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The negotiation of national, regional and minority identity during the plebiscites following the First World War

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The Schleswig Plebiscite – dividing a region
Southern Jutland/Schleswig under pressure from two national projects

For Germany and the Habsburg monarchy the severest consequences of the Versailles treaty were the loss of certain border areas to their particular neighbors. While regions like the Alsace and Posen (Germany) as well as South Tyrol (Austria) were annexed by the victorious allies right away, five areas (Schleswig, East Prussia, Upper Silesia, Burgenland and Carinthia) underwent plebiscites shortly after the war to determine their future fate and to ensure a democratic division according to the right to national self-determination. The Department of Border Region Studies at University of Southern Denmark, Sønderborg Campus, in cooperation with the Museum Sønderjylland, has started a comparative research project investigating these five plebiscites to find new answers to the interplay between regionalism and nationalism during a period, when nationalism was developing to reach its peak resulting in national-fascist authoritarian forms of government in most European countries, accompanied by similar movements in the remaining liberal democracies of Europe.

In this paper we will focus on the Schleswig plebiscites and present some findings concerning the propaganda and its strategies used by both sides. Here, previous research has concluded differences in Danish and German political culture expressed through the visual propaganda, but also the use of specific strategies used in the two plebiscite zones together with the question, whether propaganda in plebiscites on national affiliation can be interpreted in schemes of ‘normal’, border-bounded political culture at all. We conclude that the plebiscite propaganda used by both the Danish and the German side can be regarded as a form of “Geschichtspolitik” by

which a nationally blurred population was believed to accept a national narrative of the hitherto undivided region’s history and thus choose the “right” nationality.

The region of Schleswig/Southern Jutland is historically known as the Duchy of Schleswig, which was carved out of a then rather feeble Danish monarchy in the 12th century to provide for a minor line of the royal family. While the monarchy in remaining Denmark stabilized in the following centuries, at times making Denmark the dominating power in the Baltic Sea Region, Schleswig developed more into an independent entity, but still being a Danish fief. The connection to Holstein, a fief of the Holy Roman Empire, became stronger under the Schauenburg family during the 14th and 15th century. When the last Schauenburg Count of Holstein and Schleswig died childless in 1459, the nobility chose to elect Danish king Christian I., a nephew of the last Schauenburg, as duke of Schleswig and count of Holstein. This dynastic personal union was first challenged during the awakening of nationalism in the first half of the 19th century, when a Schleswig-Holstein movement strived for the incorporation of Schleswig and Holstein into an envisaged German empire, while a national Danish movement wanted to incorporate Schleswig (the Danish fief) into the kingdom of Denmark, whereas Holstein (the German fief) should be given to Germany. The inhabitants of the region, which until then had been loyal subjects in the Danish-Norwegian conglomerate state of the 18th century, with cultural affiliation in both directions and a self-conscious Schleswig (and Holstein) identity, were now forced to take side by both exogene, but also local forces. The conflict resulted in a secessionist rising in 1848, a three-year war ending with the old status quo, and a short war between Denmark and Prussia and Austria as executors of the German Federation in 1864. Hereafter, Denmark lost sovereignty over both Schleswig and Holstein, which were eventually incorporated into Prussia in 1867. While Denmark had started a controversial re-Danization policy after the 1848-50 war, Prussia was rather lax on language issues in the first years. Since the 1880’s, though, a fierce cultural Germanization policy was enforced, along with a Prussianization policy to weaken the hitherto strong regional Schleswig-Holstein

movement, which aspired the establishment of a Schleswig-Holstein state in the federal German Kaiserreich.\(^5\) Thus, at the end of World War I, the region’s population had experienced national conflict as well as the implementation of ‘national education policies’ and farther reaching nationalization policies designed in the national centers of the respective ruling state. With the 1920-plebiscites, the effect of these policies was to be measured, while pre-plebiscite campaigns shed new light on the Danish and German policy to educate or manipulate the Schleswig region’s population about their inherent national affiliation.

At the same time, the new evolving borderlines were about to change and to redefine national territory. People in Schleswig (and the other plebiscite areas) were asked to vote in favor for their national belonging and to decide between two different national projects, involving two distinct identities, even though Schleswig had been a contact zone of different cultures and languages for centuries without people being asked to decide whether to belong to e.g. Germany or Denmark. These new territorial demarcations according to the nationality principle also had the consequence of redefining borderlanders as national majorities or minorities on both sides of the newly drawn borders, as a 100% clear divide, of course, was not possible.

