

Unruly Students. Identity and Social Control in the Swedish Seventeenth Century Universities of Uppsala, Dorpat and Åbo

THIS CHAPTER FOCUSES UPON the attempts made by university authorities to control students and their ‘unruly’ behaviour and how these endeavours reveal some vital aspects of seventeenth century Swedish society.¹ The aim of my research has been to investigate two aspects of social integration, both at the state and local community levels, through a study of the universities. Eva Österberg’s definition of the concept of social integration will be used, including her division of this area into subgroups such as integration through violence and control from outside, functional integration, integration through identification and finally integration through communicative capacity. Österberg’s definition and division of integration have served the additional purpose of being a step towards operational procedure.

The focus of this investigation has been upon social control and identification. These two aspects of the process of social integration were socially binding and mutually dependent but could in some cases lead to conflict. The study has therefore concentrated upon the clashes of interest between control and identification at three seventeenth century universities in Sweden: Åbo (Turku in Finland), Uppsala (Sweden) and Dorpat in Livonia (present-day Tartu in Estonia). We look at, firstly, the level of social control the students were exposed to and secondly the amount of both internal and external identification that took place. Other aspects of this study are the concepts of corporation, state-formation and honour.

Seventeenth century society, both in Sweden and the rest of western Europe, was made up of corporations with a certain amount of judicial autonomy. The universities themselves were corporations and it is this corporate structure, which

¹ This chapter is based on my doctoral dissertation *Stökiga studenter. Social kontroll och identifikation vid universiteterna i Uppsala, Dorpat och Åbo under 1600-talet*, Studia Historica Upsaliensia 199, Uppsala 2001.

is the special subject of this study. There are several compelling reasons for focusing upon the three universities of Uppsala, Åbo and Dorpat. First of all, these institutions were placed in three very different parts of Sweden's Baltic empire: Uppsala, in present day Sweden, Åbo in Finland and Dorpat in the trans-Baltic province of Livonia (with an economic, social and judicial structure which was very different from that of Sweden and Finland). There are also the local conditions, which feature both similarities and some interesting contrasts between the three university towns. While the academic structures of the universities were to begin with almost identical local economies, the general population and number of students varied greatly in each of the cities. The final development was that with time, the structure and organization of the universities changed in the face of local conditions.

The various activities of the local university and its relationship with the people of the surrounding town, clearly show how integration at different social levels can lead to friction and controversy. Social integration at the various levels led to conflict, as well as collaboration between the actors involved. Both identification and social control led, in the case of the universities, to conflicts with outsiders such as the city and the state, as well as with members of the university itself.

Conflict and Collaboration: The University and the Crown

Unruly students were in the first instance the responsibility of university professors. It was the leaders of the university, the Rector and the professors, who were in charge of the social control of the students. The specific teaching responsibilities (as well as the general social schooling of future State bureaucrats) of the faculty were carefully spelled out in the university's charter and constitution. Ultimate authority as to matters of university discipline was vested in the academic jurisdiction of the university court. Swedish universities had, since the Middle Ages, been empowered with the authority to sit in judgment and to punish both members of the faculty and students. As with other medieval and later Early Modern corporations, such as the city guilds, the university preferred to solve conflicts internally.

The judicial autonomy of the universities caused conflicts due mainly to differences of opinion as to the width, function and relevance of that judicial autonomy. Conflicts with both State and local authorities were not uncommon. The seventeenth century saw the strengthening of State power and an unprecedented

