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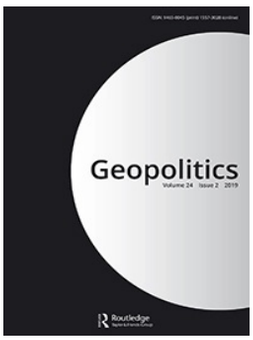

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The geopolitics of the 'Modern Breakthrough': Cultural internationalisation and geopolitical decline in Scandinavia 1870–1914

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ABSTRACT

The Scandinavian countries of Denmark, Sweden and Norway (sometimes including Finland and Iceland) have been depicted as small states punching above their demographic, political, military or economic weight in international affairs, especially in the post-Second World War era. The article historicises this notion by discussing nineteenth-century Scandinavian cultural elites and opinion makers who began portraying the region as culturally homogenous and distinctly modern. Coincidentally or consequently, this occurred at a time when Sweden and Denmark, having ceded their status as Northern European great powers to Russia and Prussia, were acutely preoccupied with reorienting themselves geopolitically. Expanding on the historiography of global positioning strategies in Scandinavia, the article centres on the interface between the realms of politics and cultural production during this period of transition. It highlights a group of self-declared cultural modernisers that in the 1880s came together under the banner of the Modern Breakthrough. Members of the group merit attention as public intellectuals advocating new ways of understanding Scandinavia's place in the world by redefining the relationship between the local and the global. By focusing on their role as catalysts in a collective reorientation towards non-military claims to international relevance and status as an example of space-making practices, we can shed new light on region-building in Scandinavia against the backdrop of changing social and political realities.

Coincidentally or consequently, cultural elites and opinion makers began portraying Scandinavia as a culturally homogenous and distinctly modern region at a time when Sweden and Denmark were acutely troubled by geopolitical decline. Focusing on the late nineteenth century and the final stages of their transition – having ceded their status as Northern European powers to Russia and Prussia – from great to small or 'middle powers' (Holbraad 1984), this article centres on the interface between the fields of cultural production and politics. By discussing how public intellectuals in Copenhagen especially

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advocated for a collective reorientation towards non-military claims to international relevance and status, the aim is to shed new light on regional space-making practices (Withers 2009) against the backdrop of changing social and political circumstances.

The cultural dynamics highlighted in what follows can be seen as a prelude to what recent scholarship terms 'Nordic internationalism' (Browning 2007; Browning and de Oliveira 2017; Clerc, Glover, and Jordan 2015). While the notion has mostly been applied to international relations and the political history of the twentieth century, this article focuses on intellectuals who in the preceding century sought to redefine their role in the world-system by exploiting a position of *relative detachment* from dominant centres and to situate themselves and their region as mediators. It thus contributes from the vantage point of cultural history to the historicisation of Nordic internationalism, with its focus on neutrality and the promotion of peace and solidaristic internationalism, as well as the interplay between the internal and the external in Scandinavian intellectual and political life. Regarding the latter relationship, scholars of the post-war Nordic social model have debated whether the model in the current political landscape is 'equipped to deal with the blurring of the boundaries between internal and external – domestic and foreign' (Kuisma 2007, 9–10). The present discussion centres on the cultural effects produced by similarly porous boundaries between internal and external in an earlier era of globalisation (1870–1914). It addresses the lack of scientific coordination on these topics that Kuisma identifies in relation to welfare state research and studies of Nordic internationalism – and we could add the scholarship on nation and region branding (Aronczyk 2013; Browning and de Oliveira 2017; Marklund 2017; Byrkjeflot et al. 2021), given the fact that cultural history has been even more absent from debates on such issues.

Revisiting creative proposals emerging from within the field of cultural production (Bourdieu 1993) after the demise of political Pan-Scandinavianism in the 1860s (Hemstad 2008), the article focuses on international status-seeking efforts by primarily Danish cultural elites. The period under discussion precedes the two main historical references in scholarship on Nordic internationalism: the globally acknowledged achievements of Scandinavian social democracy since World War I, and the substantial investments by Scandinavian countries in the UN system as mediators and peace brokers after the Second World War. The idea that Scandinavian countries should seek international legitimacy by acting as intermediators with a moral voice is connected to *cultural responses to the reconfigured boundaries between internal and external* in the period of imperial expansion and early globalisation 1870–1914, especially in the last three decades of the nineteenth century. Strategic efforts by self-declared cultural progressives to reposition Scandinavia internationally in the wake of geopolitical decline are part and parcel of this story. Critical of prevailing isolationist efforts to offset decline by

consolidating the material and moral resources of the nation, advocated in Denmark by conservative politicians and rural democratic populists alike (Christiansen 1992), the urban intellectuals campaigning for socio-cultural modernisation sought to create a space for Nordic actors as international brokers, arbiters and what Ingebritsen (2002, 2006) calls 'norm entrepreneurs'. Crucially, as will be argued below, when such roles were depicted as particularly suitable for Scandinavian cultural and political actors, the argument rested on the region's relative distance to – but not too far from – power struggles in the core.

Georg Brandes and the Modern Breakthrough

The collective term Men of the Modern Breakthrough (*Det moderne Gjennembruds Mænd*) derives from the title of an essay, which after its publication in 1883 came to designate the socio-cultural radicalism of Scandinavian writers such as the Norwegians Henrik Ibsen and Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, the Swede August Strindberg and the Dane J.P. Jacobsen. It was written by the contested organiser of the movement, Georg Brandes (1842–1927). During his lifetime, this Danish critic, European intellectual and literary kingmaker was someone who could make or break the careers of aspiring writers at home and abroad, where he promoted intellectuals such as Friedrich Nietzsche (Ahlström 1947; Hertel 2004; Knudsen 2002). Only Ibsen's fame surpassed Brandes' among the Scandinavians. Scholarship on literary modernisms (Bradbury and McFarlane 1976) and comparative literature (Damrosch 2020) acknowledges the pioneering role of Brandes, who in Denmark and Scandinavia is associated with the first wave of what in the twentieth century became known as cultural radicalism (Bay 2003). As a socio-cultural movement, the Modern Breakthrough accelerated the reaction against national romanticism in art and literature, encouraging literature to play a part in bringing about social change and tackling contemporary problems. Being 'modern' meant distancing oneself from the traditional values of Lutheran peasant society (one of Brandes' earliest publications was his 1869 translation of *The Subjection of Women*, published by J. S. Mill the same year) and institutions such as the Church, the family and matrimony. The term was also associated with Darwinism, opposing the exploitation of the poor, and attacking cultural complacency and provincialism in Scandinavia. With devoted followers and opponents in the neighbouring Nordic countries, Brandes became the focal point in public debates between the supporters and detractors of the new, the modern and the progressive.

