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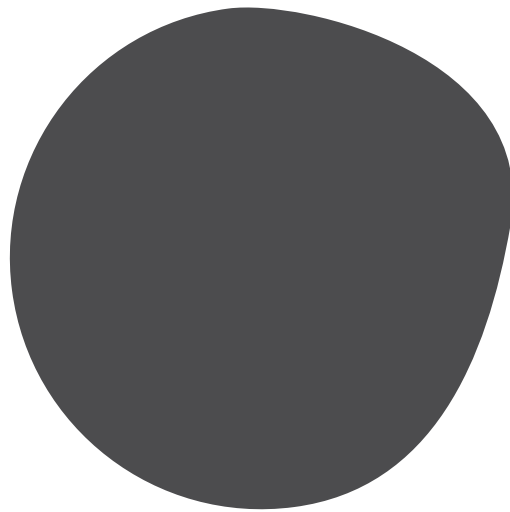
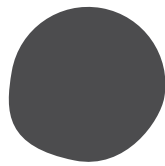
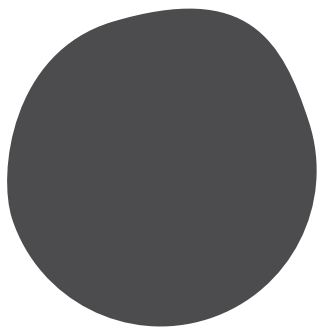
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*The Deconstruction  
of the Danish Nation*

**Charlotte K. Rose**



*“I am German.”*

*“I am Chinese.”*

*“I am American.”*

What do these cultural descriptions even mean? Why do they often stir such powerful emotions in the speaker that he or she will do anything, even die for the country he or she feels connected to? The idea of nation and nationalism is a modern phenomenon that emerged during the eighteenth century though paradoxically the nation is seen as ancient in the eyes of the citizen.

Benedict Anderson, Professor Emeritus of International Studies at Cornell University, in his work *Imagined Communities* defines the nation as “an imagined political community- and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign,” not as a societal construct that

has always existed (Anderson 6). Similarly, Ernest Gellner, the British-Czech social anthropologist and philosopher, stated that "Nationalism is not the awakening of nations to self-consciousness: it invents nations where they do not exist;" thus, these scholars see the nation as something imagined in order to organize the world and give a sense of community to its people (Gellner 6). In this essay, I will be discussing how this notion of nation is a paternalistic one. Paternalism is defined as relating to a father or fathers; characteristic of a father in his care, authority over offspring, (of government) paternalistic. I find that in the postmodern era, the paternalistic construct of nation or Fatherland is deconstructed like most other long-unquestioned systems. Postmodernism is defined as the period of the late 20th century that is after modernity, and Deconstruction is a strategy of literary analysis used in this period. Deconstruction is attributed to Jacques Derrida, the signature Postmodern philosopher (1930-2004), who took apart unquestioned systems of thought and assumptions. This postmodern deconstruction is clearly seen in Klaus Rifbjerg's novel *Anna (I) Anna*, which centers around a woman Anna, the wife of the Danish ambassador to Pakistan, who finds herself going insane under the simulation of the Danish nation in Pakistan. Her husband decides she needs to go back to the true Fatherland to be 'cured,' but Anna "changes the trip's itinerary" and with "the extradited drug smuggler Jorgen Schwer, begins a trip not dictated by the rules of Danish society; rather it becomes a journey of self-discovery (or discovery of self) for Anna" (Tangherlini 307). In Rifbjerg's novel *Anna (I) Anna*, the eponymous protagonist, tries to break down the paternalistic notion of nation through her own postmodern journey of crossing seemingly defined borders. Her efforts eventually fail as seen by the reinstatement of the nation at the end of the work and contemporarily seen in the light of Denmark's stance on the nation and immigration. The viability of the paternalistic notion of the Danish nation today and the resentment felt by the new 'other' in Denmark, Muslim immigrants, has led Denmark to input the toughest immigration policy in the entire European Union (EU).

