

Emotions in International Politics: Distrust towards the British in Norwegian Public Life, 1814–1914

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Abstract

Norway's relations to Britain have traditionally been analysed from a 'realist' angle by historians. Thus, geopolitics and more or less unspecified 'national interests' have been the main theoretical framework to a degree that borders on geographical determinism. That made it reasonable that Britain was supposed to act as Norway's protector – the 'British guarantee'. Implicitly, the relationship between Norway and Britain has been depicted as good and trustworthy. This article challenges these 'realistic' analyses. Based on recent international research on emotions, which will be discussed relatively broadly, and on Norwegian source studies, this article reviews the history of Norwegian distrust of Britain, which existed parallel to the allegedly trustful belief in the 'British guarantee'.

Keywords

public expressions, emotions in international politics, Anglo-Norwegian relations

Offering a toast at the Royal Palace during a state visit to Norway in 2018, the Duke of Cambridge stated that the relationship between Norway and Britain was 'extensive and very special'. Geography and history had led Norway to be 'the staunchest of [Britain's] allies'. King Haakon's resistance against the Germans in 1940 and the 'courageous spirit' in Norway during the five years of Nazi occupation strengthened the traditional good Anglo-Norwegian neighbourliness. 'But above all we are the strongest of friends' (The Duke of Cambridge 2018).

State visits and diplomatic toasts have rarely been used as sources to understand international politics. Thus, historians may have missed opportunities to collect and analyse friendly occasions as expressions for *emotions* (Hochschild 1979: 551 note 2; Scheer 2012: 198) that are routinely exchanged at state banquets. Emotions might have political implications at the same level as power relations or 'state interests'. According to the American sociologist Arlie Russell Hochschild, 'emotions work' (Hochschild 1979: 556) even in the sphere of 'das grosse Politik' and even if power relations and geopolitical situation carry most weight in the end.

I will investigate the Norwegian emotions towards the British in the nineteenth century up to 1905, which, with the dissolution of the Norwegian-Swedish union, was the formative period for Norway's international relationships (Berg 2016).

The basic emotion that evolved during the union was the belief in the 'British guarantee': the faith that Great Britain would defend Norway against any power and thus save the country from war (Riste 2005). Was this conviction founded on the feeling that 'we are the strongest of friends'? What significance – if any – did the emotions have for the formation of the Norwegian relationship towards Great Britain?

Historiographic Survey: The Emotional Turn

According to the German-American historian Monique Scheer, emotions have been neglected in societal research. To the degree that human emotional life was taken into account in sociological or anthropological discussions, emotions were treated as human thoughts and dreams, belonging to the realm of psychology, not to

political science or historical research (Scheer 2012: 199). Emotions were therefore marginalized in historical research (Lang 2018: 109, 107), also because such research was synonymous with the history of states, written by and for men: 'Feelings – often associated with women, children and irrationality – were not a prestigious topic' (Lang 2018: 107).

This gendered bias changed at the beginning of the twenty-first century. According to the German historian Jan Plamper, Manhattan was the 'birthplace' of, and 9/11 was the moment for the breakthrough of 'today's history of emotions' in societal research (Plamper 2015: 62, 297). This event gave rise to a scholarly 'emotional turn' (Sasley 2013; Lang 2018: 112; Plamper 2015: 63, 298). 'The history of emotions has enjoyed a boom ever since' (Plamper 2015: 62f). Concepts such as anger, sorrow and trust have increasingly been included in the study of international politics and history (Ariffin, Coicaud and Popovski 2016: 4; Coicaud 2016: 42–46). Several centres for the study of emotions in history have been established, for instance in London and Berlin (Stearns 2016: 50). A multitude of conferences have been arranged all around the world on the history of emotions since the boom started with 9/11 (Plamper 2015: 62f, note 115). Nevertheless, the emotional aspects of international political studies are still 'a rather underdeveloped field', according to the authors of the recent anthology *Emotions in International Politics* (Coicaud 2016: 23).