Georg Brandes was not only a central protagonist of aesthetic, social and political renewal. Throughout his life, he was also concerned with positioning Denmark in Europe and the world, and to a remarkable extent responsible for mediating cultural representations of Europe in Scandinavia and Scandinavia in Europe. In this article, Brandes provides

the starting point for a discussion of the geopolitics of Scandinavian intellectual life during a period of literary (Sassoon 2006, 630–657) and scholarly (Charle, Schriewer, and Wagner 2004) internationalisation. At the time, European culture was marked by a striking tension between on the one hand the typically cosmopolitan self-understanding of participants in the republic of letters, on the other hand the asymmetries of power and linguistic hierarchies that divided the literary world between centres and peripheries of cultural production (Casanova 2008 [1999]). As we shall see, such asymmetries were of great concern for the likes of Brandes and his Norwegian counterpart Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson. Standing at a relative distance to the centres of political decision-making, they were keen observers of geopolitical shifts and major events in European politics, the local meanings of which they interpreted in widely publicised lectures, speeches and articles.

We can hardly determine the 'impact' of intellectuals on politics in any precise manner. But with respect to the topic of 'Scandinavia in the world' we can note for instance that Brandes at the height of his career between the 1870s and 1890s was cited more frequently in English as well as German language texts than contemporaries such as his political opponent J.B.S. Estrup, the long-time Danish head of government in the same period (Google Ngram 2022). Brandes attracted large audiences when speaking at home or abroad, and on lecture tours across Europe. His articles were widely read not only in Germany, where he lived and worked for a substantial part of his life, but also in France, where he was active since his work on the critic Hippolyte Taine in the 1860s, and in Russia and Poland, on which he also wrote books. Multilingual (Scandinavian languages, German, French, English and Italian), always on the move and with many friends and enemies in the republic of letters, Brandes was a 'good European', as Nietzsche once called him (Allen 2012; Nolin 1976). He wrote and translated books and essays not only on literature but on political thinkers such as Benjamin Disraeli, Ferdinand Lassalle, John Stuart Mill and Peter Kropotkin as well, corresponding extensively with the latter two. In Denmark, Brandes was closely associated with *Politiken* (1884–) together with his brother Edvard, one of the founders of the journal. By the turn of the century, Brandes had become an international celebrity. On the eve of the First World War, *New York Times* (8.6.1914) reported that the police had to clear away a thousand persons who could not find a seat when he was lecturing in the city. In the following year, it was first-page news in Europe when the French progressive statesman Georges Clemenceau, having lost his patience with the Dane's 'pro-German neutrality', dramatically broke off their longstanding friendship in an article that began and ended with the words 'Adieu Brandes' (Nolin 1976; Søndergaard Bendtsen 2011).

Brandes and the Men of the Modern Breakthrough are unevenly portrayed in different branches of historical research on fin-de-siècle Scandinavia. While the efforts of the 'Brandesians' (Knudsen 1994, 30–34) to modernise society by cultural means have been applauded, critiqued, and nuanced by scholars of literary and intellectual life, they figure less prominently in social or political history or the study of international relations. This may not only be a consequence of scholarly specialisation, or the way Brandes fashioned himself as an aristocratic radical (Knudsen 1994), but also the success and international prestige of Scandinavian social democracy in the twentieth century. Social democratically inspired historical analysis dismissed the nineteenth-century provocations against the values and institutions of agrarian society by cultural radicals as elitist cosmopolitanism, their leader as a free trade supporting classical liberal, and the whole movement as something too urban, masculine (the *men* of the Modern Breakthrough) and detached to find a secure place in the grand narrative of societal transformation in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. These demarcations contrasted with an earlier phase in which Danish social democratic culture sided with Brandes' anti-establishment criticism, and his sweeping depiction of European literary life as a struggle between progress and reaction in the six-volume *Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (1872–1890), until the alliance in the 1920s was broken in the name of a stronger emphasis on worker culture and disregard for the aristocratic radicalism of the cultural avant-gardes (Hertel 2004, 83–85, 1973, 272–274). Studies of political mobilisation and democratisation in Northern Europe instead traced the historical roots of social democratic political culture to peasant farmers and cooperative movements, and to popular initiatives for the education and political activation of citizens, study circles, seminars, and religious associations such as 'Inner Mission'. Cultural hegemony was eventually achieved by the latter groups, who had a wider appeal than the urban free thinkers and for whom cultural democratisation was a more important goal than it ever was for the cultural radicals (Østergård 1997, 67–68; Christiansen 1992). The individualism and anarchist radicalism of the latter lost their appeal as the clash between individual and collective freedoms received more attention in social debate.

Building on earlier analyses of the provocative internationalism or local cosmopolitanism of the Modern Breakthrough (e.g., Berthelsen and Egebjerg 2004; Fulsås and Rem 2017), this article asks how leading public intellectuals understood Scandinavia's role in international affairs, starting from the observation that accelerating imperial rivalry in Europe in the aftermath of great power decline in Scandinavia coincided with the Modern Breakthrough. Simplifying, the geopolitical shift fuelled a quest for alternative sources of status and symbolic authority. The turn towards cultural internationalism entailed promoting Scandinavian culture abroad. But, as will be argued, it was also about mobilising the normative power of the detached outsider and

mediation as an alternative means of increasing the region's leverage on international arenas. The article then proceeds to discussing the relationship between culture and politics in the context of Scandinavian internationalism and with respect to regional and global power geometries. To shed further light on the predicament of post-imperial Scandinavia, a sociological approach to intermediate positions in social interaction and in the international system is evoked in the following segment relating Georg Simmel's discussion of 'the sociological logic of three' (Simmel 1950, chapter IV) to the analysis of Scandinavian strategies on international arenas. The article concludes with a reflection on Brandes' 'worldmaking' in relation to other analyses of the region's place internationally. The sources used for the study consist mainly of Brandes' correspondence in the 1870s and 1880s, his autobiography from 1905–1907 (a shorter English version in 1906), as well as his political speeches and literary work.