centralization of that power. This phenomenon has been studied before but the purpose of this study has been to develop the depth and knowledge of the university's judicial powers. The expansion of the existing universities and the creation of new ones went hand-in-hand with the expansion of the State, which aimed not only to train students to become efficient and rational administrators but which also had the ultimate ambition of raising the general level of education and degree of civilization in Sweden. The Lutheran faith was also to be taught and imprinted upon the minds and morals of the students at the universities. One can, without exaggeration, claim that a general process of fundamental social discipline was conducted in order to transform the population's fundamental values. The process of building a bureaucratic, centralized and autocratic State was assisted by the creation of courts of appeal (hovrätter), as well as local courts staffed by an increasing number of university trained lawyers. Some historians have claimed that these profound and rapid changes amounted to a virtual revolution both in relation to the judiciary and to higher education in Sweden. These changes have here been linked to the process and pace of social integration. Administrative expansion, large investments in secular university education and the growth of the judiciary were part of the Swedish state authorities' aim to bind together the disparate and different parts of the empire into a single, unitary Swedish nation.

The increasing powers of the State also influenced the university judiciaries. The relationship between the State and the universities was strongly influenced by the establishment of the courts of appeal, which came to take over the powers of appeal (in matters outside the competence of the universities) hitherto vested in the university's chancellor. From 1667 onwards, the universities were to appeal to the relevant courts instead of the Chancellor's office. While the Chancellor was viewed as the protector of the university, the court was the long arm of the State, which led to inevitable conflict. This was especially the case at Åbo and Dorpat. The decision to place both court and university in the same city led to many unfortunate conflicts of interest. Although mutually dependent in many areas, the conflicts proved serious and often touched upon a shared sense of honour. In Åbo, especially, conflicts of rank and prerogatives led to an active defence through judicial channels from the university's side once the professors and faculty's reluctance to use the courts had been overcome.

The general pattern, however, in Sweden's case, as with the rest of seventeenth century Europe, was that the universities, despite some setbacks, maintained most of their former autonomy. The charters of 1625 and 1626, renewed several times

by central State authorities, determined that the universities were to remain judicially independent from the city's control. This did not mean that the State turned its back on the universities. On the contrary State intervention at the universities, to guard against the spread of immorality and ungodliness from the rest of Europe, was on the increase during the whole of the seventeenth century. A recurrent theme from the State's side was that the professors were too weak and apathetic in the face of these student abuses. Yet actual instances of changes in the judicial powers of the State were infrequent. One exception was statutes to strengthen morality and good conduct at the universities during the 1690s.

One clear and unequivocal result of my research is the uncomfortable position of the university's leadership being caught between the demands of the State on the one hand and the students' defence of their autonomy on the other. Furthermore the university's endeavour to integrate the students socially clashed with the need to control and discipline them. Too great an emphasis on social integration was made at the expense of social control which led, in the worst case to state intervention in order to restore control, as well as the balance between that aspect of university life and integration. The faculty was keen to avoid drawing attention to the university, often by placating and appeasing an unruly student body. But if they failed to control or discipline the students they would be accused by the State of weakness. State displeasure could, it was feared, lead to the loss of the university's judicial independence.

Both faculty and students saw the Chancellor as a protector and intermediary in any conflict with the State or city's authorities. Confidence in the Chancellor was usually high if somewhat misplaced, as shown in cases where this official failed to defend the interests of the university. The Chancellor was in an uncomfortable middle position, too. At the same time as he was charged to defend the university's interest with respect to the city and State authorities, he was also in his supervisory capacity supposed to represent the interests of the Crown. The provincial governor (*landshövdingen/ståthållaren*) was in a similarly ambiguous position. Although he was seen in some instances as a protector and benefactor of the university with the powers to intervene on behalf of the university against the demands of the Crown, it was equally likely that he could, accompanied by loud protests from the university, do just the opposite.

An illustration of this is the administrative structure at Dorpat during the 1690s when the Governor-General of Livonia was also the university's chancellor. During the unceasing conflicts between Dorpat's students and the numerous

garrison, the university turned in search of support and succour to the Governor/Chancellor. But in Livonia, an exposed frontier province of vital strategic and economic importance, which required a heavy military presence, the needs and interests of the garrison were of greater importance than those of the university. This was especially true during the 1690s when relations with Poland and Russia, whose territory abutted upon Livonia, deteriorated sharply. Appeals to the Governor of Riga against what was seen as military indifference and callousness went unheeded. The university's confidence in the Chancellor disappeared, which led to appeals being lodged directly with the Crown in Stockholm. Confidence in the Crown by contrast remained solid but Dorpat was always anxious lest their continuous complaints of a local and often trivial nature should lead to the alienation of Stockholm's goodwill.