The dating of an 'emotional turn', as well as the supposed marginalisation of the emotions in research, is debatable. It is a fact that Charles Darwin's widely-quoted *The Expression of the Emotions in Man and Animals* from 1872 (Frevort 2014: 11; Plamper 2015: 10) has been forgotten long ago. So, in all likelihood, has Aristotle's definition of emotions, such as anger and fear: 'all those affections which cause men to change their opinion' (Plamper 2015: 12) – though it sounds so relevant after 9/11. But as early as 1999 the Norwegian sociologist Jon Elster published his internationally acclaimed *Strong Feelings and human behaviour* (Elster 1999). Centrally to the theme of this article, the American political scientist Deborah Welch Larson in 1997 published her study on the relationship between the Soviet Union and the United States, in which the focus was upon emotions, rather than the

traditional missiles, in order to understand the dynamics of the cold war (Larson 1997). In 2009 the French social scientist Dominique Moisi's *The Geopolitics of Emotion* (Moisi 2009) indicates the international breakthrough of the concept. He maintained that emotions fused with the traditional concept of geopolitics in international political research as the feelings complemented the missiles when seeking to understand international conflicts. Moisi even introduced a new classification of the states system. Instead of the West *versus* the East, he singled out a belt of states dominated by a culture of *hope* (China, India), a region that regarded international politics through *bitterness* (the Arab world), and one region possessed by a culture of *fear* (Western Europe and the United States (Moisi 1997: *passim*)). Especially fear and trust have become central concepts for future research in international relations (Stearns 2016: 63; Booth & Wheeler 2008; Stearns 2016: 63; Bourke 2006). It must be added, however, that even the traditional and dominant 'realist' historians and political scientists, who focused on material interests and power struggles, did not close their eyes entirely to such extraneous matters as feelings. The American father figure in the field of international relations, Hans J. Morgenthau, underlined that international politics, as 'a struggle for power', in general 'have their roots in human nature' and thus are dominated by emotions (Coicaud 2016: 37; see Morgenthau 2005: 6–7).

The Norwegian historians of international politics, who are very few and share a consensus on the main questions in the history of Norway's foreign relations as well as on method (Førland 2008), do not diverge from the general pattern that feelings and emotions have been overshadowed by rational conflicts about resources and military dominance. The leading historian of foreign politics, Olav Riste, never included emotions explicitly in his analysis of the history of Norway's relations to the Great Powers. As a PhD-student in the early 1960s, Riste's supervisor was, however, the British historian James Joll, whose concept of 'unspoken assumptions' had an enormous influence on the history of the Great War. '[I]f one is to understand the minds of the statesmen whose decisions brought about the war of 1914, [James Joll showed that] it is necessary first to understand the basic assumptions on which they based those decisions – assumptions probably absorbed

40 years earlier', as Michael Howard later summed up (Howard 1994; on Riste's research and huge influence on Norwegian historiography, see Jenssen 2003). These insights were passed on by Riste to his MA and PhD students during the 1980s, as they were encouraged to study pioneers in American and French studies of attitudes and mentality like Kenneth Boulding (the *image*), Robert Jervis (*perceptions*), and Jean-Baptiste Duroselle and Pierre Renouvin (*mentalité collective*) before they started their source studies (see Berg 1983). Thus, classic 'realism' continued to be the mainstream in Norwegian foreign politics research (Førland 1995; Pharo, Jølstad and Skogrand 1996) even though, concepts of emotions such as 'altruism' (Pharo 2003), 'self-assertion' (Berg 1995: 99–177), 'fear' (Salmon 1993: 11f) and 'phobia' (Berg 2001; Berg 2019) were incorporated into the analysis of Norway's foreign relations.

Riste's main contribution to the theory of Norway's foreign relations was the theory of 'the British guarantee' to Norway between 1905 and 1949. It has been unchallenged since 1973 (Riste 1973; Berg 2016). Its essential thesis is that Norway's official neutral foreign policy rested on the tacit assumption that Britain would protect Norway against any great power that threatened her (Riste 2005; Berg 2016).