*The Implementation of the plebiscite*

The plebiscite was negotiated at the Paris Peace conference and included into the Versailles Peace Treaty with Germany (Art. 109-114). It was based on the ideas of the North Schleswig Voters’ Association, which already in November 1918, some days after the German surrender, had passed a program outlining the main principles. The German side did not have any decisive influence on the terms of the plebiscite, which is partly due to the political situation at the peace conference, and partly to the lack of a constructive German counter program on the plebiscite terms. The former Duchy of Schleswig was divided into three zones: 1. Zone from the Kongeå-border between Denmark and Germany from 1864-1920 and today’s border, the so-called Clausen-line, roughly presenting the border between the use of Danish and German as church languages in rural

parishes since reformation. The second zones comprised parishes some 30-40 km south of this line, including the region’s largest and most important city, Flensburg. Flensburg was of symbolic importance as having been the birthplace of several Danish kings, as well as always having been considered a “royal” city. The third zone stretched to the Dannevirke-line south of the city of Schleswig, to the ruins of a highly symbolic wall erected in the early medieval period to defend Viking Denmark against Saxon and Slavic tribes from the South. The third zone was later excluded from the referendum, though, after request from the Danish government which did not want to annex territories that were regarded as irrevocably Germanized. Voting procedures were different in zone 1 and 2: While zone 1 should vote en bloc, zone 2 should vote Parish-wise. Thus, the Clausen-line would not be altered to the North because of possible local German majorities, but it could well be altered to the South in case of possible Danish majorities there. Eligible for voting were all men and women over 20 years of age that had resided in the region at least since 1st January 1900 or were born in the region before 1st January 1900 and had moved away since. The first restriction (1900) was a compromise to take into account an altering of the national balance caused by the many Germans who had moved to the region since its annexation in 1867, the second provision should assure that natives having been evicted or migrated from the region for Danish nationalist activities should also have an opportunity to decide on the region’s future. Even though meant to support the Danish side, this provision actually increased the votes for Germany. The plebiscite was implemented under the provision of an international commission which assumed sovereignty over the territory and was supported by allied occupation troops.

Result and Reactions

On Tuesday, 10 February 1920, the plebiscite was held in the first zone. The Danish side ended up by collecting 74.2 % (75.431) of the votes. Slight German majorities were counted in Aabenraa and Sønderborg, rather large German majorities in Tønder, Højer and Tinglev. By winning the vote in zone 1 the Danish government had the right to immediate military and administrative

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6 On the details see Troels Fink, Da Sønderjylland Blev Delt, 3 vols (Aabenraa: Institut for Grænseregionsforskning, 1979).
8 See the map in Inge Adriansen and Immo Doege, Deutsch oder Dänisch? Agitation bei den Volksabstimmungen in Schleswig 1920 (Gråsten: Deutsche Museen Nordschleswig & Museum Sønderjylland 2010), 12.
occupation. While the result of the first voting zone had been foreseeable, the result in the second zone was less certain. The by-Parish voting procedure opted for local changes of the planned borderline, and Danish hopes rested especially on the working class milieus in Flensburg. Here, many had family ties to Danish North Schleswig, and the workers in Flensburg had been voting mostly Danish in the early Kaiserreich elections, until they became socialized in the growing labor movement from the 1880's. That is the reason why the campaigns increasingly heated up here. Attempts were made to disturb meetings, leaders of both sides were suspended by the Commission and a German newspaper got suspended for a week. As in regards to agitation and propaganda material the International Commission set up a censorship board that had to evaluate every poster and prints related to propaganda, because no insults against the German and the Danish government or the Commission and its personnel were allowed. Especially national symbols like flags were seen as threat to the freedom of the vote. So eight days before the plebiscite the Commission forbade the displaying of flags or of national colors in windows, streets and railroads. On 11 March 1920 the Commission revised this decree and allowed flags and national colors again, but on private houses only. On 14 March 1920, the plebiscite in the second zone took place and 51,724 voted for Germany (79 %). Voting turnout in both zones was around 90 %.