First and foremost, what is the paternalistic concept of nation and is it really so important? According to Benedict Anderson; "the reality is quite plain: the 'end of the era of nationalism,' so long

prophesied, is not remotely in sight. Indeed, *nation-ness* is the most universally legitimate value in the political life of our time” (Anderson 3). For Anderson, this concept of nation is so important because it fills the vacuum left by “the dusk of religious modes of thought,” the revolutions that ended the reigns of monarchies and the development of a new sense of temporality (Anderson 11). Before the eighteenth century, a few main religions such as Islam, Christianity, Judaism, and Confucianism included vast swaths of the world’s population and gave populations a community to which to belong. With the beginning of the Age of Enlightenment came the end of much of the strong belief in these religions, and a vacuum was opened that needed to be filled. Also, monarchies organized societies hierarchally and gave each person an unquestioned place in that society. Lastly, before the eighteenth century, time was viewed through what Walter Benjamin, the German philosopher and literary critic of the Frankfurt school, frames as “Messianic time, a simultaneity of past and future in an instantaneous present” (Anderson 24). This sense of time gave meaning to the often-senseless present as embedded in past events while continuously looking toward the future. Thus people had a frame of reference for their own lives and found that their present was firmly rooted in their historical past and hopeful future.

In order to combat the decay of religion, monarchy, and the almost religious sense of time, Anderson develops the paternalistic notion of nation. He sees the Fatherland filling this frightening vacuum by the fact that it is limited, sovereign, and “imagined as a community” (Anderson 7). Anderson sees the nation as fundamentally limited “because even the largest of them, encompassing perhaps a billion living human beings, has finite, if elastic, boundaries beyond which lie other nations” (Anderson 7). A nation includes many people just like religions of the past; however, unlike people or religion, a nation is made exclusive by its borders. Another component of the nation is its sovereignty which is defined as supreme in power and independent of all others. Gone are the days of one person as sovereign- now a body of many people make up the nation. Lastly, the nation creates a community. Even though one may never know everyone in the nation, being a part of one gives people a certain imagined connection, based on nothing but their nationality.

These three components make up the nation, which is indeed a paternalistic concept as it is defined and carried out primarily by men. Anna will spend the novel *Anna (I) Anna* trying to break down this notion of nation by escaping this notion herself. In the world today the deconstruction of the nation is occurring in Denmark where immigrants try to live within Denmark but because they are seen as 'other' to the Danes they are seen as breaking down the concept of nation.

The paternalistic notion of nation is limited: "no nation imagines itself coterminous with mankind," but Anna combats this with her own conception of borders (Anderson 7). Anna as the wife of the ambassador of Denmark is supposed to embody this paternalistic notion of nation and respect all national borders in general as one important component of nation. Yet Anna is tired of having her life dictated to her by Denmark- she sees the nation as an unreal idea and "borders as [merely] red lines" drawn on flat pieces of paper (Rifbjerg 167). The only real borders to her are those she sees around her- the borders of nature not nations: "Today we passed the timber-line, and it was a borderline" (Rifbjerg 168). This line is interesting in how it represents borders: Rifbjerg uses one line to describe a natural line that is more of a border than those ever created by nations. A timberline is nature's way of saying 'this far and no further'- if trees cannot survive beyond this point neither should humans. For Anna, her body tells her she has crossed a natural border when she comes to grips with the lower levels of oxygen, but it barely registers with her when she crosses national boundaries; "I've crossed borders before, in the last few days as well, and it's easier to perceive the artificial dividing lines as accidental than the definitive of the timber-line: up to here and no further" (Rifbjerg 168). In the act of not registering national borders, Anna is taking away their reality and breaking up the notion of nation. Even in the act of illegally crossing the border between Italy and Switzerland, Anna uses the very paternalistic construct of the border to undermine it. As the police try to catch Anna and Schwer via helicopter, the two hide within the roof structure of the Little St. Bernard's Tunnel, and the helicopter has nowhere to land and no means to catch them. It is ironic that here in this literary text the very border that the policemen try to uphold and thus indirectly bolster the idea of nation is breaking down via the border itself hiding the

fugitives and allowing it to be trespassed. The nugatory borders therefore no longer make the nation limited. The insignificance of borders is also seen in Denmark today.

