if Tórshavn had gained more than other parts of the country. However, the government decreed that the monopoly was to be abolished in 1796 but the abolition was postponed due to economic challenges in the islands.³⁹

The Faroe Islands, as well as Iceland, were left isolated from the European mainland and Denmark, when Denmark became involved in the Napoleonic Wars. Britain bombarded Copenhagen in 1807, and this forced Denmark out of its neutral position and into an alliance with France.⁴⁰ In the Faroe Islands the King's trade monopoly was still in force and because Denmark was at war with Britain, the islands were isolated, not only from the King, but from the source of its imports, Copenhagen. Before the outbreak of the war, there had been an ongoing dispute in the Faroe Islands about free trade in the islands. Nólsoyar Páll, who is still regarded as one of the national heroes in the Faroe Islands, had opposed the king's monopoly

³⁶ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, pp. 60-61.

³⁷ Mortensen, Joensen and Petersen, *Føroyar undir fríum handli*, p. 51.

³⁸ Mortensen, Joensen and Petersen, *Føroyar undir fríum handli*, p. 52.

³⁹ Mortensen, Joensen and Petersen, *Føroyar undir fríum handli*, pp. 51-54.

⁴⁰ Gustafsson, *Nordens Historia*, p. 169.

before the war broke out, but the war brought an end to these debates.⁴¹ Nólsoyar Páll, or Poul Nolsøe, as his birth name was, grew up in the Faroe Islands on the island *Nólsoy*. As a boy, he learned navigation from some men, attached to *Ryberg's handel*, and he went on to sail with foreign ships. This is a good example of the influence the *Ryberg Handel* had on the Islands. Nólsoyar Páll fought the monopoly both in writings and in practice, by smuggling goods to and from the islands. He was a recognised poet and among others wrote a ballad or *kvæði* of 226 verses, which is called *Fuglakvæði*. In English, the title means The Bird Ballad. In this ballad Nólsoyar Páll depicts the Danish officials in the Faroe Islands as birds of prey. Nólsoyar Páll himself is the *tjaldur* (oystercatcher), who protects the small birds against the birds of prey.⁴² Nólsoyar Páll as such is perhaps irrelevant for the subject of this essay, but he ought to be mentioned as an example of how far back resistance against the monopoly dates.

In the 1830s, the question of free trade was up for debate in the Faroe Islands. Carl Adolf Muhle, who had been the bookkeeper of the Faroese and Greenlandic trade in the administration in Denmark wrote about the question in his books called *Om Emancipationen af Færøerne og Grønland* (1835) and *Carl Mogensens Krønike* (1844). He claimed that the reason for a royal monopoly still existing in the Faroes was due to the constant deficit of the trade in Greenland, which then was under the same administration as the Faroese trade. In *Om Emancipationen af Færøerne og Grønland*, he printed two contradictory reports on the matter of free trade by two inhabitants of the Faroe Islands. The reports were written for a Royal Committee from 1816, which was to implement free trade in Iceland and reform the trade in the Faroes.⁴³ It must however be stated right away that the committee did not implement free trade in Iceland in 1816. On paper, foreigners were allowed to trade in Iceland, but the price for trading licenses was so high that the trade was not liberalised at all in practice.⁴⁴

J. H. Schrøter, a clergyman from Suðuroy, the most southern island of the Faroe Islands, wrote the first report. He favoured free trade, although he also saw some problems in implementing it. He stated that although Suðuroy would benefit from free trade, it would take at least three years for the rest of the Faroe Islands to be ready for the same. His report was as much about

⁴¹ West, *Faroe - the emergence of a nation*, pp. 49-52.

⁴² Jakobsen, *Poul Nolsøe - Lív Søgá og irkingar*, pp. 237-295.

⁴³ Muhle, *Om Emancipationen af Færøerne*, p. 16.

⁴⁴ Einar Laxness, *Íslandssaga a-h*, p. 155.

different ways to implement new production in the Faroe Islands.⁴⁵ His arguments seem inspired by liberal thought, as he, for example, stated:

Naar en Familie, som ved Korn- og Kartoffel-Avl næsten kunde forskaffe sig tilstrækkelige Fødemidler, troer sig vissere og mageligere at kunne erhverve dem ved Uldarbeide, beregnet efter en bestemt Taxt, da bliver Mangel dog Mismod Følgen, ifald Tilførelsen udebliver eller Beregningen slaaer feil.

At Frihandel, skjønt Tilførselen da blev ustadig og Priserne usikre, vil befordre Agerdyrkningens Udvidelse, synes den Fremgang same havde i sidste Krig at bevise.”⁴⁶

It was his belief that if people had to find new exports, they would become more creative in their ways of farming and that the islands therefore would be wealthier in the long run.

E. M. G. Løbner, the *amtmaður* of the Faroe Islands from 1816-1825,⁴⁷ was more reluctant although he did not reject the idea of free trade completely in his report. He stated that it would take at least five years to introduce free trade, if the wish was to do so. His arguments even have a spark of colonial ideology, when he, for example, stated:

Derimod naar fleere Handelsstæder bleve anlagte vilde sikkert Dovne, Ledige og Løsgjængere tye til disse, oprette Svire-Selskaber, begaae Uordener, og vilde saaledes denne Indretning svække Moraliteten og lede til Ryggesløshed hos Landboerne, som hidindtil have besiddet en særdeles Religiøsitet og Ærefrygt for alt det, der bidrager til Menneskeslægtens Tilvæxt i det Gode.⁴⁸

The logic seems to be that if the islands were opened to the outside world, the inhabitants would no longer be protected against the temptations of that world. But his arguments were also practical, as he for example warned against the dangers of a private monopoly replacing the royal monopoly.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ Schrøter, “Schrøters frágreiðing”, pp. 20-21.

⁴⁶ Schrøter, “Schrøters frágreiðing”, p. 19.

⁴⁷ http://www.stm.dk/p_5617.html 28/11-2017

⁴⁸ Løbner, “Løbners frágreiðing”, p. 28.

⁴⁹ Løbner, “Løbners frágreiðing”, p. 42.

Although the abolition of the royal monopoly in the Faroe Islands as mentioned was first declared to take place in 1796, it did not happen until 1856. As Hans J. Debes stated, the monopoly had been the main hindrance for growth in the eyes of reformers in the 19th century and had isolated the islands from the rest of the world.⁵⁰ But Løbner's argument that the monopoly also had served as a social benefactor to the inhabitants in the most remote islands, securing an import of necessities to the islands, should of course also be considered.

One last remark however, that has to be made is that not all Danish officials were against the monopoly - in fact some of the last *amtmenn* of the islands before 1848 were against it. Both Ludvig Christian Tillisch, *amtmaður* from 1825-1830, and Frederik Ferdinand Tillisch, *amtmaður* from 1830 - 1837, worked actively against the monopoly. The latter even presented four petitions from the Faroes about the abolition of the monopoly in the state assemblies in 1838.⁵¹

There is a difference in the trade history of Iceland and the Faroes. A monopoly was in both Danish dependencies, but the trade in Iceland was, with some exceptions, overseen by trading companies rather than the King's officials themselves. "Det kongelige octoierede almindelige Handels-Compagni i København" for example gained monopoly of the trade in Iceland in 1764 and kept it for 20 years. The last years before the trade in Iceland was partially liberalised in 1787 there was a royal monopoly in Iceland.⁵²

However, when it is mentioned before that free trade was considered in the Faroes in 1789, it was due to the fact that the Icelandic trade had been partially liberalised in 1787, when the so called *fríhöndlun* was implemented. With *fríhöndlun* Icelanders were allowed to trade with all merchants in the Danish kingdom, who were from Denmark, Norway and the duchies of Schleswig and Holstein. However, the trading centres had been bought by those, who had worked in the Royal monopoly and thus in reality there were few Icelanders, who gained much by *fríhöndlun*. Free trade was not introduced in Iceland until 1855,⁵³ one year before free trade also was implemented in the Faroes.⁵⁴ Free trade was therefore one of the main goals of the Icelandic independence movement during the first half of the 19th century.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, p. 59.

⁵¹ Mortensen, Joensen and Petersen, *Føroyar undir fríum handli*, p. 71.

⁵² Einar Laxness, *Íslandssaga a-h*, p. 112.

⁵³ Einar Laxness, *Íslandssaga a-h*, pp. 154-155.

⁵⁴ Mortensen, Joensen and Petersen, *Føroyar undir fríum handli*, p. 75.

⁵⁵ Gunnar Karlsson, "Upphafsskeið Þjóðrikismyndunar", pp. 339-341.