Riste's theory rested on a geopolitical analysis of Britain's role as the ruler of the seas. It was launched without problematizing the fact that Britain was famous for brutality against minor powers. The theory also ignored the fact that the British policy towards Norway during the early nineteenth century were so arrogant that one should not be surprised if it provoked antipathy, hatred, fear or – at least – distrust, in contrast to the trust in the 'British guarantee' or the amiable feeling that the Duke of Cambridge praised in the Royal Palace in Oslo in 2018. The rest of this article will concentrate on such anti-amiable feelings – the hate-story, not the love-story – towards the British government and towards the British people in general. The conclusion is that feelings – as bad as they might be – were not allowed to dictate the Norwegian foreign political relationship to Great Britain, as Norway did not need a friend, but a protector, as a minor state in a world dominated by great powers where interests, not emotions, dictated politics.

A Short History of Norwegian Distrust of Britain

In her book on fear, the British historian Joanna Bourke reminds us that emotions like fear, hate and love are historically constructed. The manifestations of feelings vary according to time and space. This makes it difficult to compare the fear felt in the past with for instance the collective fear of catastrophe during the cold war (Bourke 2006: 6; see also Frevert 2014: 10f).

Consequently, we must treat expressions of feelings in international politics with scepticism and detachment. Still, it is amazing to see how *many* published sources from the nineteenth century articulate bad feelings and even mistrust towards the British in Norway. This is a paradox, since the Norwegian foreign political 'belief system' (see Berg 1983; Åselius 1994) was founded on the 'British guarantee'.

The history of the Anglo-Norwegian *emotional* relationship started as badly as possible. The Danish-Norwegian king was forced by the British government to cede Norway to the Swedish king in the Kiel peace treaty in January 1814 (Berg 2014; Glenthøj and Ottesen 2014). This convention ignited a revolt of the elite in Norway. A constitutional assembly established Norway as a state with a government and king. This government appealed to the British government for support, inspired by verbal support for the Norwegian liberal constitution in the British Parliament (Hemstad (ed.) 2014, *passim*; Berg 2012: 26; Frydenlund 2009: 106f). However, the British government respected international conventions, like the Kiel treaty (Mestad 2015; Lucas 1990: 273). The Norwegian government sent a representative to London to appeal for support, but he did not even get access to the Prime Minister. Another Norwegian delegation was not given entry to the British Isles (Berg 2012: 26). Left without British support, the union with Sweden was unavoidable. Thus, the first Norwegian diplomatic encounter with Great Britain was a disappointing effort.

From a small state perspective, Britain behaved cynically and immorally both before and after 1814. The Danish king was more or less forced into the war that led to the loss of Norway after the British seized his navy and bombed Copenhagen in 1807 to prevent the Norwegian-Danish fleet from falling into the hands of Napoleon

(Glenthøj and Ottosen 2014: 28–58). In addition to the break with Denmark, the consequence for Norway was that the British blockade in Skagerrak led to a catastrophic stoppage of the grain supplies from Denmark (1807–1809 and 1813–1814); corn shortage followed, and famine occurred. The British became hated.

The memories of the blockade became a firm part of Norwegian memory culture during the nineteenth century. The military ministers in the government had, as former Danish officers, participated in the war. Some of them had been among the 5000 Norwegian seamen who had been prisoners of war in Britain (Berg 2003: 94). British warships had sunk Norwegian-Danish warships. Norwegian sailors had drowned. Norwegian vicars had cursed the British at the funerals (Berg 2003: 94f). But worst was the famine caused by the blockade.