In the 1990s and early 2000s, the Danish borders had become meaningless and eventually Danish authorities wanted to reinstate them as boundaries not to be crossed. Since the time aforementioned, Denmark has granted visas to myriads of immigrant workers from Poland and the Baltic countries and asylum to thousands of refugees from the former Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, and Somalia (Hedetoft 1, 2). Denmark prides itself in its embrace of diversity and being a refuge for asylum seekers. But there has been growing resentment towards both the immigrant workers and refugees that have come and remain living in Denmark. The immigrant workers are willing to work “long hours at lower wages than normal unionized Danish labor,” while many refugees make up forty percent of those on welfare (Reimann 1). Another problem comes from the immigrants from Muslim countries who have deeply religious ideologies that sharply contrast with Denmark’s extreme secularism. In 2000, the separation of church and state became complete in Denmark when Lutheranism no longer was the state religion. The resentment is clearly seen in Denmark’s action in 2001, when the Danes elected the most conservative government of the last 70 years because of its promise to curb immigration. Therefore the deconstruction of the Danish nation and the opening of borders to non-Danes have brought a strengthening and bolstering of borders and thus the nation.

Not only are the limitations of a nation as marked out by its borders integral to the concept of the nation, but these limitations are integral to its sovereignty as well. Anna next grapples with Denmark’s sovereignty and undermines its certitude. Anna subverts her own nation’s supremacy and independence from other nations through first helping the criminal Schwer escape from the Danish authorities. In an episode that could only be termed comically entertaining, Anna uses the diplomatic immunity given to her as a representative of the nation of Denmark to thwart that same nation in exercising its national rights of justice (Rifbjerg 51). Anna here declares in her actions that the individual, not the nation is free and supreme and many of an individual’s actions cannot be monitored by the nation-



ergo the individual is supreme. Also, the nation's independence from other nations is called into question when the Danish authorities alone cannot capture the escaped Danish nationals in Italy, and must call on the Italian police for help. In another episode of the novel, Anna also deals with authorities as they try to capture her and put her into a mental hospital in Denmark. This is the solution for Anna's life that the nation thinks is best for her but she knows herself better than the nation does and refuses to be captured. This incident illustrates that Anna sees the individual as supreme over the nation and the sovereign force in any conflict between the nation and the individual. With the combined national police forces Anna and Schwer are tracked down near the border of Switzerland. As their capture looms inevitable, the individuals act and again escape the nation's grip and therefore crack its authority; Schwer shoots at Karl Christensen, the Danish Chief Detective, who has been tracking them down, and they again escape (Rifbjerg 165). If the nation is indeed sovereign, it would first be able to handle its own national security problems on its own without the help of other nations. Also, this would be supreme over the individual, and no individual's actions could usurp the power of the nation as a whole. As seen through Denmark's continued failure to catch Anna and Schwer, Anna uses her own journey of escape from the paternalistic notion of nation to break that sense of nation down. Anna breaks this paternalistic notion down by showing that individuals of the nation are not like children that need the guidance of the paternal nation but are individuals whose actions shape the nation. This concept is important when the Danish nation grapples with the immigrants who are dependent on the paternal nation but want to have more than a child's say in the future of that nation.

Immigration is deconstructing the Danish nation because of the questioning of its sovereignty by Muslim immigrants and their imams, Muslim leaders who lead prayer in a mosque. In Denmark as of 2000, there is no official state religion and as in United States, the separation of church and state is held very dear in Denmark. Denmark's government is therefore secular, yet believes in respecting all religions practiced within its borders without favoring one over another. Yet Muslim immigrants and their religious leaders feel that their way of life is bound by their religion, and they would like the

Danish government to recognize that. In August 2011, a Muslim man was killed and the imam of his community demanded that the government pay blood money which is a monetary restitution to the offended (European Phoenix 1). The government of Denmark refused, citing the fact that they cannot favor one religion over another. Yet, the Muslim community and their imams were outraged that their religion was not fully respected. It is a difficult situation and is ironic that the secular Danish government and nation is being deconstructed by the deeply religious beliefs of some of its immigrants.