Culture and education

One of the most important aspects of most independence movements is the promotion of culture. Culture is in many ways the most important factor, when we define ourselves as Faroese, Icelandic or something else. The most central factor in a culture is language, as language is not only the way to communicate, but in many ways the manifestation of the culture of a nation. In the Faroes and Iceland, language remained a central figure in the promotion of nationalism. Therefore, a discussion of the culture and the state of the language in the Faroes and Iceland is necessary for this study.

Jens Christian Svabo, son of a clergyman in Miðvágur in the Faroe Islands, was among the first Faroese men to study another subject than theology at the University of Copenhagen, when he started studying economics and natural history (DA: *naturhistorie*.) In 1781-1782 he travelled home to the Faroes and was among the first to systematically write about all aspects of Faroese society.⁵⁶ In his writings, which were not published until long after his death, he wrote about the state of the Faroese language and education and collected old Faroese ballads (FO: *kvæði*). He believed that the Faroese language was originally Nordic, but due to foreign influence and the loss of medieval Faroese writings, the language had almost become unrecognisable as the old Norse language.⁵⁷

He furthermore examined the different dialects, and finally, he compared the Faroese, Icelandic and Danish languages. Even though he was certainly influenced by the Romantic movement in trying to rediscover the origins of Faroese culture, he is rather pessimistic about the future of the Faroese language.⁵⁸ More specifically he presented two choices:

1) at bringe det til sin første Reenhed; bringe de gamle manglende nordiske Ord tilbage; udrydde de nye og fordervede, give Sproget, om ikke en nye udtale, saa dog altid en nye *Orthographie*; Men hvor Mange Rejser maatte ikke, i denne Henseende, gjøres igjennem de islandske *Membraner*, hvorfra denne Forbedring ene kunde hentes? Og end da vilde dette Øjemeed finde de største, ja fast uovervindelige Hindringer. Langt fornuftigere forekommer det mig, 2) om man her vilde stræbe at befordre det danske

⁵⁶ Svabo, *Fra en reise i Færøe*, p. XI.

⁵⁷ Svabo, *Fra en reise i Færøe*, p. 265.

⁵⁸ Svabo, *Fra en reise i Færøe*, pp. 265-266.

Sprogs Indførsel i den Reenhed, som det i sildigere Tider har erholdt, og for Eftertiden endvidre vil erholde.⁵⁹

Svabo thus favoured the Danish language, which he stated was spoken quite well by the inhabitants of the Faroe Islands. He also compiled lists of Faroese words, and his work was cited in many books on the subject in the 19th century.

Rasmus Christian Rask who is well known for his work regarding Icelandic and his influence in founding *Hið íslenska bókmenntafélag* (EN: the Icelandic literary society) in 1816 also studied Faroese, even though he never visited the islands. He found the language to be closely related to that Icelandic, but according to Povl Skårup, the author of *Rasmus Rask og Færøsk*, he also seems to have doubted, whether the Faroese language was to be grouped as an independent language or merely a sub-category to the Icelandic language.⁶⁰ Povl Skårup cites Rask for writing about some old Faroese letters that “[d]en ældste Færøisk ligner Islandsken meget, og er neppe at skjælnes derfra.”⁶¹ There is no reason to discuss Rask’s research on the Faroese language further. The important fact regarding his work with Faroese is only to show the frail state of the Faroese language, when Rask studied it in the beginning of the 19th century.

Jørgen Landt, a Danish clergyman from Bornholm, who travelled in the Faroe Islands in 1800, grouped the Faroese language as closer to Norwegian than Danish, which *almuefolket* (EN: the commoners) spoke quite well - some even better than the *almuefolk* in Denmark. But he stated one other important fact regarding the Faroese language, namely that it was not used for official business. Danish was used in church and in court.⁶² The fact that Faroese was only a spoken language and not used for example by the church is one important difference between Iceland and the Faroes. The first Icelandic translation of the bible was printed as soon as in 1584 by the bishop Guðbrandur Þorláksson.⁶³ The fact that the official language was Danish and the officials themselves were Danes may not have affected the daily life of the *almuefolk* in the Faroes, but it must have played a role for them that the church service was in Danish and not in the native language of the people.

⁵⁹ Svabo, *Fra en reise i Færøe*, pp. 265-266.

⁶⁰ Skårup, *Rasmus Rask og Færøsk*, p. 5.

⁶¹ Skårup, *Rasmus Rask og Færøsk*, p. 8.

⁶² Landt, *Færøerne*, p. 251.

⁶³ Einar Laxness, *Íslandssaga a-h*, p. 205.

Svend Grundtvig, a Danish folklorist and philologist,⁶⁴ wrote about the specific problem of the Faroese language not being the official language in the Faroe Islands in his book *Dansken paa Færøerne*, which was published in 1845. The book was not only about the language question, but about the broader question of Faroese education and how it should be organized in the islands. As the school system of the islands of course is a quite central part of how the language and culture of the islands had been preserved, it is important to turn to the education in the dependency.

It is believed that the first school in the Faroes dates as far back as to the 12th century, when there was a seminary in *Kirkjubøur* – this is the school that Sverre Sigurdsson, who was the king of Norway from 1177 to 1202, is said to have attended.⁶⁵ But when the Reformation reached the Faroes in 1540, the seminary was closed and a Latin school was founded in Torshavn. In about 1630 a Danish school was established in Torshavn for “pupils whose gifts were insufficient for them to be taught Latin.”⁶⁶ However, the Danish school was closed in 1770 and the Latin school ceased accepting new students by 1794. Many of the Faroese clergymen at the time, for example Schrøter, had attended the Latin school before entering schools and universities in Denmark.⁶⁷

There was little organised schooling in the villages, and home tuition was the most common form of education in the Faroes in the beginning of the 19th century. Educational reforms in Denmark did not reach the Faroes, but, unlike in Iceland, some villages established schools, where teachers often travelled around the islands to each village. John F. West stated that the reason for the establishment of these village schools was the following:

Yet the Danish example, whereby every parish supported a school in which every child from six to thirteen might be instructed in reading, writing, arithmetic, scripture, gymnastics and gardening, was bound to stir emulation in Faroe as Danish priests and officials with experience of the new system arrived in the islands.⁶⁸

⁶⁴ Piø, “Svend Grundtvig”, *Den Store Danske, Gyldendal*, from <http://denstoredanske.dk/index.php?sideId=86202>, 28/11-2017

⁶⁵ *Britannica*, <https://www.britannica.com/biography/Sverrir-Sigurdsson>, 15/12-2017

⁶⁶ West, *Faroe - the emergence of a nation*, p. 102.

⁶⁷ West, *Faroe - the emergence of a nation*, pp. 102-103.

⁶⁸ West, *Faroe - the emergence of a nation*, p. 103.

However, the reform that Grundtvig opposed was a compulsory school system in the Faroes, which was introduced in 1846, but which became unpopular and unsuccessful. Children were now attending school, when they were needed at sea or in the fields and the system was also more expensive for the villages, than the previous system.⁶⁹

The situation was a bit different in the capital, Torshavn. As mentioned, there had been a *Danish school* in Torshavn until 1770, when it was abolished. But in 1806, the school was re-established again and became a school for *almúguna* (DA: almuefolk).⁷⁰ However, there were few signs that the Faroese were poorly educated. As we shall see, travellers to the Faroes on the contrary remarked that the Faroese children were well educated.

Grundtvig's book was rather controversial, as it proposed that the Faroese language should be used in church, court and school in the Faroe Islands. This position was probably not shared by the Faroese population, as the Faroese language was not accepted as official church language until the 1930s.

Grundtvig's book outlined the arguments for and against the Faroese language prior to the discussions about the constitution in Denmark. He stated that Niels Hunderup, a former official in the Faroes who represented the Faroes in the state assembly in 1843 was wrong when he claimed that the Faroese language was a dialect. Grundtvig furthermore outlined the problems this led to, where all the chief officials in the Faroe Islands were Danish. It should be stated that Grundtvig was inspired by the nationalist spirit in Denmark at the time, the ideology of which is largely founded on his father's, N.F.S. Grundtvig's, ideas. He for example thought the Scandinavian, and more importantly, the Danish people should support the Faroese population to save the language and not suppress it, as he stated:

... kun Færingerne selv snart maa vaagne til Bevidsthed om og Følelse af hvad det er at eje og – hvad det er at miste et Modersmaal, og de andre skandinaviske Folk, og da nærmest det Danske, istedenfor at undertrykke, vil understøtte Bestræbelserne for at hævde det færøiske Sprog i dets naturlige, hellige Ret: som Kirkesprog, Retsprog, Skolesprog og til en vis Grad ogsaa Skriftsprog, hvor det er Folkesprog.⁷¹

Svend Grundtvig also argued against implementing a traditional school system in Faroese society. He cited the earlier mentioned clergyman Jørgen Landt, who travelled to the Faroes at

⁶⁹ West, *Faroe - the emergence of a nation*, p. 103.