Another channel of communication and a further potential threat was the arrival of roving commissioners sent out from Stockholm to investigate the universities. The unannounced or even announced arrival of these commissioners was most unwelcome by the universities who feared that their judicial autonomy and legitimacy would be undermined by the commissioners. It was only in the most extreme cases of upheaval among the students (leading to riots) that the feared commissioners were called in to investigate.

'Them and Us': the University, its students and the local community

Another interesting issue is the relationship between the university and the cities or the familiar English university concept of 'town and gown'. Part of the academic identity of the university was its clear distinction from the rest of the city's population and the degree to which the university's jurisdiction was valid in the surrounding city. One aspect of this was the violation of the university's judicial powers and authority as exemplified by the forced military recruitment of students or disputes between the university's craftsmen and those from the town.

The university was always keen to defend its authority and was unwilling to allow social control over the students to be usurped by others. The university, both faculty and students, demanded that their chancellery be contacted before a member of the institution was accused of any crime. To do otherwise was viewed as an insult to the entire university. It was very rare that a member of the university was accused and put in the city's court for an alleged crime. Should a member of the university serve as a witness in another court then the permission of the university's prefect had to be sought beforehand or strong protests from the

Chancellor would ensue. If a student was locked up in the city gaol, then he had to be handed over to the university prefect the following morning. If the city authorities failed to follow this procedure strong protests would be heard. This procedure was common to all three universities in question.

Another area of contention between the city and university authorities was that of police patrols organized by the former authority. Differences between the universities in this area were considerable. Law and order, especially at night, was maintained by the city's watch patrols. The charters of the universities stated clearly that the university would have a separate watch headed by its own watch keeper in addition to the one organized by the city. At Uppsala, the university organized its own watch first and it was not until the 1640s that the city followed in setting up its own watch. In Åbo, by contrast, the university did not have a watch in the 1640s while the city did. It was not until the 1690s that the university watch was organized.

At the largest and most established university, Uppsala, the watch served to provoke the students as it was seen as a challenge and a dare to fight with the guards or just verbally ridicule and abuse them. The watch occupied an ambiguous position and its authority was weak. The watch was viewed by the professors as a vital tool of control but made the task of uniting the entire university, both faculty and students, into one single institution more difficult.

At Dorpat the local garrison also served as the university watch. What was meant to be a temporary measure became a permanent feature essentially because the Crown was unwilling to furnish the university with the necessary pecuniary assistance to set up a watch. Earlier research has not, it seems, pointed out the significance that the garrison was the university watch with all that this entailed, including the constant scuffles and trouble with the students. At Dorpat university, the question of the watch and its often brutal conduct towards the students was highly inflammatory. The Rector and the professors faced constant complaints from the students that they had been beaten and harassed by the watch as soon as they showed themselves in the streets of the city. The students also complained that they faced severe beatings and other insults in the city garrison gaol if they were arrested. In the military court they complained students were being treated with complete contempt and were the subject of the court's arbitrary whims. Given these sentiments of the students, the existence of the garrison and the threat constituted by its soldiers served to cement a sense of social integration and institutional identity. Hence the faculty defended its students and vice versa against

a common 'threat'. Yet the garrison was employed by the university to keep watch over the students; those very same students the faculty so often had to defend against army harassment.

Across the Gulf of Finland at Åbo university the situation was almost completely reversed. Here there were far too few arrests for violence and unruly conduct by the students. Even in the 1690s when the watch was established, very few students faced arrest and punishments. Instances of trouble between the watch and the students were even rarer. There were instances when the students did run rampant through Åbo that the citizens took the law into their own hands and handed the miscreants to the courts to be punished.