‘Selskabet for Norges Vel’ (The Society for Norway’s Welfare), established in 1809, became the *de facto* Norwegian government during the war. The invitation to the establishment of the society referred to ‘det engelske Søuhyre’ som ‘vilde afvæbne os ved Mangel og Hunger’ (the English sea monster who tried to disarm us by hunger) (Gierløff 1959: 29f; Berg 2003: 95). An English tourist, Sir Thomas Dyke Ackland, experienced the hatred of Britain and the British during his travels in Norway in 1807. He arrived before the outbreak of the war and was exuberantly welcomed by the country’s military and civilian elite. Some of them had a life-style more British than the British themselves (Frydenlund 2009: 107; Berg 2019: 96f). As another British traveller reported: every Brit was considered by the Norwegians ‘as a brother’, and English newspapers ‘were lying upon their tables’ (Carbone 2017: 218). Then came the war and the mood shifted. The commanding officer at Kongsvinger Fort, ‘måtte bruke nevene’ (had to use physical force) to keep the mob away from Sir Thomas. He was arrested and eventually expelled from Norway ‘med noen bitterhet’ (somewhat bitter) (Huitfeldt 1970: 124f). Nevertheless, his journey resulted in a travel book published in London in 1813 without other negative remarks on Norway than observations on the farmers’ heavy drinking (Huitfeldt 1970: 122), typical of British romantic accounts from voyages to rustic and friendly Norway (Carbone 2017: 208, 214, 215–217) – a false impression.

Though the country's elite earned fortunes from trade with England, the general and enduring feelings towards Great Britain during the years before 1814 were distrust, bordering on hatred (Berg 2003: 92f). None of the 5000 prisoners of war forgot their experiences. The last former prisoner of war in the government was Herman Foss, Minister of the Navy (1845–1848), and one of the leading members of the Parliament (Berg 2009). After he and the rest of the generation of 1814 gradually left the political scene, the bitterness against England did not fade, but was shored up by a grand heroic poem.

Seven years after the signing of the November treaty of 1855, in which Britain and France formally guaranteed the integrity of Norway, the dramatist Henrik Ibsen published his poem 'Terje Vigen'. Ibsen, later to become very influential on British literature (Rem 2012: 70f), was introduced to a British audience in 1872 in a review of his *Digte* (Poems) in which 'Terje Vigen' was included (Fulsås and Rem 2018: 142). The same year, 'Terje Vigen' was translated into English in an anthology of Scandinavian poems (Davis 1984: 8; Meyer 1974: 368f). The poem is a homage to patriotism, courage and love of wife and children. The context is however a grim narrative of how Terje tries to break the British blockade by rowing from Norway to Denmark to bring back corn for his family. An English corvette captures him. He remains in captivity for five years. When he returns home from England, his loved ones have died from hunger. He becomes a pilot and, during a storm, saves an English captain – the same one that had arrested him without mercy.

'Terje Vigen' became a treasured poem in Norway (Meyer 1974: 199). 'Rekkevidden av dette ene diktets makt her i landet kan ikke lett måles' (the influence of this poem in this country can hardly be measured), according to the author Christian Gierløff (Gierløff 1950: 123). It contributed to keeping the memories of British brutality alive for generations. In 1906 a monument over Terje Vigen was erected on the coast of Skagerrak (Heidem 1998: 72). In 1916 the first movie was produced (Meyer 1974: 199). The generation that is presently approaching 90 – like my own father – is able to recite 'Terje Vigen' by heart, touched by Terje's greatness in his encounter with suffering. Probably they ignore the fact that the British were the bullies. But that

was hardly forgotten by Ibsen's own generation. His picture of the power behind the British guarantee was grim and threatening, not friendly and trustworthy.