Offsetting Imperial Decline

The golden age of modern Scandinavian literature preceded the golden age of Scandinavian welfare by a century. The former started in the 1870s, the latter peaked around 1970. Between these dates power manifested itself both temporally and spatially. It mattered who came first and was able to set the agenda for others, but so did state support to back up technological, social and cultural innovation (for a discussion, see Wallerstein 2006). To make up for weaknesses in the political and military domain, the diminished Scandinavian polities could look for other ways of projecting power. Brandes' sought to achieve this objective by placing Denmark and Scandinavia in the frontline of social and cultural progress (Allen 2012).

Turbulence in the Baltic Sea region in the nineteenth century provided the historical context for socio-cultural reorientation in Scandinavia. At the start of the century, Sweden and Denmark had come significantly weakened out of the Napoleonic wars (e.g., Kirby 1995). Sweden's decline as a European power began already in the early eighteenth century and was sealed by the loss of Finland to Russia in 1809, for which it was compensated by a personal union with Norway in 1814. The latter date, marking the end of the Dano-Norwegian Kingdom, constitutes a landmark in the history of Danish decline, followed by another one in 1864 when Denmark lost control over its southern duchies in the Second Schleswig War. The former Scandinavian powers found themselves in an uncomfortable position as small states in the great power dominated Concert of Europe. Denmark struggled to adapt, surrounded as it was by powerful neighbours in the East, West and South, in an era that has been described as 'the most hostile environment for the small state' in recent history; the category was defined as consisting of those states that were not great powers – because 'European empires had incorporated

most other polities worldwide, and because there simply were not enough sovereign states around to make for a viable category of "middle powers"' (Neumann and Gstöhl 2004; see also Maass 2017; Holbraad 1984; Bjørn et al. 2003). As a middle power by virtue of its position in the international system between the dominant and dominated, Denmark's strategic location for the traffic of goods, people and ideas to and from the Baltic added to its relative importance to the great powers, along with the latters' interest in maintaining a neutral power at the entrance to the Baltic (Holbraad 1991, 23).

For a short period after the defeat in 1864, Danish governments entertained the idea of recovering some of the lost territories from Prussia and Austria. But after German unification in 1871, these hopes focused mainly on the Danish-speaking parts of Schleswig, the primary concern of foreign policy being to improve relations with the powerful southern neighbour (Holbraad 1991, 27). In a longer perspective it is worth recalling that Denmark had been adjusting to new geopolitical realities in the region and scaling down its territorial ambitions since 1720. But the transition from a composite state to a smaller nation-state was a slow process. Perceptions of the country as a European power of some significance were not abandoned overnight. On the contrary, as is often the case with declining powers, writes Holbraad, 'the psychological adjustment to reduced circumstances took a long time'. As part of this transformation, neutrality, which had become a practice of Danish diplomacy in the eighteenth century, became 'an ideology of foreign policy' in the following century (Holbraad 1991, 20, 23; see also Feldbæk 1992, 80–89). The political and moral outcome of 1864 – a locus classicus in Danish collective memory – was captured by the motto '*Hvad udad tabtes, det skal indad vindes*' ('External loss, inward gain'). These words by the poet H. P. Holst were linked to the post-1864 focus on developing Denmark's internal possessions and lands, Western Jutland in particular, and resisting the expansion of German nationalism in the south (Frandsen 1996; Glenthøj 2014). Despair translated into nationalist proposals for offsetting a gloomy geopolitical outlook by consolidating popular resources within the decimated and now (with the loss of the German-speaking southern parts) monocultural small state, albeit one that still possessed colonies such as the Danish West Indies.

It was at this juncture that Georg Brandes entered the scene as a leading proponent of a cultural opinion that considered internal consolidation an insufficient renewal strategy. Critical of both the militarist tradition and the isolationist turn, he advocated for internationalisation through increased non-military interaction with the world beyond the region. Although not the dominant one, this position was not unique. Socialists, pacifists, entrepreneurs and the maritime industry were just as critical of nationalist isolation in an era of globalisation, and united by a shared belief in the importance of 'status-

seeking' (de Carvalho and Neumann 2015; Larson, Paul, and Wohlforth 2014). This focus on international status and prestige was becoming an increasingly important strategy for the Scandinavian small or middle powers.

While his main priority was transforming society through art, Brandes was not immune geostrategic reasoning. He elaborates on Denmark's predicament in a long letter from Rome shortly before the Paris Commune took power in France. Commenting on the prevailing concerns for maintaining national autonomy in small countries feeling the pressure from expanding empires, Brandes (1978, letter from 8.3.1871) suggests that Denmark grappled with difficulties that were not only geopolitical in nature. In the new world of industrialised and competing economies, market logics added to the country's problems: 'A tradesman whose whole capital consists of ten rigsdaler is no tradesman. The large capitals swallow up the small. The small must seek their salvation in associations, partnerships, joint-stock companies, etc.' From Brandes' perspective in 1871, it was only a question of time before Denmark was absorbed into the German sphere, possibly by Scandinavianism merging with Germanness into 'a kind of *Gothogermanism*'. It could try to stall this development by joining forces with its neighbours, but with France defeated and Germany unified there were few potential allies south of the border. Denmark's options were limited to Sweden-Norway, 'a little, unimportant state' according to Brandes, perhaps echoing his own anxieties about Denmark's future relevance. The French in turn were geopolitically destined for decline as the principle of nationality that France had introduced in European affairs was beginning to work against the country. But, as Max Weber among others has pointed out (de Carvalho and Neumann 2015, 6), military power does not translate directly into international status and prestige. Brandes predicted that France, like Athens in the Roman empire, would maintain its culturally and scientifically central role for the foreseeable future, while Germany would move ahead in the competition between European great powers over the medium-term, only to be blocked by Russia in the next phase. Globally, however, the world would soon belong to a Transatlantic, English-speaking alliance ('In 200 years the world will be Anglo-Saxon'). The moral for Denmark was not to forget old lovers (France), to improve chances of national survival by forming alliances with the Scandinavian neighbours, and to embrace Anglo-Saxon culture (Brandes 1978, letter from 8.3.1871, 1906, 370–371). While remaining attached to German-speaking Europe until his death in 1927, Brandes was himself an important catalyst in Scandinavia's orientation towards Anglo-American culture, especially before and after World War I (Hertel 2004, 79).