Thus the watch influenced the respective universities and the process of social integration and control. The comparative study of the watch shows what the consequences were of its different roles and how these led to forms of integration which varied from one university to another. On a higher level the results give some interesting new facts and knowledge about the social control in urban societies before the organization of a regular police force. At a time when the central State authority was weak and there was no regular police force organized in the country, the local population had a constant and justified fear of criminals, rioting students and rampaging soldiers. A riot could quickly spread into a general conflagration especially if the watch was not present to control unruly students. The watch was, however, a double-edged sword in that it may have controlled student unrest but it provoked new conflicts at the same time.

A closer study of the frequency of violent crime and disturbances against the peace among students also established what honour code and rites of passage into manhood existed among those very same students. In fact, rioting and acts of hooliganism were seen as legitimate tools in the process of integration and in defence of the university's honour. This was a process of integration through identification and for the individual student, a striving to belong to a clearly defined group with shared norms. Only by volunteering to commit acts of daring or defiance could an individual student hope to win acceptance from his fellow students.

Many of the problems associated with students and their conduct towards the watch had to do with copious amounts of alcohol, which was rampant at the universities. In almost all the cases investigated, the overindulgence in alcohol was featured in one way or another. Much attention was given to the problem in the university charters and a curfew was imposed upon the students, making it forbidden to frequent pubs and drinking establishments after nine o'clock in the

evening. Naturally this restriction was completely ignored by the students who continued to drink as long as they liked and the watch was only called in when fighting broke out. The faculty and the professors turned a blind eye to their students' drinking habits, as long as they did not cause a nuisance or jeopardised the university's reputation through their unsuitable conduct. As in so many other walks of life, regulations were one thing and actual judicial practices were quite another.

City churches were also arenas for conflict between the city and university faculty. What was at stake in this case was the ranking of seating in the church during mass, which was strictly hierarchical. The conflicts and their resolution were similar in the three university cities. As we know, the seventeenth century was a society dominated by hierarchies and orders of preference. It was a hierarchy where the university, with the exception of students and faculty of noble birth, did not occupy a natural place. All faculty and students of non-noble birth had to be placed among the citizens of the town (lower down the pews from the nobility and members of the city's bureaucratic State elite) but the question was where was this placement to be? If people were to seat themselves in the 'wrong' place, arguments and unseemly scuffles might follow. The result of these debates on rank and how disputes about the order of precedence were settled in practice gives valuable insights into the workings of urban life in seventeenth century Sweden.

The universities showed how they defended their spheres of power and influence against perceived outside interference from the State and city authorities. This is a consistent pattern in all three cities during the two decades of the 1640s and the 1690s, which have been studied in the greatest detail. The university sought at all times to give the impression to outsiders of monolithic unity and a united front among the members of the institution. Social integration at the universities was not only a way to differentiate the academic community from the rest of the city's population but also a defence mechanism against State interference. It was a question of taking charge over the process of social integration and controls. These controls had to be kept within the realm of the university's area of authority, which entailed a constant vigilance against State and municipal interference. It is quite apparent that all three universities strove to preserve their institutional independence. The only difference was that the opponents were different in Uppsala, Åbo and Dorpat. At Uppsala and Åbo the 'enemy' of that independence was the city's magistrates and municipal authority. The difference at Åbo was

the additional worry of the presence of the local court of appeal while at Dorpat it was the existence of the military and their garrison, which posed the greatest threat to university autonomy.

My research has touched upon some of the key areas in the relationship between town and gown, especially those concerning law and order, as well as the limits of the university's jurisdiction. There are two areas in particular, which are of major interest and which deserve future research. Firstly, in times of economic hardship the academic staff and the city's population, facing insecure or falling incomes, had to rely upon the yield of their rural properties outside the confines of the city. This led to conflicts of ownership and demands upon tenants for rents between 'town and gown'. Secondly, why did it take such a long time for the municipal and university watches to be established?