The report of the International Commission to the Conference of Ambassadors submitted in May 1920 stated that there had been minor abuses of power to influence votes. It was concluded, though, that these did not have great influence on the general outcome of the plebiscite. The Commission considered the result of the plebiscite for very decisive and only suggested minor changes to the Clausen line of about five square kilometers, not involving any residents. The draft treaty of the Conference of Ambassadors on May 28, 1920 was sent to the representatives of Germany and Denmark. Denmark accepted it at once, whereas Germany tried to recuperate the towns of Højer and Tønder, where more than three-fourth of the voters had voted for Germany, but finally signed. The transfer of sovereignty took place on 15 June 1920.

10 The “Flensburger Nachrichten” (1865-1945).
11 That was first lead by the police director Bruun, but then followed by the subdirector of police, the Swede Eric Hallgren.
12 Cf. Wambaugh, Plebiscites since the World War, 91.
National belonging via plebiscite propaganda

The result of the plebiscite demonstrates that both zones decided differently and rather clearly, but also that between a fifth and a fourth of the population had preferred another outcome for their home. This demonstrates the continuity of diverse national and regional affiliations in the region’s population that had evidently been quite obstinate in face of the policies of nationalization applied. Here, we will try to give a short analysis of visual propaganda used by both sides under the focus of the use of national and regional images and narratives expressed in plebiscite campaign posters and token money. In the Schleswig plebiscite area plenty of archival material displays propaganda in images or pictures. We chose visual sources in this context. As any historical source, they display only a limited historical reality. But they tell about narratives used by their proponents to connect regional identity with national projects/affiliation/identity.

Approximately 107.000 Danish and about 200.000 German posters were used during the plebiscite time in the Schleswig area.\(^{13}\) Most posters based their message on a historic argumentation or carried “historic appeals”\(^ {14}\) and proclaimed a regional continuity within the respective nation state.

These sources have the advantage to be clear in their message, as they are only successful under the precondition that the recipient is able to decode the symbol’s message. Symbols used for example in the context of propaganda have to refer to meanings that are widely and commonly known, explaining the usage of many clichés and stereotypes on posters, flyers and images on token money in the context of the political propaganda of the plebiscite. Propaganda is here understood as a deliberate and systematic effort to form and eventually manipulate the behavior of the recipients in favor of the propagandists. So propaganda is considered as influential and manipulating messages that aim to secure authority for one party or group.\(^ {15}\) Essential for the

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\(^{14}\) Wambaugh, *Plebiscites since the World War*, 78.

\(^{15}\) Cf. Renate Kummer, *Nicht mit Gewehren, sondern mit Plakaten wurde der Feind geschlagen! Eine semiotisch-linguistische Analyse der Agitationsplakate der russischen Telegrafenagentur ROSTA* (Slavica Helvetica; Bd. 76) (Bern: Peter Lang 2006); Thomas Meyer, *Visuelle Kommunikation und Politische Öffentlichkeit*, in Herfried Münkler and Jens Hacke (Hg.), *Strategien der Visualisierung. Verbildlichung als Mittel politischer Kommunikation* (Eigene und fremde Welten 14) (Frankfurt am Main: Campus 2009), 53-70; Vittoria Borsò et al., *Tranfigurationen des Politischen. Von
success of the propaganda and its use is the clever selection of the content and the “definition of
the truth”.

Images of national identity have been used to argument national and regional belonging in
agitation work. As images always intend to convey messages that guide the recipient into a certain
direction that has been the case in the Schleswig plebiscite area as well. Images, like any other
sign, can be symbols and thus they carry a certain message. To make the message to be understood by the recipient, it is important to assure that the recipient will be able to decode the symbol’s message. That is why symbols used in the context of propaganda always have to refer to meanings that are widely and commonly known. That is why one finds so many clichés and stereotypes on posters, flyers and images on token money in the context of the political propaganda at that time.

The main focus of German and Danish propaganda

To be able to answer the research question of this paper, how national and regional identity is negotiated and therefore constructed or reconstructed by the use of propaganda material, there have to be certain categories that enable us to actually show these processes. Here, of course, both sides aimed to influence voters at the coming plebiscites to vote for either the Danish or the German side.