These private reflections by Georg Brandes on Denmark's prospects in the face of great power competition and German unification serve as a reminder of the geopolitical constraints that shaped cultural survival strategies in late nineteenth-century Scandinavia. Denmark's main concern was to avoid

sliding back from its former status as a European power to that of a periphery with, as later defined by Rokkan and Urwin (1983, 2), 'little control over its fate and possessing minimal resources for the defence of its distinctiveness against outside pressures'. The country's shrinking population was seen as a problem, and not only because of what Hobsbawm (2002[1992]) later referred to as the 'threshold principle', implying that only entities of a certain size could prevail. As Glenthøj (2019) argues, this principle explains why the various national projects in the region and the broader Pan-Scandinavian movement were so intertwined. It also shaped the strategies of Danish intellectuals, who expressed doubts over the prospects of culture to thrive in small circumstances. In a letter to his journalist-politician brother Edvard, Brandes (1978, letter from 20.3.1871) complained that a lack of critical mass was detrimental to cultural vitality in Denmark. As he saw it, the problem was not scarcity of individual talent, but weak prospects for these talents to grow in cross-fertilising interaction. Elsewhere, in a book summarising a period of voluntary exile in Berlin (1877–1883), Brandes compares the diversity of opinion in the German capital with the fact that one opinion could become monopolistic in a narrow space such as Copenhagen, where everyone received the same education and read the same books (Brandes 1885; Berthelsen and Egebjerg 2004, 112). Expanding this limited space through regional integration (of publication markets, academic networks, Scandinavian theatre etc.) was a potential remedy (Glenthøj 2019; Hansen 2018). For Brandes, expansion through networking and comparison was a political and scholarly ambition grounded in personal experience. Looking back at his youth from 1906 he recalls a dinner conversation in Hamburg, where a cosmopolitan merchant who had returned from Mexico directed his attention to 'the narrowness at home, where only the few had travelled far or collected material which might by comparison offer new points of view and give one a comprehensive experience of life' (Brandes 1906, 193).

Two aspects of Brandes' outward-looking agenda were particularly aligned with the diplomatic aims of the Danish small state. First, the idea of peace and understanding between the Scandinavian people was both a condition for maintaining a regional balance of powers (Holbraad 1991) and central to the novel emphasis on cultural integration within Scandinavia (Hemstad et al. 2018). Neutral responses to European wars were co-ordinated between Denmark and Sweden-Norway (two countries since 1905) between the Crimean War (1853–56) and the First World War. In the context of both cultural and foreign policy, Scandinavian transnationalism and peaceful relations between the former great power rivals were seen as first steps towards a more encompassing internationalist programme. Second, the political and cultural elites alike entertained the idea that mediation and arbitration internationally provided effective survival strategies for a small state in the wake of 1864. Denmark and initially also Sweden had successfully experimented with this idea during the Crimean War. But it was put on hold in Danish foreign

policy until the 1890s (Holbraad 1991, 29–30, 44–45; Bjørn et al., 272–273, 314) as Denmark increasingly focused on consolidating its internal moral and material resources. In this period, in the 1870s and 1880s, the Brandesians who spoke out against all forms of provincialism were the main proponents of proactive internationalism. However, just as in the case of Ibsen (Rem & Fulsås 2017), the international icon of Scandinavian cultural modernity, their project was not about unrestrained internationalism, but rather nation- and region-building abroad. In the next phase, at the turn of the century, political and cultural internationalism came together in Scandinavian peace-building foreign policy and Brandes' own widely publicised interventions on behalf of the rights of individuals, minorities and small nations against great power expansionism and imperialism. By that time, Brandes had advanced from spearheading a Scandinavian literary movement to the position of a European public intellectual (Knudsen 1998, 360–364).

Literature and geopolitics

In his extensive literary criticism and commentary on Danish and European politics, Brandes tended to blur the lines between the political and the cultural, by casting social and political struggles in cultural or literary terms. To some extent this was even an explicit goal towards which a senator and law professor in Rome (Giuseppe Saredo; see Brandes 1978, letter from 31.3.1871) had pointed him in 1871. The idea was that politics keeps art, philosophy and society together. Books were not merely seen as works of art but as weapons in social debates. Positioning himself as a pioneer of cultural modernisation, Brandes exemplifies what Bourdieu (1993, 44) refers to as the structural affinities between the literary avant-garde and the political vanguard.

The way Brandes conceived of literature as a weapon in his interventions in Danish politics is well-known (Hertel and Møller Kristensen 1980). What interests us here is how literature was used to redefine the region's place in international politics. Debates on this question in the late nineteenth century were marked by an opposition between those who advocated for internal consolidation and *Realpolitik*, and others who emphasised the value of international solidarity and strategic mediation, and the need for regional coordination in the domains of cultural production, education and civil society (Hvidt 1994; Ekman 2010, 9). Scandinavian cooperation also applied to foreign policy (coordinated neutrality in great power conflicts), social policy, professional organisation and the economy (the Nordic monetary union of 1872) . The above-mentioned quest for regional unification – at different levels of ambition from policy coordination to political unity – as a survival strategy for smaller states had long functioned as a driver of regionalist efforts.

What distinguished the Pan-Scandinavianism of Brandes and his collaborators was their belief that much of this work should take place outside the region, and not only by means of cultural propaganda but through active engagement on international arenas. The idea was that the cultural consolidation of the region was best achieved in close interaction and competition with 'external' literatures and ideas (Brandes 1872, introduction). Furthermore, as mentioned, Brandes considered access to cultural markets abroad a condition for a richer and more differentiated literature to develop within the region. In Denmark, the literary progressives fashioned these goals as part of an on-going European reactivation of Enlightenment thinking. Freethought and secularism became increasingly political in the last decades of the century (Bagge 1992). The journal *Politiken* – launched by Edvard Brandes and the journalist and *Venstre* (Liberal) politician Viggo Hørup in 1884, following a split within *Venstre* between a 'Danish' and a 'European' fraction – became a central mouthpiece for the liberal opposition against a long period of national-conservative rule by *Højre* (the Right). The social-liberal party *Det Radikale Venstre* was formed in 1905.

Discursively, the cultural progressives testified to the contested nature of a Nordic public sphere and the multi-layered structure of transnational cultural space. If 'Europe' stood for the most advanced stage of modernity, Scandinavia constituted an intermediate stratum between national constraint and international freedom. 'Radicalism is excluded from this pious and fat land', Edvard Brandes wrote to August Strindberg in 1881. 'What we must achieve, in short, is to command public opinion in the Nordic countries'. (Brandes et al. 1939, letter from 3.7.1881.) The Scandinavian framework offered a means to project their radical programme onto a larger canvas and to broaden the channels for the traffic of ideas between the region and the European core (Ekman 2010, ch. 5). But there were significant obstacles. Brandes especially lamented the impact of nationalisms and cultural hierarchies on intellectual life, to which he was exposed during travels and periods of voluntary exile in Europe; Italy in 1870–71, Berlin in 1877–1883 and several periods in Paris (e.g., Nolin 1976). He tried to counter these tendencies by supporting efforts to institutionalise 'intercultural space' (Pym 2008) through his involvement (Dahl 1998) in journals such as the multilingual *Cosmopolis* (1896–1898).