⁷⁰ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, p. 71.

⁷¹ Grundtvig, *Dansken på Færøerne*, p. 58.

the beginning of the 19th century, when education was in the hands of the parents. Landt was impressed by how well educated the population in the islands seemed, and Grundtvig, who was clearly inspired by the thought of the Enlightenment, argued the almost Rousseauist idea that the most natural education was when the parents educated their children themselves, to the benefit of both the children and parents.⁷²

Jørgen Landt made clear that although one would expect barbarism in a country with no schools, the people were quite well educated in Christian values, and fairly good at reading and basic arithmetic.⁷³ When Carl Julian Graba, a lawyer from Holstein, visited the islands in 1828, he stated that a school had been in the capital for two years, and he was allowed to attend the lessons for two days. The lawyer was primarily in the Faroe Islands to study birds, but was very impressed by the achievements of the teacher and the children, when the children were submitted to an examination. Afterwards, Graba was allowed to test any child he wanted, because he suspected the teacher of only choosing the clever pupils, but to his astonishment, all the children he examined did well. He even stated that some of them knew geography better than he did.⁷⁴

The problem for those who wanted the recognition of the Faroese language was that the language was not a literary language and that there was no Faroese grammar. Consequently, all attempts to write Faroese had been written phonetically.

However, V. U. Hambershaimb, a clergyman from the Faroes, did not invent the Faroese grammar until 1846, which he published in *Annaler for Nordisk Oldkyndighed* in 1854.⁷⁵ Hambershaimb was son of the last *løgmaður* of the *Løgting* before its abolition in 1816. Hambershaimb grew up in Sandavágur, but moved with his mother and siblings to Tórshavn, when his father died. His grandfather was a retired bailiff (FO: *Landfúti*) and his great-uncle was the previously mentioned J. C. Svabo. There is little doubt that the young Hammershaimb learned to cherish the language and history in the surroundings he grew up in.⁷⁶ At the age of twelve, he moved to Denmark, where he went to school and eventually began to study theology. He established contact with Icelandic students and also became acquainted with Svend

⁷² Grundtvig, *Dansken på Færøerne*, pp. 33-35.

⁷³ Landt, *Færøerne*, p. 251.

⁷⁴ Graba, *Dagbók skrivað á eini ferð til Føroya í árinum 1828*, pp. 66-68.

⁷⁵ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, p. 88.

⁷⁶ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, p. 84.

Grundtvig. When he travelled through the Faroe Islands with the *amtmaður* of the islands, Christian Pløyen, in 1841, he started to write down old Faroese ballads and sagas.⁷⁷

Faroese was not recognized for use in schools until 1938 and in the Church until 1939. However, Danish remained an official language, now alongside Faroese.⁷⁸ The importance of Hammerhaimb's grammar lies in the fact that it provided a basis for the development of the Faroese language, which became the main subject of the independence movement later. Because of the grammar, the Faroese language could develop in literature and in time could not be reduced to a dialect, which Niels Hunderup as mentioned had done.

In Iceland, the language and the well-preserved sagas provided a basis for cultural nationalism. As we shall see in the chapter about nationalism, Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, professor in History at the University of Iceland, points out that although some preferred the Danish language to the Icelandic, this was the exception rather than the rule.⁷⁹

Gunnar Karlsson furthermore points out that the Icelandic cultural heritage was also of great interest to Iceland's more numerous Nordic neighbours. The old sagas were an important component of the Nordic heritage in the age of Romanticism, as they were the sources of the old language and Nordic culture. These sagas were instrumental to the Icelandic cultural nationalists, as they readied themselves for the nationalist struggle. Gunnar Karlsson describes it as follows:

But perhaps just because Iceland had preserved in the sagas a medieval tradition of a golden age, it was unusually well-equipped for a nationalist struggle in the age of Romanticism, especially as the sagas also had material which could easily interest the country's larger neighbours.⁸⁰

The fact of the matter was perhaps in many ways as simple as that. As the sagas from Iceland had such great importance in the national culturalism for the Nordic countries, especially Denmark, it became difficult for Danish politicians to argue against the national movement in

⁷⁷ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, p. 84.

⁷⁸ West, *Faroe – the emergence of a nation*, pp. 166-171.

⁷⁹ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, "Severing the ties", pp. 239-240.

⁸⁰ Gunnar Karlsson, "The Emergence of Nationalism in Iceland", p. 49.

Iceland. The Faroese language was by no means as well preserved as Icelandic was in Iceland, and therefore the Faroese people were not as well-equipped for the struggle for nationalism.

Were the Faroes and Iceland nations in the first half of the 19th century?

The question of whether the Faroes and Iceland could be categorised as nations in the first half of the 19th century is important. Whether the Danish dependencies were nations or not is decisive to the understanding of the political status within the Danish kingdom. Therefore, it is useful to look at, how the Faroes and Iceland fit into theories of the nations.

When Ernest Gellner wrote that a “viable higher culture-sustaining modern state cannot fall below a certain minimal size (unless in effect parasitic on its neighbours); and there is only room for a limited number of states on this earth”,⁸¹ he most certainly did not have the two small dependencies of the Danish kingdom in mind. And the problem, when discussing whether the Faroes and Iceland could be considered nations in the 19th century, is often that the theories of nationalism exclusively base their arguments on the formation of nation-states on the European mainland, which does not fit the history of the Faroes and Iceland.

The form of nationalism that arose in the two dependencies at the beginning of the 19th century was largely cultural nationalism. It was not until well into the 19th century that the independence movements began to work for greater political autonomy. In the Faroese case, the independence movement did not become political until around the 1880s,⁸² while the independence movement in Iceland began to work for more political autonomy in the 1830s. The primary purpose of the movement in the Faroes remained the preservation of the language and the promotion of culture, even after political parties were founded at the beginning of the 20th century.⁸³

However, the question of Faroese and Icelandic nationality does in some aspects fit Gellner’s theory quite well, even though the history of the nations may not be quite the same as in the major European states. In short, Ernest Gellner argues that nationalism occurred as a result of industrialisation, because rural peasants moved to the cities. In the slums of the cities, the rural citizens lacked identity and social relations, and consequently found consolation in each other. In due time, social mobility gradually began to take place. Some of the peasants became educated, reinvented the culture and language of their ancestors and finally a community arose between these former peasants, now living in urban communities, which led to nationalism.

⁸¹ Gellner, “Nationalism and High Cultures”, p. 63.

⁸² Debes, “The Formation of a Nation: The Faroe Islands”, p. 75.

⁸³ Debes, “The Formation of a Nation: The Faroe Islands”, p. 78.

Most importantly, Ernest Gellner points out that “it is nationalism that engenders nations, and not the other way around.”⁸⁴ As he further states, the cultural history that nationalists defend is often invented by themselves and might only be partially true.⁸⁵

At first sight, the concept of industrialisation may seem quite alien, when the Faroes and Iceland of the 19th century are examined. The shift from animal husbandry to fishing as the primary industry in both nations did not occur until around the turn of the 20th century. However, those who became the leaders of cultural nationalism in the two nations, such as for example V. U. Hammershaimb from the Faroes and Jón Sigurðsson from Iceland, were typically young men living or studying in Copenhagen. As in Gellner’s example, the young men from the two *countries* met with their *countrymen* and reinvented their nationality. Subsequently, the Faroese grammar was published in Copenhagen for the first time in 1854 and the Faroese flag was designed there early in the 20th century. There was also contact between Icelanders and Faroe Islanders in Copenhagen, but the interaction between the two will not be examined here.

If one, however, insists on combining the state and the nation, the case of the Faroe Islands is particularly interesting, as one would then have to argue that they are not a nation today, because parts of the “state” are still Danish, although the Faroese do most definitely consider themselves to be a nation. However, even though Iceland and the Faroes were not nation-states in the 19th century, one could rather convincingly argue that there are few examples of more unified nations in terms of language, religion and ethnicity. The geographical reality, which left the two island nations relatively isolated at times, must quite logically have had an impact on forming the national cultures.