To do so the posters and other iconic illustrations had to have certain characteristics:

- The messages had to be clear, so that every recipient was able to decode them.
- This means the propagandists had to use symbolic descriptions, which they assumed the recipient would know and understand.
- Further symbols have been used that were regarded to meet and reflect the need of the emotional situation of the recipient.
- The appealing function of the iconic messages could be expressed directly, but could also be evoked by an image that displayed an emotional context indirectly.

What is essential for the view of national identity construction at the beginning of the 20th century is the fact that national identity contemporarily was generally regarded as something naturally

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inherited within people, something that was only ‘sleeping’ inside every person and that only needed to be awakened. Thus, plebiscite propaganda was not mainly about rational choice, but an instrument to reach the nationality deeply rooted in the region’s population.

Categories of propaganda material

We have decided to summarize and interpret the collected data of posters and other images in propaganda purposes of the plebiscite area in Schleswig into certain categories:

1. The Nation – national belonging

National togetherness deduced from historical references (Ill. 0), is one central message of many posters and token money bills. The Danish side sees its own nation as a naturally grown nation with a long heritage dating back to the glorified nordic Viking age, and the plebiscite area is regarded as naturally belonging to the Danish nation. Official national symbols as flags like e.g. the Danish Danebrog (Ill. 1) are ubiquitous on nearly every propaganda material, especially posters. Unofficial symbols like a lure or the famous Danish golden horns (Ill. 4) supplement the Danebrog and should reprove the historical roots of the plebiscite area for the Danes.

In particular flags have been the strongest and effective agitation instrument in the times of the plebiscite in Schleswig. With the use of flags it was intended to appeal to emotions and unconscious feelings. So in connection with the use or images of flags and landscapes (Ill. 2) or flags and other symbols one tried to evoke strong emotions and emotional connection. For the German side this often meant the use of the Schleswig-Holstein flag in connection with an oak

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16 Token money has arisen from the fact that there was a terrible deficit of coined money in Germany after the First World War and therefore token money was issued. During the plebiscite time every single commune was accountable for their own token money which they designed with very characteristic images and signs. In Schleswig there has been token money in both zones and many of them had motives on them that displayed typical “Germanness” or typical “Danishness”. Much token money had a German and Danish side or a Danish and a more neutral side that have been drawn by illustrators. Money with pure German or Danish sides have occurred, too. Cf. Adriansen/Doege, Deutsch oder Dänisch?, 13.
17 This was later clarified again by the folk-etymologic studies of Claus Eskildsen, cf. Claus Eskildsen, Dansk Grænselære (Copenhagen: Reitzel, 1936). and also played a role in the border conflict after 1945, cf. Martin Klatt, Flygtningene og Sydslesvigs danske bevægelse 1945-1955, [Studieafdelingens udgivelser], nr. 44 (Flensborg: Studieafdelingen ved Dansk Centralbibliotek for Sydslesvig 2001).
18 They are officially approved by the national and local authorities.
19 They are not officially approved, but known by almost everyone identifying with the nation/territory.
20 Whose colors are blue-white-red.
tree which is seen as a typical German symbol since the 18th century or even a double oak (Ill. 3) which is a symbol for an undividable Schleswig-Holstein since the Treaty of Ripen 1460. Often, the Schleswig-Holstein flag is connected to or substituted with the black, white and red flag of the Kaiserreich (Ill. 0, 5, 10, 11, 19), while the historically correct connection to the flag of the republic (black, red, yellow) is not happening at all (both flags’ history is deeply intertwined with the democratic revolution of 1848, while the black-red-white rather symbolizes the conservative restoration hereafter). In general, the German propaganda has a more backward message focusing on the past instead of looking into the future. Many posters displayed the damage and the threat to the German nation through e.g. the unofficial symbol of the Germania. On one hand we find the threat to lose more territory, and on the other one the German propaganda related to the special regional situation in the Schleswig plebiscite area. This becomes obvious by looking at the material. Here not only the national symbol of the former flag of the German Reich21 (Ill. 5) is portrayed but at the same time or sometimes instead of it the Schleswig-Holstein flag or other regional characteristics that can easily been recognized are displayed - like the Flensburg Nordertor (Ill. 6). The old Ribe-slogan „up ewig ungedeelt“ is ubiquitous, reminding of the historic narrative of the regions “indivisibility”, but also indicating its ties to the German people. Thus while the Danish side deduces Schleswig’s national belonging as a long heritage from former Viking times, the German side argues on two levels, the national and the regional. This leads to another important aspect of constructing a national identity which can be best expressed by the German word “Heimat”, which we focus on later.