The University Patriarchy and the Student Sense of Fraternity

My investigations also include the universities' internal organisation and the relationship between the faculty and the students. This relationship, as with most other parts of seventeenth century Swedish society, was patriarchal, or in other words, mutually dependent, unequal and strictly hierarchical. An analysis of the practical application of the universities' judicial powers shows a distinctly different pattern between the periods and the cities. Whereas the 1640s saw many perfunctory investigations, which led to arbitrary justice, the latter decade (the 1690s) was characterised by the university judiciary's wish to reconcile with the students. This led to complicated and laborious court cases, which most often led to an acquittal or ended with no result at all. There was also a significant difference between the universities in question. Most punishments were meted out at Uppsala while Åbo's students, accused of various wrongdoings, were most often given light sentences or acquitted altogether. Both Dorpat and Åbo showed a strong tendency for outsiders to fail in their cases against accused students.

During the 1690s the pattern shared by all the universities was for the administration to persuade their students to accept an out of court settlement instead of going to court. The students' sense of honour stood in the way of such settlements and were seldom pursued when their accuser, such as an apprentice or fellow student, was of a similar rank in society. A physical assault was met with either escalated and more serious violence or was taken up in court. Several endeavours to find an amicable solution to a dispute, which was often treated by the university judiciary as trifling, foundered upon the students' code of honour. That

sense of honour found it contemptuous that a slight or injury to one's honour could be bought. Thus the court's definition of what was practical and the popular sense of honour were at odds. Court cases could, in instances where the court trivialised the matter, lead to a heightened sense of aggrieved personal honour.

The chancellery's social control through the university's judiciary seems to have been of a 'softer' variety and of a quasi-official sort. Certainly the university had a formal court structure but it had many informal sides to it. Students were most often sentenced to fines or a shorter visit in the university gaol. For more serious crimes or repeat offenders the delinquent student lost his stipend or grant for a term or two. Several offences were punishable with suspension or expulsion from the university but that punishment was rarely imposed. In most cases the sentence was reduced to fines and a few days in custody.

The university judiciary was caught between two fires. In general, as the century wore on, the university came under supervision from an increasingly vigilant Crown. Instances of disturbances among students reflected poorly upon the university's reputation and could put its judicial independence in jeopardy. At the same time the university had to reintegrate the offending students to restore harmony and peace at the university. Well meaning lectures about good behaviour at the university ran up against the consistent refusal by some students to heed their professors' admonitions. In some rare cases the students went even further by attacking their own professors. Perhaps the light sentences were not part of some elaborate plan to placate the students but a reflection of the real fear of violent student reprisals.

Instances of actual student attacks were, however, few and far between. In some cases the prefects and professors were targeted and attacked either physically or in written pamphlets. The ever more factious division between students and faculty was most evident at Uppsala during the 1660s when the new university charter attempted to interfere with the students' rights of association. In other cases, the motivation of student displeasure is more difficult to establish. Contrary to expectations, the students did not heckle, cajole or insult their teachers as a common sport but did, in this mutually dependent hierarchical structure, make considerable demands upon their professors. It was commonly expected that the professors would find their students a post after their studies were completed. The duty to find their students work after university grew during the latter part of the century and was a common practice by the turn of the century.

Another shared notion, which all the students at these universities had, was

the duty of their professors and teachers to defend them against what was seen as unreasonable demands and intrusions from outsiders. This system of protection and personal patronage was strongest at Dorpat because of the perennial struggle with the garrison. Here, given the acute situation, students demanded and invariably received the support of the faculty in their ongoing struggle against the soldiers because of the diminutive number of students – a mere one hundred in total. The loss of one or more students was a serious matter and here the students could speak as one voice if aroused by faculty passivity in the face of outside provocation. Thus the faculty was forced to be lenient in their judicial enforcement and be active in supporting their students against outsiders. The mere threat of students leaving was serious enough to warrant the faculty to take action.