The final deconstruction of the nation Anna grapples with is the third component of the paternalistic concept of nation; that it is imagined as a community and which is realized in the Danish nation as the importance of the community over the individual. Anderson describes this component of the nation as “conceived as a deep, horizontal comradeship... a fraternity” (Anderson 7). The concept of a nation is here paternalized through the blatant use of adjectives associated with male activity: “comradeship, fraternity”. Anna combats this sense of ‘community’ as she is flying from Pakistan to Iran on her way to Denmark and meets another Danish national; he begins the conversation with, “And on your way home? [Anna answers] -That depends on what you mean by ‘home’. He laughed. Could there be any other place?” (Rifbjerg 39). Just by meeting another Dane, this man assumes their shared nationality gives them a sense of community though they have never met before. Anna tries to drive in the point that this concept is a paternalistic, imagined one that she does not want to be a part of. So when he automatically assumes ‘home’ means the same for both of them Anna questions this notion and reroutes her entire journey to show that though they are both Danes – their nationality means nothing. Instead of flying straight to Denmark from Iran as planned, she gets off in Italy (Rifbjerg 50). Specifically, this sense of community that supports the notion of nation has an ‘us versus you’ mentality for the Danish nation. This Danish frame of mind is metaphorically represented in Jantelov, the Law of Jante, which stands as a kind of Ten Commandments for the community in Scandinavia. Some memorable lines include: “1. Du skal ikke tro at du er noe 2. Du skal ikke tro du er like sa meget so moss [1. You shall not believe that you are something 2. You shall

not believe that you are as good as us]" (Sandemose 1). These sayings truly epitomize Scandinavia in general and Denmark in particular; the community will always be greater than the individual. Individualism is seen as an alien concept. Anna is trying to break free from this concept; traveling away from her family and rerouting her journey unexpectedly is her way of showing that she is making decisions as an individual not as part of the community. But this disobedience to the community places Anna with Schwer; in the transgressive category of the criminal.

The idea of the transgressive in Postmodernism is the notion of "border dissolution in every direction" and the postmodern deconstruction of the nation is seen through the transgressive categories of the criminal and more recently the immigrant (Tangherlini 308). As previously stated, the nation is held up primarily by the sense of community it creates. As a criminal, one breaks this communal bond through actions that serve the individual at the disservice of the community. Breaking down the community through crime therefore breaks down the nation as well. In order to escape the paternalistic notion of nation and break it down Anna inadvertently aligns herself with the criminal (i.e. Jorgen Schwer). Anna describes her and Schwer's flight from the nation as "a hitherto unknown feeling of freedom, recuperation, of possibilities and energy," yet the jaws of the nation's judgment looms close (Rifbjerg 185). One who breaks national laws for oneself as an individual is considered a criminal, but if one does so for the nation one is actually considered a hero. This hypocritical contradiction is epitomized by Captain James Cook who discovered Australia, New Zealand, and the Hawaiian Islands. Anna considers Cook to be "a swindler," but because he swindles for his nation he is a national icon (Rifbjerg 186) Though under other circumstances the actions of colonizing (with its inherent stealing of property and enslaving of free people) would be considered criminal. If such actions are done for the nation, then the criminal becomes a hero that is protected and held up by the paternal nation.