Another special example used as national symbol by both sides is the figure of a woman and mother. On the German side the figure is the Germania22 (Ill. 11) as a traditional icon for the German nation, generally decorated with an oak crown which is an unofficial German symbol. The figure is used to show the threat the German nation has to encounter. The frightened child clamps itself to the mother. Looking almost crashing down one can see the additional official national symbol of the German eagle in the background. Mother Germania is fearful and insecure,

21 Its colors were black, white and red.  
her pride seems to have vanished. This reflects a general tendency in the German propaganda expressing humiliation and an injured national pride, which, of course, is explained by the experience of the loss of the war and the perceived harshness of the Versailles Treaty. A good example are the images shown on token money bills (Ill. 17), where the former huge German dragon gets beaten by the Danish knight. But it appears that the German dragon eventually will return and then will be defeating the Danish knight.

The Danish side used the figure of a woman and/or mother in the same function. She is the one who stands for unity and the positive. In the colors of the nation she poses with the Danebrog over her shoulder on a platform while her head is encircled by the sun, and, in the background, the German black eagle is still threatening (Ill. 12). Although the eagle looks rather threatening with its gloomy eyes, the Danish figure of a woman appears strong and secure and will be protecting her children.

The motive of a guarding mother can be found on many political posters. Thus, a Danish poster took over a mother motive that had been used by the German Social Democrats in their election campaign or the German national assembly in 1919. While the grey German poster displays a German child that rather looks poor and that requests the missing mother with its raised finger to think of it before voting (Ill. 13), the more red-white Danish poster shows a child that is barefoot with a toy standing there, having the Danebrog in his hand (Ill. 14). This child asks its mother to think of its future when voting and therefore to choose Denmark.

Whereas the figure of a woman and/or mother on the German side embodies the German nation and rather not gets displayed that often, on the Danish side she stands for a guardian for the Danes, “Mother Denmark – mor Danmark”. Her message announces contentment, sun and security and was used very often on Danish propaganda material. Another example can be seen in the picture where mother Denmark welcomes her daughter representing Schleswig. They are meeting and embrace each other on a bridge over the 1864-1920 border creek „Kongeå” (Ill. 15).

The self-description of the Danish side uses national symbols but also positive motives to describe

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23 The Danish poster was sent to the Polish propaganda committee by the Danish side as a draft. They changed the language and they hung an amulet about the neck of the child on their poster. Cf. Wambaugh, *Plebiscites since the World War*, 79.

24 As for the analyses of propaganda posters it seems to be appropriate to state the thesis that Denmark is always displayed friendly and light as Germany is always portrait kind of dark and gloomily.
itself and its advantages. E.g. it is the motive of the sun as fortunate appearance in the sky that can be found on most images. Contrary to that the German side gets displayed in dark colors and the looks and appearance of the figures and symbols is threatening. Even with the symbolic tug-of-war (Ill. 16) situation a German figure has a rood in his pocket. While from the Danish point of view the German neighbor gets illustrated as dark threat.

2. “Heimat” – regional belonging

“Heimat” is a regional place/space where people are ingrained historically and culturally. The concept of Heimat was central in both sides’ campaigns, even though the mystification of Heimat can be considered more characteristic for the German than the Danish case.

In the German propaganda, belonging to the German nation was replaced with the “Heimat” aspect. The „Heimat” is the rural-peasant Schleswig-Holstein, which unity and entity should be preserved ad its territorial history should be defended. Describing Schleswig-Holstein as a place of „Heimat“ carries a higher emotional potential than only relating to the national belonging and togetherness. This takes into account the complex history of national belonging that Schleswig-Holstein had.

As already mentioned very often German national symbols were substituted by symbols of Schleswig-Holstein and the border region to reach a closer identification. To express the belonging to the region of Schleswig-Holstein Low-German as the spoken regional language played an important role. So many posters on the German side carried words or lines in the regional language to guarantee a high emotional appeal.