Neither the Faroe Islands nor Iceland can, in any case, be described as nation-states in the early 19th century – indeed the modern nation-state was still in creation. Ernest Renan, the French philosopher, defined the nation more broadly in 1882, than later theories of the nation-state and showed that there could be many different aspects that made a nation, but ultimately, to him the nation was a:

... grand solidarity constituted by sentiment of sacrifices which one has made and those that one is disposed to make again. It supposes a past, it renews itself especially in the

⁸⁴ Gellner, “Nationalism and High Cultures,” p. 64.

⁸⁵ Gellner, “Nationalism and High Cultures,” pp. 64-65.

present by tangible deed: the approval, the existence, the desire, clearly expressed to continue the communal life. The existence of a nation (pardon this metaphor!) is an everyday plebiscite.⁸⁶

Renan's definition of the nation may be rather abstract, because what can be defined as a nation seems so limitless. But at the same time, it is important because he stated that in order to be a nation, there has to be some kind of will among the population of the nation to be defined as such. The very core of the nation, although a nation may be a result of sociological patterns, is the fact that people define themselves as part of the nation. Therefore, the question of whether the Faroes and Iceland were nations becomes the question of whether the people defined themselves as Faroese or Icelandic.

In 1844 Hammershaimb wrote an article under the alias *En Færing*. The article was published in *Kjøbenhavnsposten*. In the article, he commented on the debates in the Danish state assemblies regarding a planned school-system in the Faroe Islands. In these debates, Danish politicians had referred to the Faroese language as a dialect rather than a proper language. Hammershaimb wrote:

Ved at læse the kgl. Udkast til Almueskolevæsenet paa Færøerne, maatte det smerte mig som enhver Færing, der elsker sit Fødeland og sit Modersmaal, at see, hvilken Fremgangsmaade man vil have anvendt mod det færøiske Sprog;⁸⁷

The simple fact that he describes Faroese as his *mother-tongue* (DA: *modersmaal*), himself and his countrymen as *Faroese* (DA: *færing*) and the Faroes as his *country of birth* (DA: *fødeland*) is evidence of the awakening national cultural movement in the islands and the fact that he was indeed Faroese and not Danish.

The same is evident in Iceland. Guðmundur Hálfðanarson points out that the objective of the *Rit þess íslenzka lærdómslistafélags*, a journal which was published from the end of the 1780s to 1794, was “to keep and preserve the Nordic language as a beautiful principal language.”⁸⁸ He also points out that although there were Icelanders who wanted to adopt the Danish

⁸⁶ Renan, “What is a Nation?”, p. 17.

⁸⁷ Hammershaimb, “Det færøiske Sprog”, p. 83.

⁸⁸ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, “Severing the ties”, p. 239.

language, as for example the principal of the Latin school, Bjarni Jónsson, this was the exception rather than the rule.⁸⁹ Although neither examples denote any wish for independence, they are evidence of a specific culture of the two nations.

One other relevant factor when asking the question of whether Iceland and the Faroes are inhabited by specific nations is how the outside world defined the dependencies. It is a logical consequence of a nation or any group for that matter that not everyone can be part of it. If the Danes were Danes, there had to be someone, somewhere in the world who was not a Dane. In other words, any kind of group with any kind of members must have a definition of who is a member – and consequently who is not part of the group. In this regard, the two dependencies, the Faroe Islands and Iceland are in similar positions. It was perhaps the Danish and other foreigners, who visited the two islands that provided the best arguments for Faroese or Icelandic nationality. If people were going to define Denmark, they had to define the Danish dependencies as either Danish or non-Danish. And it seems that nobody doubted the fact that Icelanders and the Faroese were, if not proper nations, definitely not Danes.

Kim Simonsen, postdoctoral researcher at the University of Amsterdam, among others has researched travel accounts on the Faroe Islands. He claims that the language movement in the Faroe Islands began early in the 19th century before it is traditionally believed to have begun. He states that the development of Faroese culture began before the politicization of the language question by the turn of the 20th century. In his doctoral thesis, he examines travellers to the Faroe Islands, who wrote about the Faroese temperament and how the people of the Faroe Islands behaved.

In his conclusion, Kim Simonsen states:

I hope to have made an argument for seeing the Faroe Islands in line with other peripheral areas and peripheral nations in Europe. The Faroe Islands is a periphery that turned into a nation, but still a peripheral nation just like rural provinces all over Europe, but especially in Spain, France, and Italy.⁹⁰

If the Faroe Islands were a peripheral nation in the 19th century, then the same may be said about Iceland. The difference between the dependencies at the time was that Iceland was

⁸⁹ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, “Severing the ties”, p. 239-340.

⁹⁰ Simonsen, *Literature, Imagining and Memory in the Formation of a Nation*, p. 278.

culturally more developed than the Faroe Islands. As stated before, the Faroese grammar had not yet been invented and thus there was no Faroese literature existent. At the time that fact weakened the arguments of the Faroese for being a nation.

Were Iceland and the Faroe Islands colonies?

It has been stated that the Faroes and Iceland were indeed nations in the 19th century; or at least, they were emerging nations. However, both dependencies were part of the Danish kingdom and the political power of the two was in Copenhagen. There is, however, a great difference between how the dependencies were treated compared to other subjects of the Crown. That raises the question of whether the dependencies were colonies or not.

In the *Oxford Dictionary of World History*, published in 2000, colonialism is not defined specifically. Under the word *colonialism*, the dictionary refers to imperialism, which is defined as:

The policy of extending a country's influence over less powerful states ... Imperialism generally assumed a racial, intellectual and spiritual superiority on the part of the newcomers. The effects of imperialism, while in some measure beneficial to the subjected population, often meant the breakdown of traditional forms of life, the disruption of indigenous civilization, and the imposition of new religious beliefs and social values. The dreams of imperialism faded in the 1920s as anti-imperialist movements developed, and from the 1940s many colonies gained their independence.⁹¹

One does not need to linger, when confronted with the question of whether Denmark enforced new religious beliefs and social values on the Faroese and Icelandic populations. The old Nordic religion had been replaced by Christianity around the year 1000, long before Danish involvement in the two countries. Iceland and the Faroes can hardly be treated as equals to Greenland or the African and Caribbean properties of the Danish Crown. The fact that the two countries were represented in Danish assemblies, even if not equally and not before 1830, reveals that the two dependencies had a special status in Denmark's administration.

However, one should be careful not to simply assume that the two dependencies should be treated equally, when answering the question of whether the two dependencies were colonies. The Faroes, as will be discussed in the chapter about the re-establishment of *Alþingi*, were for example not granted a re-establishment of their old assembly, the *Løgting*, while the Icelanders

⁹¹ *Oxford Dictionary of World History*, p. 296.

were more lucky. Furthermore, the Faroese language was by some Danish officials simply considered no more than a Danish dialect, as stated in the chapter about culture.

The question of whether Iceland and the Faroe Islands were colonies or not has been discussed by Danish, Icelandic and Faroese historians as well as others. In the book, *Danmarks Ret til Grønland* from 1932, Knud Berlin writes about Denmark's legal right to Greenland as an answer to Norwegian claims to Greenland. Knud Berlin was a professor of law at Copenhagen University and was interested in the question of the Icelandic and Faroese status within the Danish kingdom.⁹² He stated that "ikke blot udadtil, ogsaa indadtil behandledes Island og Færøerne i den nærmeste Tid efter 1814 nærmest som Kolonier, ligesom før."⁹³

Knud Berlin furthermore claims that the two dependencies of the Danish kingdom were indeed treated as Danish colonies, because it was formally declared that all new laws passed in Denmark were not put into effect in the Faroe Islands or Iceland automatically.⁹⁴ Representatives of the Danish Crown in Iceland and the Faroes, respectively, had to recommend the law, before it was implemented.

Berlin's argument seems to be quite a contradiction. The fact that Danish laws did not automatically apply in the two dependencies, could be interpreted as proof of the special case of Iceland and the Faroe Islands within the Danish kingdom and be used as an argument for the dependencies not being colonies. It also underlines the fact that Iceland and the Faroe Islands were not part of Denmark, which however, does not mean that they were countries or considered nations.

The Danish historian, Uffe Østergaard, examines the question in the article "Danmark - småstat, imperium og kolonimagt," which was published in 2017. Although he eventually concludes that the Faroes and Iceland were not colonies, he is also of the opinion that the islands were in many aspects treated as colonies throughout the 19th century:

Når det er sagt, tilbagestår spørgsmålet om, hvordan de nordatlantiske øer adskilte sig fra tropekolonierne, og om de kan kaldes kolonier. Forvaltningen af Island, Færøerne og Grønland havde en del lighedspunkter med den måde, kolonierne blev administreret

⁹² Tamm, "Knud Berlin", *Dansk Biografisk Leksikon*, <http://denstoredanske.dk/index.php?sideId=286836>, 27/8-2017

⁹³ Berlin, *Danmarks ret til Grønland*, p. 132.