Recently, especially in Scandinavia, the immigrant has slowly replaced the criminal as transgressive to the nation; one can even say the immigrant has been criminalized (Tangherlini, email, 1). According to Ulf Hedetoft, professor at the University of Copenhagen

and a member of the Academy for Migration Studies in Denmark, the nation of Denmark has “not regarded itself as a country of immigration... due to its relatively homogeneous population of 5.4 million” (Hedetoft 1). But over the last thirty-five years, half of the growth of the population in Denmark is due to immigration, especially immigration from Iraq, Afghanistan, Somalia and the former Yugoslavia. Yet if immigrants are replenishing the negative population growth of Denmark’s native population, how can they be classified as transgressive or even criminal? Hedetoft finds that “Denmark is a small, highly developed nation based on cultural homogeneity and social trust” (Hedetoft 3). It is structured on a welfare system that is predicated on the give-and-take mentality, but because many of the immigrants, especially Muslims, do not understand the system they are placed in the transgressive category of ‘the other,’ a category that is seen as only taking and therefore deconstructing the notion of nation.

As in most other countries, in Denmark labeling of the ‘other’ is done to better define who is a true Dane. The ‘other’ was aforementioned as first being the criminal and then being slowly metamorphosed into the immigrant. The first immigrant ‘other’ was actually fairly close to home for the Danes: the Greenlander. Since 1814, Greenland has been a colony of Denmark, but in 1979 it was granted home rule and became known as Northern Denmark in the new Post-Imperialist age. In Peter Hoeg’s novel *Smilla’s Sense of Snow*, the process of Greenlandic assimilation into Danish society is looked into and the labeling of Greenlanders as the ‘other’ is observed. Unlike mainland Danes, native Greenlanders are Inuit and are born and raised in the wide expanse of the Arctic- so their greatest fear is that of being enclosed in a small space- which is at great odds with the Southern Dane who has to make do with the small area that is the collection of islands of Denmark (Hoeg 103). Yet the Greenlander did become assimilated or at least gotten used to and another ‘other’ needed to be found as the foil to true Danishness. That ‘other’ became a new immigrant: the Muslim immigrant.

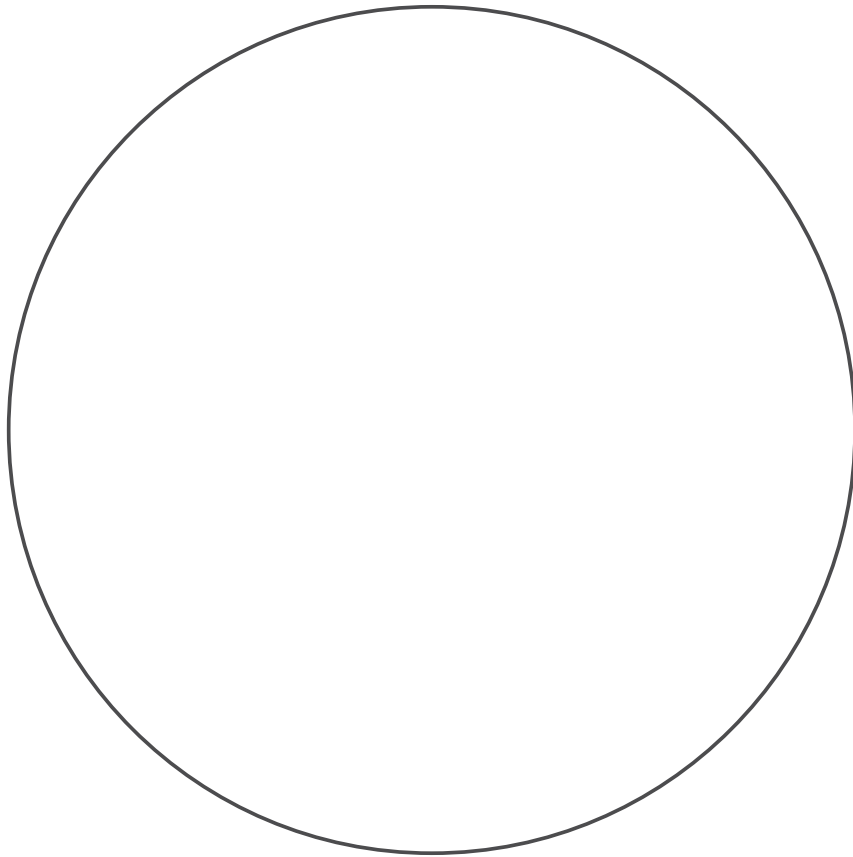
Though Anna and postmodernism try to break down and deconstruct this paternalistic notion of nation, it is still very much viable. Borders are very much distinct as seen in Gaza today and individuals are seen in terms of their communities- as in people’s proud declaration