It was usual to represent Britain in Norwegian public life as a brutal class society during the nineteenth century (Noreng [1990]: 10; Berg 2019: 97f). The author Knut Hamsun is a well-known example. A less well-known example is the Danish critic, Georg Brandes, who was extremely influential in Norwegian intellectual circles from 1870 to 1930 (Sørensen 2001: 307f). In his famous book *Hovedstrømninger i det 19de Aarhundredes Litteratur*, published in 1870, he summed up Britain as a coalition of England and Scotland, which cooperated in subjugating Ireland, while England dominated Scotland, and 'England, Skotland og Irland undertrykker i forening de fjerne kolonier' (England, Scotland and Ireland together oppressed the colonies) (Rasmussen and Sørensen 1997: 17). Another Danish intellectual, Nikolai Grundtvig, was just as anti-British and had the same great influence on his Norwegian followers (Rasmussen and Sørensen 1997: 126). One of his disciples, the vicar and founding father of the Norwegian left wing 'folk school' movement, Christopher Bruun (Sørensen 2001: 267f, 358-362), participated as a volunteer in the Danish-German war of 1864. Thus, he came to share the Danish bitterness against the British who had not come to their help against Germany (Bruun 1964: 38). In other words, the memories of the alleged British betrayal of Norway in 1814 and of the old Fatherland, Denmark, in 1864, were actively kept alive and consolidated in the Folk Schools that were the breeding ground for Norwegian radical nationalism during the second half of the nineteenth century (Thorkildsen et al. 1996: 249, 174, 186).

The nineteenth-century Norwegian hatred against England was, however, not a fruit of general disappointment alone. It grew out of a concrete example of British colonialist behavior from 1818, when some British smugglers were arrested in the Bodø area. The smugglers appealed for support against the Norwegian authorities from the British government, and were heard. Norway, both small and poor at that time, had to pay them a huge amount of compensation after years of diplomatic negotiations. This outcome damaged national finances, which were seriously bad. Even worse, it damaged the authority of

the Norwegian government towards its own population and towards its partner in the union, Sweden (Sandvik 2018: 45). Furthermore, the Swedish foreign minister represented Norway during the negotiations with the British. The historical lesson drawn from this was to watch out for combined British ruthlessness and Swedish negligence of Norway's interests. This combination nurtured 'en storm av forbitrelse i Norge' (a storm of bitterness in Norway) against the union partner and the British protector. Several collections of documents and dissertations were published on the 'Bodø case', the last one in 1894, at a time when the bitterness towards Sweden was transformed into the separatism that ended the union in 1905 (Berg 2003: 95-97 on the Bodø case).

During the harsh propaganda war against Sweden at the turn of the century, the separatists found fresh arguments in the freedom fight of another small state, namely the Boers' struggle against Britain. The Second Boer War (1899-1902) became a source of inspiration for the Norwegian opposition to the union. In the end, the dissolution of the Scandinavian union was a result not only of anti-Swedish feelings, but also of anti-British attitudes, formulated by the two most prominent historians at the time. One of these two historians later became Norway's foreign minister in 1940. The other one became 'stemmen fra London' (the voice from London) during the Second World War, who, through the BBC, strengthened the resistance against the German occupation (https://no.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacob_S._Worm-M%C3%BCller (05/09/2018)).

Halvdan Koht, foreign minister from 1935-1940, published a book in 1899 in which he compared the Boers to the Norwegian freedom-loving separatists. 'Burarne er fredsvener og trur at krig er synd; men tek nokon på dei, er dei kje seine um å verja seg, og dei vêr seg godt, slike skarpskyttarar som dei er' (the Boers are peace lovers and believe that war is a sin, but if anybody attacks them, they defend themselves well, as they are good sharpshooters) (Koht 1899: 25). Koht became the consultant for the Norwegian Nobel Peace Committee a few years later and served as a member there for a generation (Lundestad 2017: 20, 103). By lauding the Boer farmers for their willingness to take up arms against an overwhelming enemy, he elevated his own peace-loving Norwegian farmer heroes to a level that was meant to warn

Sweden, as the regional great power, of what would happen if the Norwegian demands for sovereignty were to be turned down by force.

Worm-Müller followed suit. In his biography of a Boer general, published in 1902, he characterized the British warfare against the Boers as a war to exterminate two small freedom-loving and cultured peoples simply because they had gold on their land. The British even ‘jager de ulykkelige Kvinder og Børn ind i Konzentrationsleirene for der at dø Hungersdøden’ (drive the unhappy women and children into concentration camps to let them starve to death) (Worm-Müller 1902: 7f; Gierløff 1950: 90. See Carlsson 1978 on Norwegian attitudes to the Boer War).