A serious threat to the university's social cohesion was the existence of student groups and cliques that were mutually antagonistic. An even worse situation arose if internal student loyalties clashed with loyalty to the university. Thus the overall social cohesion of the university was in open and clear opposition to those bonds of loyalty between the students in their formal societies (nationer) and in their private, informal groups. As with other young all-male groups, these brotherhoods and fraternities had their own codes of conduct, rites of passage and a strict hierarchical structure. This leads me to the conclusion that these groups were neither egalitarian nor particularly fraternal. They were characterized in the relationship between the students by a high degree of forceful coercion, trials of strength and outright use of violence.

Another previously highlighted problem at these universities was the problem of penalties and punishments meted out on those members who did not follow the rules or those outsiders who aroused the ire of the cliques. New students were the most at risk from blackmail (involving the extortion of money) and violent beatings. Some were in fact so badly treated that they left the university before even starting their studies or ending their given courses. Despite these problems, students showed a remarkable unwillingness to act as stool pigeons. The professors discussed this problem but could find no practical solution and very few cases ended up in the university courts. The main cause for the lack of denunciation was probably the not unreasonable deterrent of yet further beatings if the faculty was called in to sort out the matter. Students were not ranked according to age but the numbers of years they had spent at the university. Should a student not respect this, then his more senior classmates would be on hand to give him a quick, violent correction. This form of social control, quite contrary to the rules

of formal university conduct, was not uncommon but could lead to a sharp reprimand from the prefect's office.

The students were also divided into groups according to their geographical origins. These associations, which had been created spontaneously were initially forbidden, then accepted and finally became obligatory at the universities. They were organized along lines of provincial (*landskap*) origins such as *Ostrogothia*, *Ostrobothnia*, *Sudermania*, etc. Such territorial divisions led to sharp conflicts between the different provincial associations, which demonstrates how the social integration within the universities and within Sweden's Baltic empire progressed during the seventeenth century. Instances of national conflicts, such as those incorrectly claimed between German and Swedish students at Dorpat, were few and far between.

The issue of ethnic conflict, in an age when the process of state formation was in a critical and expansive phase, is of great interest. It seems previous research on the topic of ethnic conflict at the universities has exaggerated its impact and frequency. A word of caution needs to be made. This problem is mentioned in records but only rarely did it lead to the embarrassment of a court case. This topic is well deserving of further research in the future.

The comparative studies of the three universities have revealed a general pattern common to all the universities. But Åbo and Dorpat, founded in the early part of the century, are quite different from Uppsala in their structure and student population. The size of the university, in terms of the student population and the numbers of lecturers at the faculty, was decisive. At Dorpat, the smallest in size and the most vulnerable to outside threats, the level of unity between faculty and students was the highest. Dorpat and Åbo also had the least degree of social control over their students. By contrast, the students at Uppsala were more tightly controlled by a faculty that was more remote and differentiated from the students than the smaller universities. Furthermore, the Uppsala faculty viewed the student fraternities as a threat to the unity and strength of the university as a whole. The demands made upon the students in regard to their lifestyle and studying were the greatest. Those students who did not reach a certain standard or who misbehaved were thrown out of the university. Expulsions or sharp reprimands, such as those at Uppsala, were seldom heard of at Dorpat or Åbo where the faculties, given the limited student numbers, could ill afford to lose even a single student.

The most valuable result of my research, I would argue, is that it shows how

the university functioned as a part of society and in relation to its members functioned during the seventeenth century. A patriarchal structure permeated not only the institution as such but also its relations with the outside world and the higher State authorities. It also shows the practical consequences of the inequality that existed in society. This was a strictly hierarchical society where identification, social integration and personal relations were built upon the foundations of rank, status and the concept of honour; issues which were of utmost importance not only to the students and members of the faculty but the whole of society.