that 'they are American'. Anna and Schwer last quite a long time asserting their individuality and embodying the criminal category, but as they are about to cross into Denmark, Schwer is shot and Anna almost commits suicide. The nation is here reinstated, but that reinstatement demands a cost. The true criminal, Schwer, must be killed; he cannot viably exist in the community when he has spent so long violating its laws. His death is merely described as "a shadow [falling] over the side of the boat;" as a criminal his death is not of much note (Rifbjerg 249). Anna, on the other hand, has not so much violated any of the national laws as merely tried to live freely (her only crime being the shooting of her potential rapist) so the Fatherland sees her as potentially redeemable. She is about to bring judgment on herself through suicide, but the male author Rifbjerg sees her death as unnecessary and there is suddenly not enough bullets in the revolver and she decides to return to her childhood home instead (Rifbjerg 251). Though Anna ultimately fails at breaking down the paternalistic notion of nation, she has met it on her own terms. She will no longer check herself into the psychiatric ward as her husband has bid her; she will now make her own decisions within the construct of the nation as her journey of 'escape' from the nation has led to her return to it but now very much as a viable and sane citizen.

The paternalistic notion of nation has gone through postmodern deconstruction and still remains a viable system. Anderson's definition of the nation as imagined is limited and sovereign. A community has wrestled with the protagonist Anna's deconstruction of it and remained stalwart. Anna tries breaking down the notion of nation by joining the transgressive category of the criminal with Jorgen Schwer but the end of the novel sees the nation putting down Schwer and the category of the criminal and allowing Anna to return to the nation as a citizen of it. Though respecting her position as a citizen of Denmark she is one on her own terms, out from the paternalistic hand of her husband and from merely being the wife of the representative of Denmark. She is now a representative in her own right.

But what does the victory of the nation mean for the contemporary transgressive category of the immigrant? Because this category violates the paternalistic notion of nation, it must be put down

and presently the only viable way to survive for the immigrant is through assimilation. This seems sadly obvious but especially in the homogeneous countries of Scandinavia where “cultural belonging and political rights are thus intertwined, and ‘equality’ is interpreted to mean two different things simultaneously: ‘cultural similarity’ and ‘political sameness’” (Hedetoft 3). Thus, in order for immigrants to have access to basic civic rights in the welfare states of Scandinavia, they must culturally assimilate, but how does a reverent Muslim immigrant assimilate in the secularly Lutheran society they have immigrated to? Will they ever become politically equal in Scandinavia? Can they assimilate and yet keep their own cultures alive? I find that they cannot. But instead of focusing on the Danish resentment towards immigrants themselves, we need to go back to the question of nation and the laws that uphold it. Yes, the Danish nation is deconstructed figuratively through the novel *Anna (I) Anna* and literally with the last few decades of immigration which has remained much the same but that does not mean it will for long. Danish citizens resent the fact that almost half of their income goes not to Danes but to those they have labeled as ‘other;’ yesterday that was the Greenlanders, today it is the Muslim immigrants- tomorrow, who is to blame? Instead of focusing on the annoyance felt towards those labeled as ‘other’, we need to take a look at the immigration laws themselves. Yes- the Danish nation has the strictest immigration policy in the EU but organized immigration has been acknowledged as a boon to a country. Denmark needs to look at what kind of professionals they are in need of, whether that is medical practitioners or menial laborers; then they can open up immigration to those skilled persons. Thus, immigration in Denmark would not be feared or looked upon as a drain to the economy but rather be seen as one of the country’s strengths.



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