“Heimat” is also reflected in the use of language, which reflects the complex language situation in Schleswig, where language not necessarily coincides with national identification. Many German posters, but also one Danish (Ill. 16), have texts in the regional Low German. Illustration 9, which was used with identical Danish and German texts, refers to the region as an argument to vote German, trying to reconcile the region’s population, Danish and German speaking, under the concept of Heimat. But, alas, it also clearly illustrates that the united “Heimat” does not have a future, as the plebiscite requires people to make a national choice.
Likewise, illustration 6, a Danish text-poster, tries to relate “Heimat” into a Danish context by using a 1800-poem expressing conglomerate state patriotism in the German language; notwithstanding the development of Denmark into a nation state since. Here, again, the contemporary choice in 1920 cannot be aligned to the united, pre-national “Heimat”.

German posters often do not only display Schleswig-Holstein Symbols like the blue-white-red flag of the 1848 rising and the traditional dynastic coat of arms (Ill. 7) that guaranteed a quick recognition and a sense of regional belonging, but also many clichés like pictures of typical landscapes (Ill. 8) and peasant population were used. There are virtues summoned like loyalty and mutual consent (Ill. 9), but not as an expression for the belonging to a nation, but for the belonging to the German people, to the “Germanness” itself. This is becoming expressively clear in the poster of the flag with the threefold “German” in gothic letters (Ill. 20). In this context one often finds sentences in the style of circular arguments (We want to be German because we are German!)

Here, a fundamental difference between the German and the Danish side can be found. On the German side the common nation or even a common state are not emphasized. It is more the people that is being seen and declared as a unifying brace. So the belonging to the German people substituted the belonging to a German nation which had been punished and damaged. It is not the grown German nation that stands in opposition to the Danish nation, but it is Schleswig-Holstein that fears its destruction of the entity with the plebiscite area, it is the “Heimat” of Schleswig-Holstein and the Schleswig-Holstein identity - marked most of all in its Low-German language that seemed to be in danger.

The Danish side summons a Danish „Heimat“ as well, but for the Danish side it is more a natural national feeling that is part of every Danish minded person. Simultaneously one can see portrayed the cliché image of a Danish guardian state to whom the people joyfully return.

Whereas on the German picture the German peasant stands in front of an oak tree on Schleswig-Holsteinisch-German soil, the Danish picture displays a Danish collective, a happy Danish family that hoists the Danebrog in front of his house and under the shining sun (Ill. 10).

3. “Rationality” – semi-rational reasons for belonging
While most posters clearly use emotional approaches in their propaganda, rational choice oriented propaganda was also used especially on the Danish side. Here, arguments focused on better living conditions for the individual in a peaceful land of plenty, contrary to war-torn and already inflation-ridden Germany with its yet unstable political system. This is best represented by the well dressed Danish bourgeois pays its tax for children and retirement arrangements, while the poorly dressed German man pays its tax for war reparations (Ill. 18), while illustration 21 is another good example for rational choice to vote Danish.

This part of the campaign focused on especially on Flensburg and there the working class population. This is due to the special situation in the city, where the working class was the big unknown. The Danish and German social democratic parties had agreed not to take sides in the plebiscites, but ask their members to vote according to their personal national affiliation. This was not necessarily implemented by the local party districts, where especially SPD in Flensburg argued to vote for Germany out of national and also political reasons, as the Weimar Republic was perceived to be more modern a state than the Danish monarchy. Also north of the border, local SPD-groups argued for Germany on a rational approach by focusing on the more advanced German social security regulations (Ill. 22).

For the Danish side, Flensburg as a trading town that depended on the trading region Schleswig was a major point in the argumentations and propaganda. Danish posters made Flensburg look economically deserted and neglected if remaining with Germany, while regaining its once flourishing harbor if coming to Denmark.

After the referendum, this economic chain of arguments was ridiculed by the German satiric magazine *Kladderadatsch* (Ill.19), where the well loaded Danish ships have to leave the zone without having gained the territory, and a German woman holding the Kaiserreich flag waves an ironical good-bye to the Danes, who have a lot of wonderful food on their boats but failed nevertheless.