Summarising what we have discussed so far, at least three sets of motives drove Brandes and his associates to look beyond the national framework. First, the quest for alternative sources of international relevance, such as intermediation (discussed in the following sections) and alliance-formation to compensate for geopolitical decline. Second, the problem of size and small numbers; this problem affected markets and other conditions for cultural production and encouraged regional cooperation in a variety of cultural and policy-related matters. Third, the mobilisation of internationality against

conservative hegemony at home. Some of these drivers operated, following Neumann's (1994) distinction, from the 'outside-in' (e.g., German unification), others from the 'inside-out' (e.g., policy coordination between socio-culturally similar neighbours constituting a value community of sorts). They were simultaneously operational on individual, professional and regional scales, as witnessed by the mobilisation of international symbolic capital against national conservatism by the cultural radicals, scientific and policy coordination, and the regional strategy of pooling interests and displaying a unified front outward to boost the region's international standing. In the case of Denmark, we should recall the existential fears of being culturally colonised by Germanness, beginning with the entanglement of Danish politics and the German federation after 1815 and exacerbated after the Schleswig wars in 1848–51 and 1864 (Østergård 1997). Brandes' view was that neither militarism, isolation nor small-state alliances provided an effective shield against this fate (Allen 2012, 49). The effects of the necessary structural constraints implied by a non-dominant position in the international system should instead be mitigated by opting for a pro- rather than re-active stance in international affairs and a programme of socio-cultural renewal. 'Modern' in the Modern Breakthrough referred not only to catching up, it underscored the need for rejection of the status quo and the rejuvenation of society starting with aesthetic renewal (Aabenhus 2018).

Other notable exceptions to isolationist tendencies in this period include the industrial and financial elites such as C.F. Tietgen, who profited from the same globalising tendencies that between 1870 and 1914 inspired Brandes' reassessment of the relationship between the domestic and the foreign. Globalisation was reshaping social life in the Danish capital through the international circulation of culture, people, finance and professional networks. Newly founded periodicals and literary magazines, the publishing industry and Fredrik V. Hegel who in the 1870s made Gyldendal Scandinavia's leading publishing house merit attention among the 'external' factors that conditioned Brandes' rise to fame by facilitating the diffusion of modern ideas and texts. In addition to this intersection between industrial and cultural modernisation, the financial support for scientific and cultural production by newly established foundations such as Carlsberg constituted another. While Brandes was clearly at odds with some of the conservative principles of the entrepreneurial elites, he did not challenge their belief in the virtues of free trade, which for Brandes were aligned with free thought (Glenthøj 2014, 480; Hertel 2004, 25–26).

In the cultural domain, the objective of autonomy was according to Georg and Edvard Brandes best achieved through active engagement and marketing abroad, including and especially in Germany. This view was challenged by members of their own circle of intellectuals and politicians on the liberal left such as Viggo Hørup, who preferred keeping a low profile internationally – 'so that we are not in the way where someone might happen to step on us by

mistake' (cit. in Allen 2012, 64). On the far right, it was dismissed by the kind of isolationist conservatism, militarism and anti-Semitic pan-Germanism indorsed by the writer Harald Nielsen (Bagge 1992).

The painful memories from 1864 had not receded when Georg Brandes (1894) three decades later gave a talk for an audience of students in Copenhagen. Intervening in the ubiquitous debates on national identification by defending his own interpretation of cultural nationalism, Brandes argued that cultural offence was the best defence for Denmark and Scandinavia. The national and the international were mutually constituent categories, and Denmark's 'political and cultural salvation lay in an enhanced Danish presence on the European cultural scene'. But if that was the case, he argued, the governing National Liberals had weakened Denmark's chances of regaining self-respect 'by requiring that patriotic Danes ignore the rest of Europe, with the result that Europe lost interest in Denmark' (Brandes 1894; Allen 2012, 81–85). Indeed, between the 1870s and the 1890s, Brandes' efforts to counter cultural nationalism with liberal-progressive internationalism competed with powerful conflicting images of Denmark and Scandinavia both within and beyond the region. These included the Christian idealism of local elites, idyllic projections of pan-Germanic authenticity or the fantasies of a hazy North in symbolist representations of Scandinavia and Russia in the cultural capital of the world, Paris (Briens 2010; Wilfert-Portal 2002).

Regional and global hierarchies

From a non-dominant position, international cultural space could appear biased against small countries and linguistic peripheries. In his 1899 comment on Goethe's concept of *Weltliteratur*, Brandes (transl. in Rosendahl Thomsen 2008), who grappled with this topic throughout his life, sourly notes that it was easier for a third-rate writer from a dominant linguistic region to achieve international recognition than for a first-rate writer from a dominated region. Three decades earlier, addressing the literary symptoms of being located at some distance from the perceived cultural centre, he claimed that '[o]ur literature resembles a small chapel in a big church, it has its altar, but the main altar is not here' (Brandes 1872, 10).

Brandes' internationalist Scandinavianism followed upon the demise of a political Scandinavianism that before 1864 envisioned a political union under one king, as well as an earlier iteration of cultural Scandinavism supported by writers such as H.C. Andersen in Denmark and Fredrika Bremer in Sweden (Ekman 2010; Hilson 2008). For Brandes, the individual Nordic literatures gained from being embedded in a broader framework of 'modern Scandinavian literature', achieved by opening rather than closing channels for transfers and comparisons with other political and linguistic

regions (Rosendahl Thomsen 2008). One crucial requirement for such a programme to succeed was that artists, writers and intellectuals from the region displayed a unified front outward. Ideally, as in subsequent political regional cooperation on international arenas (e.g. Götz and Haggrén 2009), disagreements should be handled locally, enabling 'Scandinavian literature' to appear as a bloc beyond the region.