⁹⁴ Berlin, *Danmarks ret til Grønland*, p. 132.

på. Forbindelserne mellem dem og moderlandet var til forskellige tider forpagtet af en privat familie, overdraget til et danskbaseret handelskompagni eller en enkelt privat købmand, eller forbindelserne var underlagt et dansk statsligt handelsmonopol.⁹⁵

When Østergaard concludes that Iceland and the Faroes were in fact not colonies, it is because Iceland and the Faroes were obviously different from the tropical colonies. Østergaard points out the fact that the tropical colonies were sold when they were no longer profitable, while the same was never even discussed in relation to Iceland and the Faroes. He states that this is proof of their special status.⁹⁶ It is of course also an indication of the special status of the two dependencies to the Danish crown that they were represented in the state assemblies (DA: *stænderforsamlingerne*) and the *Rigsdagen*, when they were founded, when the same did not apply to any of the colonies. The position, which the two dependencies held in the state assemblies is, however, very different, as we shall see later in the dissertation as Iceland managed to re-establish *Alþingi* in 1843 as a consultative assembly, while this was not the case in the Faroes.

Guðmundur Hálfðanarson has discussed the question whether Iceland was a colony in the 19th century in his article, “Var Ísland nýlenda?”, published in 2014.⁹⁷ As he argues, there are many definitions of the word *colony*. He, for example, mentions that in a lecture, which the Icelandic Grímur Thomsen held in 1846, the latter stated that Iceland was a colony from the time of settlement – albeit a free colony, which one may think is a paradox, as a colony cannot be free. But when Thomsen defined Iceland as a colony, he did so because Iceland was originally colonized by Norse settlers. The Icelandic word for *colony* is *nýlenda*. The literal translation of *nýlenda* is *new country*, and it is by this definition, that Grímur Thomsen categorised Iceland as a *nýlenda*. This definition makes Iceland, and for that matter also the Faroe Islands, a colony in the same sense as the first states of the United States were colonies, but it is surely something entirely different from for example the African colonies of Europe from the 19th century and onwards.⁹⁸ One of Guðmundur Hálfðanarson’s conclusions is that Iceland does not fit into the history of European colonies. Denmark, on the other hand, tried to include Iceland in the Danish Constitution and when this failed, Iceland’s wishes of greater autonomy were gradually

⁹⁵ Østergaard, “Danmark - småstat, imperium og kolonimagt”, p. 30.

⁹⁶ Østergaard, “Danmark - småstat, imperium og kolonimagt”, pp. 30-32.

⁹⁷ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, “Var Ísland nýlenda?”, pp. 42-75.

⁹⁸ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, “Var Ísland nýlenda?”, pp. 50-51.

granted. Professor Hálfðanarson states that the basis for racial and imperialistic ideology was simply not present in the case of Iceland.⁹⁹

On this question of whether Iceland and the Faroe Islands were colonies, however, one cannot discuss Iceland and the Faroe Islands as if they were simply the same. When Grímur Thomsen held a lecture in 1846 and described Iceland as a colony under the above-mentioned definition, it was in the context of Icelandic literature and how the Nordic literature in Iceland was preserved. He stated that Iceland was the keeper of the Nordic literature and it had reached its true heights in Iceland. When the *gullöld* had ended, foreign influence had partly ruined the state of Icelandic literature and nationality.¹⁰⁰

On the contrary, the Faroe Islands did not enjoy the same status as Iceland at the time. Niels Winther, a Faroese politician, expressed his astonishment when he returned home in 1849 and discovered that the constitution had not been put into effect. His description of his fellow-countrymen is quite harsh. He stated:

Indbyggerne ymte dog næsten ikke et Ord om al denne grændseløse
Tilsidesættelse; de sove, og Ingen vækker dem; de skimte kun svagt hvad der
foregaaer i det Fjerne, og Ingen vover at skjære den Hinde, der hviler omkring
Øiet og saaledes aabne deres Blik for Lysets velsignelsesrige Straaler. Selv
Negerne have emanciperet sig; Færingerne finde sig med Taalmodighed i deres
Skjæbne.¹⁰¹

Niels Winther's description should be seen in the light of his liberal views. His arguments regarding the state of the Faroe Islands and how their conditions could be improved were often that the population of the islands would grow if the Faroese were given a chance to govern themselves. He also believed that foreign influence had ruined the once so "free-spirited"¹⁰²

⁹⁹ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, "Var Ísland nýlenda?", pp. 53-54.

¹⁰⁰ Guðmundur Hálfðanarson, "Var Ísland nýlenda?", pp. 50-51.

¹⁰¹ Winther, *Et embeds-aristokratisk Udkast til en Communallov for Færøerne angrebet*, p. 4.

¹⁰² "Vi finde ikke mere Spor af hine gamle Færøboere, hvis varme Frihedsfølelse bragte dem til at afryste det norske Kongeaag [sic]."

mind of the islanders and that it was the Danish officials and the royal monopoly in the Faroes that were to blame.¹⁰³

However, if we accept the simple definition of a colony that Knud Berlin uses, i.e. a colony is a country administered by another country then Iceland and the Faroe Islands were without doubt colonies in the beginning of the 19th century, as they were administered in both governance and trade by Denmark. The definition may not be fully encompassing, but if we accept it with the small amendment that there is a difference between the two dependencies of Denmark, we may accept the definition. Iceland and the Faroe Islands were by no means colonies in the same way as for example Greenland and the Caribbean and African colonies. Greenland never gained any sort of political platform, where the natives participated in the discussion regarding their country before 1861, when the *forstanderskaber* finally were founded there.¹⁰⁴ The events in Copenhagen at the beginning of the 20th century when Icelandic students were furious to be presented alongside "eskimoer og negere" at an exhibition at Tivoli underlines how the Icelanders did not consider themselves the same as the Greenlanders.¹⁰⁵ The fact that it happened so many years after what is the period under discussion in this thesis, only demonstrates the fact that Icelanders and the Faroese did not see themselves as the same as Greenlanders because of "race" – not even in the beginning of the 20th century.

The conclusion reached here is that the Faroes and Iceland were not colonies in the same manner as other Danish colonies. But Iceland was less of a colony than the Faroes in some aspects as the Faroes were not culturally as well developed as Iceland. In self-governance, the Faroe Islands also lagged behind Iceland, and as we shall see in the next chapter, the Faroes were denied a re-establishment of the Faroese *Løgting*, one of the reasons being that the inhabitants were not regarded as sufficiently educated.

¹⁰³ Winther, *Et embeds-aristokratisk Udkast til en Communallov for Færøerne angrebet*, pp. 3-11.

¹⁰⁴ Jón Th. Thór, Joensen and Thorleifsen, "Nationalisme og nationsdannelse i 1800-1900-tallet", p. 434.

¹⁰⁵ Jón Yngvi Jóhannsson, "Af reiðum Íslendingum: deilur um Nýlendusýninguna 1905", p. 139.

The re-establishment of Alþingi and the refusal to re-establish Løgtingið

Iceland and the Faroe Islands were part of the same state assemblies of Roskilde until *Alþingi* was re-established in 1843 and Iceland thus received its own consultative assembly.¹⁰⁶ Formally the two dependencies had shared three representatives in the Danish state assembly, although two of the representatives were always from Iceland, while the third was a representative of the Faroes; and he was, as mentioned previously, always a Dane.¹⁰⁷ During the last decade before the *Rigsdagen* met in Denmark in 1848, political changes took place in Iceland, which are important when we compare the two countries.

As early as 1838, the king decided to establish a committee of government officials in Iceland (ICE: *embættismannanefndin*, DA: *Forsamling af embedsmænd*), which was to discuss and make recommendations regarding Icelandic matters. Since the establishment of the state assemblies in Denmark, Icelanders had sought greater autonomy. In 1837 the *stiftamtmaður* of Iceland, Carl Emil Bardenfleth, received a petition, signed by 205 men, asking for an assembly of some kind to discuss Icelandic matters. The *stiftamtmaður* sent the petition to the King, recommending that a number of officials could meet in Reykjavík to discuss Icelandic matters. The King's officials were in favour of the *stiftamtmaður*'s recommendation. On the 22nd of August in 1838, the King announced that a committee of officials was to have meetings in Reykjavík bi-annually (ICE: *embættismannafundurinn*). The committee met twice before King Frederik VI died in 1839. His successor, King Christian VIII, was to become a decisive figure in the nation building of Iceland,¹⁰⁸ as shall be seen.