**Conclusion**

As we have shown here, both sides, the Danish and the German one, tried to influence and therewith “educate” the population of the Danish-German borderland to chose one nation, one national belonging they inherently belonged to and therefore should vote for belonging to in the
future. As propaganda is a deliberate and mostly manipulative form to “educate” people and their behavior there is always a different understanding of the same “truth”. Propaganda can clearly be seen as part of a “Geschichtspolitik”, which is a way to interpret history and to convince the public of this certain interpretation. We showed that historical references and facts, even the use of language and national or regional symbols can be explained and used by both sides, but with different purposes. Especially the use of both languages for both sides to “educate” and move people to the right vote, as well as the heavily used concepts of *Heimat* and *Region* shows us that the population of the Danish-German border region was not a clear divide between two nations. Likewise, the use of rational choice approaches in some posters demonstrate the idea that not all inhabitants of the region had made up their ‘national’ mind, yet: that the Danish and German race for Schleswig was still open; or, differently interpreted, that there still were “vaterlandslose Gesellen” who could be bought by Danish bacon. Here, we have a clear precedent to later anti-Danish campaigns and the border struggle after 1945.

Posters, as shown in this paper, are one way to influence, persuade and “educate” people by perpetuating clichés and stereotypes as central messages of the images and sentences. Thus, a “historical truth” could easily be twisted in the German or Danish way. On the other hand, the plebiscite results clearly revealed a blurred picture of a continuous competition of national and regional identifications in Schleswig – which has remained until today, where it is reflected in the continuous existence of the national minorities in the region, in spite of the nationalizing efforts of the Danish and German nation states.

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Illustrations

III. 0 Token money from the municipality Holnis (Germany)

III. 1 Danish plebiscite poster (Thor Bøgelund; 5.000 copies)
III. 2 Token money bill from the municipality Aventoft (Germany)

III. 3 Token money bill from the municipality Auenbüll, today Avnbøl (Denmark)
III. 4 Danish plebiscite poster
Lur (Rasmus Christiansen; 10,000 copies):
Ill. 4 German token money bill from the municipality Auenbüll (Germany)

Golden Horns:

Ill. 5 German token money bill from the municipality Neustadt in Holstein (Germany)
German token money bill from the municipality Süderbrarup (Germany)

Ill. 6 Danish plebiscite poster (Thor Bøgelund; 1,000 copies in each language)
III. 7 Token money bill from the municipality Süderbrarup (Germany)

Token money bill from the municipality Rødekro (Denmark)

III. 8 Pro-German plebiscite postcard
III. 8 German plebiscite poster Farmer (Paul Haase):

![German plebiscite poster](image_url)
Ill. 9 German plebiscite poster (Alexander Eckener)
Ill. 10 Token money bill from the municipality Steinfeld (Germany)

Fake of a token money bill from the municipality Varnaes (Denmark)
III. 11 Title page Illustration German journal „Die Woche“ (march 1920)

Token money bill from the municipality Süderbrarup (Germany)
III. 12 Danish plebiscite poster (Thor Bøgelund; Text Hans Ahlmann; 5,250 copies)
III. 13 German poster for the vote for the national assembly 1919 (Gottfried Kirchbach)

III. 14 Danish plebiscite poster (Thor Bøgelund; 7,500 copies)
Ill. 15 Danish plebiscite poster (Joakim Skovgaard; Text Henrik Pontoppidan)
III. 16 Danish plebiscite poster with Low-German saying (Guys, hang on)
III. 17 Token money bill from the municipality Süderbrarup (Germany)
III. 18 Danish plebiscite poster (Harald Slott-Møller)
Ill. 19 Cover page illustration of the German satiric magazine “Kladderadatsch” (April 1920)
III. 20 German voting poster (Johann Holtz; 50,000 copies)
ILL. 21 Danish poster by Harald Slott-Møller (Why to vote for Denmark?)
Arbejdere! Forskrede!

Den tyske
Alderdomsforsikring
giver et ubestrideligt
Retskrav.

Den danske
Alderdomsunderstøttelse
afhænger af

Sogneraadets og kommunale Instantsers
vilkårlige Afgørelse!

Bevillingen af Alderdomsunderstøttelse er i Danmark afhængig af, hvorvidt der er Trang tilfældet. Dette bedømmes for hvert enkelt Tilfælde færskilt.

Alderdomsrente kan man kræve, 
Alderdomsunderstøttelse skal man bede om. 
Det er to forskellige Ting.

Tyskland byder forskriving og Rente, 
Danmark kun Understøttelse!