When internal disagreements nevertheless surfaced, they stemmed from regional hierarchies. This testifies to the relative and constantly evolving nature of core-periphery dynamics and the fact that intermediate regions constitute peripheries vis-à-vis centres and centres in relation to other peripheries. Brandes and Copenhagen exemplify the observation by Rokkan and Urwin (1983, 18) that the longer the distance is between centre and periphery, 'the greater the need for relay points of command in the provinces and the greater the risk that they will become the nuclei of independent centre formation'. Such 'independent centre formation' was very much what was at stake in the cultural field when the Norwegian Ibsen in the mid-1870s accused Brandes of replicating the kind of core-like behaviour for which the latter blamed French and English intellectuals. These were tensions between the regional centre of Copenhagen and the Norwegian periphery. Ibsen opposed Brandes' claims to speak for the whole region, including the Norwegian and Finnish peripheries, arguing that the Dane was merely articulating the viewpoint of a narrow group of Copenhagen intellectuals. The point was that if power was about who could afford to ignore whom, the regionally dominant Copenhagen elite could indeed afford to overlook developments elsewhere in the region, whereas Norwegian and Swedish intellectuals were well-informed about developments in Copenhagen (Fulsås and Rem 2017, 32–33; Ibsen 1874). Brandes himself claimed to be a pragmatic realist in such matters. Beyond Denmark, it was more practical for him to go along with the prevailing view of the region instead of making futile attempts at insisting on national differences between the three Scandinavian countries (Brandes 1978, letter from 20.6.1870). To achieve international recognition it was, as Sassoon (2006, 642) observes, 'necessary to give foreigners what they wanted, to deal with themes which had wider resonance: in other words it was necessary not to be too national-specific'. It was also easier to make room for the different Nordic literatures in European cultural space by wrapping them in the single package of 'Scandinavian literature' (Ekman 2010, 227).

Insofar as the literary modernisers advocated closer integration into European cultural space as a strategy for national and regional survival, the process entailed a double movement of integration and resistance. The logic of the market and globalisation pointed in one direction, the logic of national and regional consolidation in another. The literary sphere mirrored and contributed to both trends. On the one hand, Brandes reinforced the view from the centre by promoting cultural standardisation. The way he spatialised modernity and focused in his work on the core

literatures of France, Germany and England exemplifies how centres, following Hill (2013), are constructed at the periphery by local actors picking up ideas from the core and treating them as if they were universal. However, Brandes put question marks around *their* universalism. It is also worth recalling that he initially adopted internationalism in the early 1870s as a response to failed attempts at gaining a position in Copenhagen. Defending his oppositional stance at home, he turned to internationality as a recourse (Nolin 1976, ch. 3). On the other hand, he helped create a space for 'Scandinavian literature' internationally and marketed Denmark as one of the 'most advanced' societies of Europe, as one German critic (quoted in Allen 2012, 60) observed towards the end of Brandes' life. Back home, he nevertheless portrayed local culture as backward and positioned himself as someone who would help Denmark catch up with modern Europe – having been 'as usual' forty years behind progressive Europe, as he declared at the outset of his career (Brandes 1872, 14).

Considering how linguistically disadvantaged the Scandinavian literary fields were in international cultural competition, they always risked absorption into a dominant language and culture. The challenge was to find the right balance between integration and differentiation, which since the eighteenth century had shaped the development of Danish national literature in relation to Germany (Feldbæk 1991). On a practical level, this manifested itself in different ways. Brandes personally was constantly fighting over unauthorised printings of his works, until Denmark in 1903 signed the Berne Convention for the Protection of Literary and Artistic Works (Knudsen 1994, 414–421). At the same time, he recognised the importance for Scandinavian literature of being able to access German markets, which for Scandinavian intellectuals was the first path towards international recognition (Fulsås and Rem 2017).

On the whole, regional cooperation abroad, in cultural as in political matters, gained increasing importance in the wake of the failure of political Scandinavianism to translate into Swedish support for Denmark in the War against Austria and Prussia in 1864. In contrast to the German unification process, launched by the war with Denmark, and Italian unification, culminating only three years earlier in the establishment of the Kingdom of Italy, Scandinavia lacked an equivalent to Piedmont or Prussia (or Cavour or Bismarck) to manage the process of political unification. Instead, the various nationalisms within the region remained embedded in a broader Pan-Scandinavianism (Glenthøj 2019), which provided the ideational framework for regional cooperation based on cultural affinity and the pooling of national interests in dealing with the world beyond the region.

Scandinavia – a third region

In a well-known formulation of the double movement implied by comparative research, Brandes (1872, vii) declares: 'The comparative view possesses the double advantage of bringing foreign literature so near to us that we can assimilate it, and of removing our own until we are enabled to see it in its true perspective. We neither see what is too near the eye nor what is too far away from it'. The goal, then, was not merely to assimilate, but to overcome the limitations of excessive self-reliance by means of comparison (Berthelsen and Egebjerg 2004, 100–101). From his own vantage point, Brandes considered non-dominant regions resistant to the kind of parochialism that hindered fruitful dialogue between competing universalisms in the centres, and hence well-placed to carry out this double movement. He shared this belief with other pioneers in the emerging field of comparative literature studies such as the Transylvanian Hugo Meltzl, editor of the first journal devoted to the theme, launched in 1877, or the Irish literary scholar Hutcheson Macaulay Posnett. As writers occupying marginal positions both culturally and institutionally, Damrosch (2020, 31) notes that 'Posnett and Meltzl understood the ease with which cosmopolitanism could collapse into its seeming opposite, becoming a form of imperial nationalism'. While semi-peripheral actors who like Brandes represented a kind of intermediate space between the dominant and the dominated (on this distinction applied to the art field, see Bourdieu 1992) were acutely aware of this danger, they also benefitted from their comparative insights into mutually ignorant or hostile positions in the core. Against this background, it is easy to see how those regions labelled semi-peripheries in world-systems analysis (Wallerstein 1976) perform a stabilising function in the international system, as a glue between centres and peripheries (Arrighi and Drangel 1989, 12). But do they also contribute to maintaining the distance between units in the system? We can shed light on this question by turning to Georg Simmel's multi-level theory of asymmetric social interaction.

One of the founding fathers of modern sociology, a philosopher of sociability and Brandes' contemporary, Simmel understood social life as constituted through reciprocal interaction. His fragmented reflections on 'the sociological logic of the situation of three', notably the essay 'Exkurs über den Fremden' (1908), were intended as a contribution to the neglected impact of neutral actors on two-party relationships, which is of particular relevance for understanding Brandes' position. Simmel's discussion centred on the structural power inherent in social constellations of more than two. Interests, authority and flows of information are the focus of his analysis. Acknowledging the beneficial effects of the mediator or arbiter for alleviating tensions between antagonistic elements, he underlines the power bestowed on the third party who benefits from a privileged relationship with mutually hostile adversaries. This framework is

helpful for understanding how intellectuals – as well as individual and collective actors in other domains – in semi-peripheral regions like Scandinavia both suffer and gain from their location in international space.