Such hateful utterances were used against the country that guaranteed Norway’s integrity in the November treaty of 1855. This was the state that the Norwegian founding fathers had sought protection from in 1814.

Conclusion

Can emotions be treated seriously by historians of international politics? Historians who have studied emotions in international politics do not doubt that emotions count in international politics. Anxiety and fear, as well as sympathy, in declarations like the one that was expressed in Oslo in 2018, are basic instincts among leading politicians as well as at the grass-root level – not surprisingly.

In 1908 King Edward VII paid a state visit to his daughter’s kingdom accompanied by the British navy. It was the second official state visit to Norway after 1905. The first one was in 1907, when the Danish King visited his son, the Norwegian king (Brautaset 2018: 254, note 42). Consequently, the situation called for pompous declarations. Prime Minister Gunnar Knudsen obviously was in a mood for such declarations as he proposed a toast on board one of the British warships that accompanied King Edward:

We trust [...] that there never will be trouble, and if there is, that we shall not be the cause of bringing you into it. But if the possible comes to pass, we shall place our trust in the British

nation, mindful of the new link forged by our Queen (Berg 1995: 96).

The newspapers ridiculed the Prime Minister for this unusual sentiment in a country that claimed neutrality toward all great powers to be its sole foreign political ambition. A few years earlier, in 1905, Gunnar Knudsen had opposed the election of the Danish prince Charles as the new king of Norway after the dissolution of the union with Sweden; Prince Charles' marriage to the daughter of King Edward of Great Britain would create such close bonds to one great power in particular that it could jeopardize both the neutrality and the security of Norway in the future, according to Knudsen and the other republican objections to Prince Charles.

But that was precisely why the government in 1905 insisted on keeping the monarchy and recruiting Prince Charles as Norway's new king. The aim of it was eloquently – and sarcastically – formulated by the author Arne Garborg: “Norge” kjem til aa stande saa lengi Engeland finn det Umaken verdt aa halde uppe det nye dansk-engelske Kongehuse’ (‘Norway’ will exist as long as England finds it expedient to uphold the new Danish-British dynasty (Berg 1995: 96)). Garborg disliked it, as the good republican he was. But he had a point – or, rather, *the* point.

The fear of British disregard of its small and feeble protégé was not a private utterance from one bitter author, and not an emotion that was directed against the British specifically, regardless of the bleak collective memories of Britain's bad behaviour towards Norway from the days of Terje Vigen or the Bodø case. Great powers were generally distrusted by small Norway, both by its elite and by its ordinary citizens. Gunnar Knudsen's predecessor as prime minister, Jørgen Løvland, referred to them as ‘krigerstater’ (warrior states) (Berg 1995: 53). Neither Løvland nor Knudsen nor any Norwegian citizen trusted the great powers. The point of this article is that this distrust was neither lesser neither greater, but more stable when the ‘guarantee state’, Britain, was the subject (Berg 2019: 107).

This result of the investigation into emotions in Norwegian foreign policy might seem paradoxical when compared to the parallel ‘trust

in the British nation' 'if the possible comes to pass'. The paradox seems less striking, however, if one accepts the basic assumption that international politics are cynical in their operation. As Gunnar Knudsen, as well as Løvland and their forerunners in 1814, was well aware: the great powers dictated the destinies of minor powers on the basis of geostrategic interests, not feelings. As the commanding admiral of the Norwegian navy during World War One, Karl Dawes, noted: If Germany were to involve the Norwegian coast in the war, 'I reckon British intervention – with or without our consent – as certain' (Berg 1995: 221).

Not even during a war with great moral questions at stake was the distrust of Britain completely absent. Therefore, it is necessary to continue to scrutinize the emotional side of international politics in order to understand that the relationship between the great powers and the minor ones is something more than merely geopolitical, military and economic power games.

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