Shortly after the death of King Frederik, 48 Icelandic students met in Copenhagen and signed a petition to the new king. In the petition, they presented a list of reforms for the island, including more autonomy in internal Icelandic matters. Initially, the petition was rejected by the Danish officials. But shortly afterwards, King Christian VIII showed that he was more interested in Icelandic matters than one might have assumed. Gunnar Karlsson describes this development as follows:

¹⁰⁶ Gunnar Karlsson, "Upphafsskeið þjóðríkismyndunar 1830-1874", pp. 257-258.

¹⁰⁷ Gunnar Karlsson, "Upphafsskeið þjóðríkismyndunar 1830-1874", p. 245.

¹⁰⁸ Gunnar Karlsson, "Upphafsskeið þjóðríkismyndunar 1830-1874", pp. 251-252.

Þegar tillögur embættismannafundarins í Reykjavík 1839 höfðu farið frá Kansellí til Rentukammers og þaðan aftur til Kansellís var niðurstaðan sú að best væri að konungur héldi áfram að tilnefna fulltrúa Íslendinga á Hróarskelduþing. Þá gaf konungur út úrskurð sem markar tímamót í þjóðríkismyndun Íslendinga, því að hann bað Kansellíð að biðja embættismannanefndina, þegar hún hittist sumarið 1841, að hugleiða hvort ekki væri best að stofna ráðgjafarþing á Íslandi, eða eins og konungur sagði:

*at tage under overvejelse, om det ikke måtte være hensigtsmæssigt, at der på Island dannes en særlig rådgivende forsamling, hvori ved siden af nogle af landets vigtigste embedsmænd, som Vi dertil ville udnævne, et passende antal af landets indvånere dertil valgte mænd kunne tage sæde.*¹⁰⁹

In the King's statement, one should bear in mind, lies not only an obvious practical advantage for Icelandic independence, as there is no better man to have by your side, than the king himself. There is also a recognition of Iceland as something more than simply a Danish *amt*, as was the legal position of the Faroes and Iceland at the time.

When the re-establishment of the Icelandic *Alþingi* was debated in the state assembly in Roskilde in 1842, the main topic of discussion was not if, but how, *Alþingi* should be organized. The King himself had recommended that a consultative assembly ought to be established in Iceland. After the debates, a committee was appointed to address the question. The committee recommended that the proposal be accepted. In its conclusion, the committee wrote about the natural right of the Icelanders to have their own consultative assembly:

Efter at have underkastet denne Sag den omhyggeligste Overveielse, kunne vi ikke Andet end erkjende, at Island, hvis naturlige Beskaffenhed og andre locale Vilkaar ere saa aldeles forskjellige fra Danmarks, og derfor ogsaa her kun lidet kjendte, baade har et naturligt Krav paa en egen raadgivende Forsamling i Landet selv, og at dette ogsaa er den eneste Vei, ad hvilken Hans Majestæt Kongens landsfaderlige Øiemed med Stænderinstitutionen, for Islands Vedkommende, - og uden altfor uforholdsmæssige Udgivter for hiin fjerne og lidet velhavende Provinds, kan vorde nogenlunde opnaaet.¹¹⁰

¹⁰⁹ Gunnar Karlsson, "Upphafsskeið þjóðríkismyndunar 1830-1874", p. 253.

¹¹⁰ *Tidende for provindsialstænderne 1842*, p. 2433.

However, the difference between the dependencies from a Danish perspective at the time became very evident in the Danish state assembly in 1842, 1844 and 1846, when the different petitions were discussed. The Faroese petitioned for the revival of the *Løgting* in 1844 and in 1846 - probably inspired by the Icelanders. But as we shall see, the petitions were not met with the same approval as the Icelandic petition had been.

The first Faroese petition was from some Faroese people in Copenhagen at the time. The authors are unknown, but were probably Faroese students, and the two previously mentioned men, V. U. Hammershaimb and Niels Winther are both likely authors of the petition; the latter for example wrote about the matter in the Danish paper *Fædrelandet* in 1845.¹¹¹ The petition was presented by Christian Hunderup, the Faroese representative in the assembly, and was simply called: “Andragende fra nogle sig fortiden i Kjøbenhavn opholdende Færinger, om at der maatte blive forundt Færingerne en Institution lig det gamle Laugthing.”¹¹²

In his book *Nú er tann stundin komin* Hans Jacob Debes claimed that the petition, or proposal, was rejected. The word *havnað* (ICE: hafnað) is used to describe the destiny of the proposal.¹¹³ But even to say that the proposal was *rejected* seems to be an understatement. It seems that the proposal was never even debated in the state assembly. The only time it is mentioned is in the agenda for the 26th meeting in 1844, but the proposal was not debated in that meeting.¹¹⁴

In 1846, 28 Faroese men living in the Faroe Islands sent the second petition to the state assembly in Roskilde. The petition is reprinted in the book *Færøsk Politik* by Jóhannes Patursson.¹¹⁵ The petitioners specifically asked for a Faroese *Folketing*, which should serve as a consultative assembly regarding internal matters – the same as *Alþingi* became. The arguments put forward by the petitioners are similar to the Icelandic arguments in the Danish state assembly four years before. They are practical and point out obvious geographical difficulties the Faroes had in relation to participation in the Danish state assemblies, as they were separated by sea from the rest of the kingdom; but they also pointed out that more

¹¹¹ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, p. 47.

¹¹² *Tidende for provindsialstænderne 1844*, pp. 1729-1730.

¹¹³ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, pp. 30.

¹¹⁴ *Tidende for provindsialstænderne 1844*, pp. 1729-1730.

¹¹⁵ Patursson, *Færøsk Politik*, pp. 6-8.

responsibility would lead to positive development in the islands. The petitioners almost humbly asked to become fully civilised by being given responsibility for themselves. As the petitioners stated:

Føje vi hertil, at Folkets Retsbevidsthed er i kendelig Udvikling, at det føler de antydende Mangler og tror, at selv den redeligste Vilje hos dem, som lede Landets Styrelse, ikke har kunnet eller vil kunne raade Bod paa dem, men at de nævnte Institutioner ikke blot vil kunne udfylde Savnene, men ogsaa yderligere bidrage til at vække Ivren for det almene Vel og give dem en sund og gavnlig Næring – formene vi at have paavist Hensigtsmæssigheden af en Folkerepræsentations Deltagelse i Lovgivning og Bestyrelse.¹¹⁶

When the petition was presented to the state-assemblies in 1846, it was not welcomed by all the members of the assembly, and not even the representative for the Faroe Islands, Niels Hunderup favoured it. Hunderup, U. A. Plesner and H. C. Sager, all members of the Roskilde state-assembly, formed a committee that was to make a recommendation regarding the petition. The committee's conclusion was a result of a rather creative reading of the petition. They stated that the intention of the petitioners had probably never been to obtain an assembly like the state-assemblies, and if they had wished for that, the committee stated that it would be detrimental to the small islands. According to the committee, the islands were not only too small but also only populated by commoners (DA: *almuefolk*).

Færøernes Beboere, som ikkun udgjøre circa 7000 Individer, bestaaer udelukkende af simple, for høiere Dannelsen blottede Almuesfolk, og en Repræsentation, udvalgt af deres Midte, vilde upaatvivleligen savne den fornødne Indsigt og Dygtighed, som maa være tilstede i en Stænderforsamling.¹¹⁷

However, in the end the committee recommended a *kommunalforsamling* for the Faroes. The committee suggested that it could be useful for the state assembly to have an advisory local organ in the Faroe Islands, which could make recommendations to the Danish state assembly.¹¹⁸ The Faroese petitioners wanted the same that had been given to Iceland – their

¹¹⁶ Patursson, *Færøsk Politik*, p. 8.

¹¹⁷ *Tidende for provindsialstænderne 1846*, p. 3568.

¹¹⁸ *Tidende for provindsialstænderne 1846*, pp. 3567-3570.

own state assembly. It should be noted, as Hans Jacob Debes for example did, that not all the Danish members of the assembly agreed on the way in which the committee interpreted the wishes of the petitioners. And even an important figure such as Orla Lehman, one of the most influential liberal politicians at the time,¹¹⁹ pointed out that the islanders wished for more than only local authorities and he recommended that an assembly with as many powers and responsibilities as possible should be established in the islands.¹²⁰

However, it is evident that from a Danish perspective there was a difference between Iceland and the Faroes. The debates in the *Rigsdagen* will be discussed next. However, even before the *Rigsdagen* met for the first time in 1848 the Danes seemed to differentiate between the two dependencies, as has been shown.