We may recall that a starting point for Brandes' career as a comparatist was his early discovery that leading proponents in the tringle between French, German and English intellectual life to an astonishing degree seemed uninformed about each other's work. This provided an opening for someone like him to bring together mutually ill-informed traditions. Fashioning himself as a mediator alleviating tensions between two or more dominant cultures suspicious of each other, Brandes' position was aligned with the scientific ideal of the objective or neutral observer. In discusssing the connection between the qualities of the mediator and the 'objectivity' of the stranger, Simmel (1950, 404–405) describes the latter as someone 'who is not committed to the radically unique ingredients and peculiar tendencies of the group, and therefore approaches them with the specific attitude of "objectivity"'. Indeed, Brandes' manoeuvring in European intellectual networks, and the way he gathered much of his source material for his magnum opus from intimate conversations with prominent European writers and intellectuals (his letters provide ample evidence, see Brandes 1978), supports Simmel's (1950, 405) claim that objectivity makes the stranger the recipient of 'the most surprising openness – confidences which sometimes have the character of a confessional and which would be carefully withheld from a more closely related person'.

But we can also understand Brandes, borrowing yet another term from Simmel's conceptual toolkit, as *tertius gaudens* (the 'rejoicing third'): the third-party mediator or arbiter who benefits from the animosity between hostile parties by claiming a position above the mutually ignorant particularisms of dominant cultures. 'I was very much surprised', Brandes reminisces, 'when Mill informed me that he had not read a line of Hegel, either in the original or in translation, and regarded the entire Hegelian philosophy as sterile and empty sophistry. I mentally confronted this with the opinion of the man at the Copenhagen University who knew the history of philosophy best, my teacher, Hans Brøchner, who knew, so to speak, nothing of contemporary English and French philosophy, and did not think them worth studying' (Brandes 1906, 276–277). Connecting this observation to the poor knowledge of French and English philosophy among German-oriented Danish intellectuals, Brandes saw a space opening for someone who could benefit from familiarity with both parties in a relationship of mutual ignorance. This was one way in which small states and actors within them could 'benefit from being weak' (Baldacchino and Wivel 2020, 15). On the other hand, following Simmel's suggestion that the power bestowed on the third party is proportionate to the level of animosity between the adversaries, Brandes may have been exaggerating the degree of ignorance or hostility between French, German and English intellectuals. There was a specific

reason for Brandes to emphasise the lack of communication between German and English philosophers: 'I came to the conclusion that here was a task for one who understood the thinkers of the two directions, who did not mutually understand one another' (Brandes 1906, 277).

Brandes clearly gained from exploiting the symbolic power accrued to the third party. Simmel connects a variety of functions to thirdness, ranging from neutral mediation to 'divide and conquer' tactics. In the former instance, a 'third mediating social element deprives conflicting claims of their affective qualities because it neutrally formulates and presents these claims to the two parties involved'. In the latter instance, the *tertius gaudens* gains a specific advantage 'from the fact that he has an equal, equally independent, and for this very reason decisive, relation to two others' (Simmel 1950, 147, 157–159). In Warsaw in the 1880s, Brandes could thus spend one day in conversation with Polish Catholics and the next day with their liberal adversaries (Knudsen 2002, 30). As an intellectual broker, he combined the functions of the neutral mediator and the 'divide-and-conquer-arbiter'. As an example of the latter, Simmel mentions small parliamentary parties or states that gain their influence 'because the great parties keep one another in approximate balance'. He continues:

> What alone is important is that the forces of two antagonistic elements paralyze one another and thus actually give unlimited power to the intrinsically extremely weak position of a third element not yet engaged in the issue. Of course, intrinsically strong third elements profit no less from such a situation (Simmel 1950, 157).

Can we compare such individual positioning strategies to the behaviour of countries or regions? Around the time Brandes was discovering the advantages of the third party mediator, scholars at the University of Copenhagen were rewriting the history of Danish foreign policy by tracing the idea of Danish neutrality to the early eighteenth century, attributing moral and legal ideas of a later period to eighteenth-century actors. Enhancing the position of the small state or middle power by 'moral means' rather than by force was a cornerstone in this emerging narrative. Ideally, Denmark could play a role that was as beneficial to itself as it was to the world. 'The most useful of the services that a small state might provide', writes Holbraad (1991, 4), 'seemed to be that of mediating between major states'. In opposition to both dominant powers engaged in struggles over hegemony and dominated peripheries with little room for independent manoeuvring, the semi-peripheries were less prone to see international politics as a zero-sum game and more focused on combining the best ingredients of competing projects.

This was also the starting point of *Main Currents in Nineteenth-Century Literature* (1872–1890), Brandes' pioneering study of comparative literature (Damrosch 2020; Rosendahl Thomsen 2008). Distancing himself from the dominant view of national literature as an expression of the national spirit

isolated from the surrounding world, Brandes advocated a relational approach to national literatures. With its focus on the development of literary currents through cross-fertilising interaction within an uneven global literary space, comparative literature became a weapon in the hands of critics of both national self-sufficiency and imperialist cosmopolitanism. Comparison thus served a critical function in local debates when Brandes attacked domestic cultural stagnation and emphasised the need for Denmark to catch up (Brandes 1906 [1901]), 104, 136), but also when he stressed the value of an outsider's view of developments in the core, consisting of French, German and English literature (Bjerring-Hansen 2018; Jelsbak 2019). In this respect, the Brandes of *Main Currents* testifies to Simmel's (1950, 152) observation that the third element serves to perpetuate group cohesion. But he was also, in Simmel's terms, the 'egoistic exploiter of the situation', who in 1872 defended the cosmopolitan view as the basis for the moral authority of an intellectual aristocracy whose opinions were allegedly less shaped by the immediate concerns of the surrounding society than those of the average person (Berthelsen and Egebjerg 2004, 109).

Like other intellectuals and scientists at the time (Crawford 1992), Brandes struggled to reconcile cosmopolitan and national allegiances. The ideal of detachment related to various aspects of his person and predicament, such as Jewishness, scientific objectivity, intellectual opposition, critical distance to the core countries and languages, and small states on international arenas. For Simmel, the affinity between scientific objectivity and the third position relates to a difference in the psychological energies invested in the relationship: the non-partisan 'represents intellectuality, while the parties in conflict represent feeling and will'. When the non-partisan is in the position of *tertius gaudens*, 'that is, of egoistic exploiter of the situation', the third party is able view things with 'the feeling of a slight ironical superiority' (Simmel 1950, 162), an emotional feature of thirdness. These ideals of objectivity and relative detachment were key components when Brandes in 1871 launched his project in the atmosphere of scientific positivism shaping his work at the time; tellingly, his lectures at the University of Copenhagen were received with greater enthusiasm in the faculties of medicine and natural science than philosophy, law and especially theology (Hertel 2004, 9).