¹¹⁹ Jensen, “Orla Lehmann”, *Den Store Danske*, Gyldendal, <http://denstoredanske.dk/index.php?sideId=115627>, 28/11-2017

¹²⁰ Debes, *Nú er tann stundin*, pp. 32-33.

The discussions in the *Rigsdagen*

When the debates in the first *Rigsdagen* took place in 1848 and 1849, the different political status of Iceland and the Faroe Islands within the kingdom became very clear. The King appointed five representatives from Iceland and one from the Faroe Islands. In Iceland, the king had promised to choose five members of the newly re-established *Alþingi*, to the extent it was possible (DA: “*saavidt muligt*”).¹²¹

The five representatives from Iceland were Jón Guðmundsson, member of *Alþingi* and *student*, Konráð Gíslason, *lector* at the University of Copenhagen, Jón Johnsen *byfoged* of Aalborg, Brynjólfur Pétursson *kammerassessor* in Copenhagen and Jón Sigurðsson, while the Faroe Islands were only represented by the *amtmaður* in the Islands, Christian Pløyen.¹²² The difference regarding the representation of the two dependencies is self-evident. The Icelandic representatives were all educated Icelanders, while the Faroese representative was not even from the Faroe Islands. Pløyen, as we shall see, was without doubt loyal to the Faroes,¹²³ but the mere fact that the Danish official of the Faroes was the chosen representative indicates how different the two dependencies had developed. Further, there is no doubt that the Danish official supported the *Helstat* (EN: unitary state).

The difference between the two dependencies was not only evident from the Danish point of view, but also when we look at the different arguments presented by Pløyen and Jón Johnsen, the only Icelandic representative who addressed the assembly. The difference between the arguments of the representatives of the two dependencies are perhaps even more important, as they show the status of the two dependencies at the time.

When the new king, Frederik VII, inherited the throne in 1848, the *stiftamtmaður* of Iceland sent the King a letter, which had been signed by several officials in Iceland and members of *Alþingi*.¹²⁴ Apart from offering the King their condolences on the death of his father, they also reminded the king of what great expectations they had of him.¹²⁵ The authors of the letter had two questions, which illustrate quite well the objectives of the Icelanders. The Icelanders wrote: “At Deres Majestet allernaadigst vil skjænke Island en særskilt nationalforsamling, der er baseret paa lige frie grundsætninger og tildeles de samme Rettigheder som vores danske brødre

¹²¹ *Departementstidenden for 1848*, p. 343.

¹²² *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, p. 3.

¹²³ Thorsteinsson, *Et Færø som Færø*, pp. 155-158.

¹²⁴ *Departementstidenden for 1848*, pp. 689.

¹²⁵ *Departementstidenden for 1848*, pp. 691-692.

tiltænkte Rigsdag.”¹²⁶ The Icelanders furthermore asked for a forum in which elected representatives could meet in Iceland to discuss the plans of making a Danish constitution.¹²⁷

The petition was granted. At the beginning of the first meeting, the Danish Prime Minister, Adam Wilhelm Moltke, mentioned the special status of Iceland, when he stated that: “De til Islands eiendommelige Forhold svarende, for samme særegne, Indretninger kunne først ordnes, efterat en islandsk Forsamling herover er bleven hørt.”¹²⁸

The fact that Jón Johnsen, as mentioned, was the only Icelandic representative, who spoke at the *Rigsagen*, may have been due to the simple fact that he spoke the Danish language best, as he worked as *byfoged* in Aalborg. Jón Johnsen spoke in 1849 when he commented on a proposal, where it was stated that the position of Iceland and Schleswig within the constitution could not be decided before the local inhabitants had been given a chance to discuss it among themselves. The proposal in practice was about representation in the *Rigsdagen* after the constitution had been put in to effect. He stated:

Af de i Udvalgets Betænkning paaberaabte Ord i Rescriptet af 23de September s. a. Fremgaaer det, synes mig, aabenbart, at denne ærede Forsamling ikke kan fatte nogen endelig Beslutning om Islands forfatningsmæssige Stilling til Riget eller om denne Statsdeels Repræsentation paa den danske Rigsdag, saalænge en Forsamling i Landet selv ikke derom har havt leilighed til at yttre sig.¹²⁹

Although the purpose of Jón Johnsen’s speech seems to have been to underline Iceland’s special position within the Kingdom, his speech was also noteworthy in other aspects. Johnsen for example emphasized that the people of Iceland were loyal to their King.

Islændernes Loyaltet, Trofast, Hengivenhed og Kjærlighed imod deres Konge ikke skal kunne overtræffes af han Majestatæts danske Undersaatter, og jeg maa endnu gjøre

¹²⁶ *Departementstidenden for 1848*, p. 691.

¹²⁷ *Departementstidenden for 1848*, p. 691.

¹²⁸ *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, p. 7.

¹²⁹ *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, pp. 2729 – 2730.

den Bemærkning, at ogsaa Islænderne have i Gjærningen efter Evne lagt deres Sympathier for de Danske og den danske sag, endnu i den sidste Tid for Dagen.¹³⁰

But Jón Johnsen did not think, that Iceland would be represented sufficiently at the *Rigsdagen* and he emphasized the Icelandic nationality and nature. He stated:

Allerede Islands geographiske Beliggenhed, i flere hundrede Miles Afstand fra Danmark, stiller det, saa forekommer det mig, temmelig klart, at denne Deel af Riget, udstyret af Naturen med mange Eiendommeligheder, noget nær dobbelt saa stor som det hele øvrige Danmark med der af Nogle i den senere Tid saakaldte Slesvig-Holsteen tilsammen taget, med kun 58000 Indvaanere, som til den Dag idag have bevaret deres særegne Nationalitet, deres fædrene Sprog ublandet, et Sprog, der neppe vil faae en meget bedre Klang paa den danske Rigsdag end t. Fr. det danske Sprog i den frankfurtske Nationalforsamling.¹³¹

The arguments of Jón Johnsen's speech are similar to those of Jón Sigurðsson in the article "Hugvekja til Íslendinga", which was published the same year. It is not possible to write about the Icelandic perspective on the *Rigsdagen*, without mentioning Jón Sigurðsson and his article. Jón Sigurðsson himself is the first name that comes to mind when discussing the Icelandic independence movement, as he became, and still is, the national icon of the Icelandic struggle for independence. Sigurðsson's arguments about Iceland's position in the Danish kingdom became the ideological basis of what formed the Icelandic independence movement for many years.¹³²

Jón Sigurðsson stated that Iceland is a nation on equal footing with Denmark, and that Iceland had wilfully entered a union with Norway and followed Norway into the Danish kingdom. However, the fact that Iceland had pledged allegiance to the Danish Crown did not mean that it was part of Denmark, and consequently the Icelanders had to be given the same rights as other Danish subjects – as equals not subordinates. He wrote that:

¹³⁰ *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, pp. 2729 – 2730.

¹³¹ *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, p. 2730.

¹³² Einar Laxness, *Íslandssaga a-h*, p. 211.

Það er auðsætt, að þó að Íslendingar vildi hylla Friðrik hinn sjöunda til einvaldskonungs, þá er ekki þar með sagt, að þeir vildi hylla fyrir það hvern einn af ráðgjöfum hans, sem nú er, eða verða kann, eptir því sem þjóðarmeiningin breytist í Danmörku, til konungs yfir sig.¹³³

Jón Sigurðsson furthermore stated that the representatives of Iceland to the *Rigsdagen* should make some demands for more self-determination. He was convinced that the king would accept these demands, because the king would not discriminate between the nations (Ice: *þjóð*) within his kingdom. The reason for this last claim was of course rhetorical and the aim was to underline how obvious it seemed that Icelanders were equal to other subjects of the Danish Crown. He furthermore wrote that:

... konungi er ekki ætlanda, að hann vilji neita þjóð vorri um þau réttindi, sem hann veitir öðrum þegnum sínum, enda er líka það ætlanda þeim sem eru oddvitar þjóðarinnar, að þeir láti slíkt tækifæri hjá líða ónotað, og leiði með því engu vægari dóm yfir sig, en með rétti er felldur yfir þeim, sem seldu frelsi þjóðar sinnar fyrir vesæla nafnbót, og gáfu það síðan fyrir minna en ekkert.¹³⁴

Although the objective of the representatives of Iceland in the assembly as stated above clearly is not to be part of the Danish constitution, the representatives were rather passive in the debates in the assembly. Perhaps the tactics were not to say too much about their final objectives, as it is certain that the Icelanders would not find much sympathy among in *Rigsdagen* for the cause - their own constitution. However, the truth of the matter is in fact more likely to have been that both Iceland and the Faroes were considered insignificant in the context of the whole kingdom. The dependencies were rarely mentioned, and the more pressing questions for the Danish kingdom regarded Schleswig and Holstein – questions that will not be discussed in this essay.

The demands of the two dependencies had however never been more evident than it had become in the *Rigsdagen*. Christian Pløyen took the opportunity to address the assembly after Johnsen, and complained about the fact that the Faroese had not had any chance to discuss the

¹³³ Jón Sigurðsson, “Hugvekja til Íslendinga”, pp. 21-22.

¹³⁴ Jón Sigurðsson, “Hugvekja til Íslendinga”, p. 6.

Constitution in some forum at home. He put forward an amendment stating that the Constitution and the representation in *Rigsdagen* would not be determined before the Faroese population had the chance to make its position clear at home. As such Pløyen was never concerned with the question whether the Faroe Islands should accept the Constitution. For him it was a matter of *how* to accept it. Pløyen himself admitted the difference between Iceland and the Faroe Islands in size, which he stated would make the Faroese representation in *Rigsdagen* more complex than in Iceland.¹³⁵ He still thought that the Faroese should at least have an advisory assembly in which the question of the constitution could be debated. He furthermore referred to what the state assemblies had agreed on, when Niels Hunderup argued for a Faroese *kommunalforfatning*:

Som bekjendt har det været paatænkt, at der ialtfald skulde være communale Organer, hvorigjennem Folket ogsaa der kunde faae sin Mening udtalt; det har bestandig været Skik, at der ikke er bleven viist Færingerne den Humanitet, at der ikke er bleven gjort nogen Lov gjældende der, uden at Autoriteterne har været given Leilighed til at yttre sig om dens Anvendelighed, og Autoriteterne have da stedse igjen confereret herom med de Dygtigste af Beboerne.¹³⁶

When the proposal was finally put forward in the assembly, an alteration had been made to article 18, which stated that the status of Schleswig, Iceland and the Faroe Islands would be decided later. This led Pløyen to withdraw his amendment.¹³⁷ However, Pløyen never doubted if the Faroes should be part of the *Rigsdagen* and Niels Winther, as mentioned in the chapter about whether the dependencies were colonies, was surprised to discover that the constitution had not been registered, when he travelled home in 1849. Both examples speak to the fact that the two dependencies had completely different agendas in the *Rigsdagen*. While the Icelandic representatives argued about Icelandic nationality as something different from Danish nationality, Pløyen was concerned that the Faroese population did not get the chance to debate the constitution themselves.

Christian Pløyen also had one other remark, which ought to be mentioned, when he commented on the population of the two dependencies:

¹³⁵ *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, p. 2730.

¹³⁶ *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, pp. 2730-2731.

¹³⁷ *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, pp. 3399-3400.

Jeg maa tillade mig at bemærke, at jeg savner en Bestemmelse for Færøernes Vedkommende. Jeg overseer imidlertid ingenlunde den betydelige Forskjel, som der er paa Islands og Færøernes Størrelse, og ikke overseer jeg de eiendommeligheder, som unegtelig gjøre, at der i Grunden stiller sig flere Vanskeligheder for denne Landsdeels Deeltagelse i Repræsentationen.¹³⁸

In 1845, when the last census prior to the assembly took place, 7.781 people lived in the Faroe Islands.¹³⁹ The same year 57.957 people lived in Iceland.¹⁴⁰ The difference is considerable, and that fact must have played a role in the overall development of the countries. How important the size of a nation may be for its internal development is difficult to qualify. The needs of a nation are of course relative to the size of the nation. But the importance and significance of a *colony* or a dependency for the mother country is quite logically relative to the size of the mother country and consequently the Faroes and Iceland were not as important to the Crown as for example Schleswig. In other words: The Faroe Islands, and perhaps to some extent even Iceland, were admittedly relatively insignificant in comparison to the population of the *Helstat*.

¹³⁸ *Beretning om Forhandlingerne paa Rigsdagen*, p. 2730.

¹³⁹ *Statistisk Tabelværk – ny række, første bind*, p. 341.

¹⁴⁰ http://px.hagstofa.is/pxis/pxweb/is/Ibuar/Ibuar_mannfjoldi_1_yfirlit_Yfirlit_mannfjolda/MAN00101.px/table/tableViewLayout1/?rxid=ba616c23-7d14-4d76-a3f1-04cb7c9265d5 - 27/9-2017

Conclusion

The main question of this dissertation has been to study why the difference between the political aims of Iceland and the Faroes was so great when the Danish *Rigsdagen* began framing the constitution in 1848. And the difference, as has been shown, was indeed great.

The answer appears to lie in the apparent differences between the countries' administration, trade and culture. These three factors, which influenced the representatives of Iceland and the Faroes in the *Rigsdagen* consequently led to different outcomes for the two dependencies.

The two dependencies would perhaps have developed in a more similar manner if the representatives of the dependencies had demanded the same rights for their country. It is also important to state that the differences in culture, trade and administration contributed to how politicians in Denmark proper viewed the dependencies in diverse ways.

The account given on these three aspects demonstrates significant differences. The Faroese administration was more dependent on Danish-born officials than Iceland's administration, and the fact that one Danish official was the representative for the Faroes in the constitutional assembly, while five Icelanders met on behalf Iceland speaks for itself.

The tradition had been to send Danes to the Danish state assemblies to represent the Faroes. Christian Pløyen, who represented the Faroes *Rigsdagen* was Danish and doubtlessly supported the *Helstat*, is generally viewed as a fine representative. There was, however, an obvious difference between being represented by a Danish official and representing oneself - especially in an era when cultural nationalism was catching on in both dependencies.

As I have outlined in the chapter about trade, Faroese reformers advocated free trade as early as in Iceland. And even though Icelanders did not get actual free trade before the Faroes, they did get *fríhöndlun*, which meant that a merchant class grew in Iceland, but remained non-existent in the Faroes.

However, due to the opposition that also was evident in the Faroes, free trade was not implemented easily. It is difficult to state assertively the reason for the opposition in the Faroes against abolishing free trade, but one reason may have been that *Ryberg's Handel* was in Torshavn, and inhabitants from other Faroese islands had not experienced the same growth in their hometowns as the inhabitants of the capital.

One of the most important factors was that the Faroese literary language was not as developed as the Icelandic, both because there were no medieval manuscripts in the Faroes and due to the fact that the official language and church language had been Danish for a long time. There was no Faroese grammar until 1845, and it was not published until 1853, after the constitution had come into force in the kingdom. At the same time, the Icelandic language had remained recognisably the same since the period of settlement. The old Icelandic literary sources furthermore provided a good basis for cultural nationalism. In this dissertation examples of early cultural nationalism in the Faroes have been demonstrated before the convocation of the *Rigsdagen*, as for example the article Hammershaimb wrote in *Kjøbenhavnsposten* and he signed as *en Færing*. However, compared to the almost unanimous agreement in Iceland that Icelandic was the main language, the Faroese traces of cultural nationalism are feeble.

The above-mentioned three categories are the main reasons for the different agendas of the Faroese and Icelandic representatives to the Danish constitutional assembly. As I have outlined, the Icelandic representation in the constitutional assembly had a clear target when entering the negotiations: They did not have any intention of accepting the Danish constitution as their own. Besides, they wanted Icelandic political affairs to be handled in *Alþingi* rather than in the *Rigsdagen*. The main argument was that the Icelandic nation was subject only to the Danish Crown, but on equal footing with the Danish nation.

Because of the position the dependencies found themselves in as a result of the Peace Treaty of Kiel, where the position of the two dependencies was rather uncertain, Icelanders had the basis for presenting the above-mentioned argument. The same argument could have applied to the Faroes, if there had been any wish for it. Although there had been hopes for some popular representation in the Faroes prior to the convocation of the *Rigsdagen*, there was never any resistance against the constitution, and this remains the main reason for the the different outcomes in the *Rigsdagen*.

Today, nobody questions the fact that the Faroes are a nation, but the Faroe Islands was an *amt* until 1948, when Home Rule was implemented in the islands. Although a Faroese assembly was established in the Faroes in 1852, it was exclusively a consultative assembly without legislative power. Indeed, the Faroes are still subject to the Danish constitution today, although the islands are practically independent in most domestic matters and some foreign. The fact remains that even though Iceland and the Faroe Islands popularly are still considered similar today, the two nations took a radically different path in the years surrounding the constitutional

assembly (DA: *Rigsdagen*) in Denmark in 1848-49. An assembly, which nonetheless was decisive in the history of both nations.

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