Worldmaking from Copenhagen

This article has drawn attention to structural homologies between geopolitical and literary positioning strategies in Scandinavia in the period 1870–1914. Investigating the roots of the Scandinavian social model in the twentieth century, Musiał (2002, 10) rightly observes that '[p]rior to its discursive conception as an economic and social model in the 1960s and 1970s,

a mental framework of Scandinavian uniqueness and progressiveness had already been constructed in cultural terms'. Where Musiał highlights the importance of early twentieth-century manifestations of Scandinavian cultural and scientific innovation for the international discussion on the 'Nordic social model', this article has focused on earlier efforts mobilise cultural achievements to offset political decline.

We have already discussed Brandes' different proposals for strengthening the region's presence on international arenas. He also encouraged the marketing of Scandinavian social innovations abroad. In his speech 'On National Sentiment' (Brandes 1894), the Grundtvigian people's colleges, legal assistance for persons without means and workers' education are singled out as worthy of praise when presenting Denmark to foreigners. He calls them 'cultural paths', these social innovations through which 'little Denmark has provided Europe an example'. Adding that '[a]s few as we are, there is nothing to stop us from showing other people cultural paths they have not yet discovered', he suggests that 'creating values' is the only way for Denmark to assert itself internationally (Brandes 1894, 1905).

Brandes' thoughts on Denmark and Scandinavia in the world stand out for their strategic sensitivity to the political and cultural constraints that in his view prompted an urgent need to redefine the relationship between the local, the national, the regional and the international. His geopolitically fuelled efforts to promote the international circulation of literature and his belief that novelty emerges through international encounters helped redefine Scandinavia's role in transnational intellectual interaction (Nygård and Strang 2016). The objectivistic ideal of late nineteenth-century positivism, corrected with Brandes' own voluntarism, translated into an idea of Scandinavia as a privileged space for gaining comparative insights into competing universalisms. To be sure, the fate of the region depended on geopolitical developments, but Scandinavian actors should strive to shape international debates in a way that maximised the manoeuvring space of non-dominant states. Securing recognition for Scandinavian culture internationally was therefore important. But it was not enough. In a speech delivered on the island of Møn in 1904, Brandes cautioned against inflated national self-esteem in small states. His co-nationals should instead make acknowledgement of their vulnerability in world politics the basis for a vision of global solidarity: 'Thus it was my ideal it should be known that, despite the small size of our country, men lived here who felt sympathy with all wronged individuals or oppressed peoples across the world and who lifted their voices, spoke on their behalf … All Poles and Finns, Ruthenians, Georgians, Armenians should know that freedom and justice lived in Denmark' (Brandes 1905; transl. in Allen 2012, 101). Was Brandes projecting onto Denmark his own attempts at mobilising a position of relative

detachment for speaking truth to power, at a time when the term 'intellectual' was spreading from the French Dreyfus affair to other languages – to Danish incidentally through the mediation of Brandes in 1899 (Knudsen 1998, 335)?

Brandes and the Men of the Modern Breakthrough were not the only ones who realised the potential of ideational leadership and social progressivism for offsetting geopolitical decline. But they merit attention for taking much of this activity beyond the borders of Denmark and Scandinavia, which for Brandes was also where the nation could best discover itself in close interaction with outsiders' perceptions of the country and the region. Through his travels and public interventions from Russia to the United States (Allen 2012), Brandes carved out a discursive space for Scandinavian socio-cultural modernity, which should be considered in historical assessments of the great-power-friendly and bridge-building strategies of Scandinavian small states in the international organisations and official networks for peace in the twentieth century. He belonged to a group of nineteenth-century intellectuals and politicians that was central to the construction of a narrative of *Norden* as an internationally peaceful and socially progressive region aspiring for a leading role in global conflict resolution. Others included Brandes' collaborator Bjørnstjerne Bjørnson, who played an important role in the early peace movement and in 1884 advised the progressive European small states to position themselves as the 'Bastion of Peace on Earth', the Danish pacifist and founding member of the Inter-Parliamentary Union Fredrik Bajer, or across the border in Sweden Klas Pontus Arnoldson, who shared the Nobel Peace Prize with Bajer in 1908, and Ellen Key, also a follower of Brandes, who advocated for the vanguard position of 'Neoscandinavianism' within the global peace movement (Keel 1999, 256–257; Ekman 2010, 199–200, 243–246; Ørskov 2023).

This article has traced the idea of a socially and culturally progressive North that could be marketed as such abroad to Brandes' international networking, his role as a Scandinavian and European intellectual, and his widely circulated scholarly and journalistic texts. At a time when Denmark was engaged in a defensive struggle for international relevance, he shifted attention to the need to pro-actively market socio-cultural achievements and shape perceptions of Danish and Scandinavian intellectual and social life abroad. He personally did this by working behind the scenes to influence the content of his German translator Adolf Strodtmann's 1873 book *Das Geistige Leben in Dänemark* (Allen 2019), among many other examples. With hindsight, these efforts at marketing the socio-cultural avant-gardism of the region succeeded beyond Brandes' wildest dreams, if we are to believe the scholarship on Scandinavia's 'disproportionate' role in advancing not only social but also literary and cultural modernity (e.g., Bradbury and McFarlane 1976, introduction; van den Berg et. al 2012; Stråth and Sørensen 1997). A century after Brandes began campaigning for Scandinavian progressivism in Europe, the region

had become more integrated than ever. It was portrayed both from within and from the outside (Etzioni 1965; Hilson 2008; Jalava 2013) as being united by common linguistic and religious references, shared historical experiences and intersecting visions of social modernity. In 1965, the Danish writer Henrik Stangerup was under no illusion about the world-historical significance of the region's social achievements: 'We are experiencing today in Scandinavia one of the most important experiments of world history. That may sound pretentious, yet it isn't. Scandinavia of today is the world's avant-garde society. What is taking place among us will happen in other countries tomorrow, as soon as they have reached a comparable level of freedom and welfare' (cit. in Ruth 1984, 63). By then, however, Sweden had surpassed Denmark in the race for the title of the most exemplary among Scandinavian societies.

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