The Danish Survival Manual in the Wilderness

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Abstract
The Danish language and the hybrid rituals of Danish-Argentine culture have been maintained in Argentina some 175 years after the arrival of the first Danish settlers. The motivation for this maintenance cannot only be attributed to the migrants' effort of preserving their original identity even in the new country. It also seems to reflect a specific form of self-esteem and belief in the Danish (unlike the Argentine) efficiency and work productivity. Yet, when the migrants eventually revisited Denmark, it appeared to them to be ineffective and alien, which prompted them to reformulate their hybrid identity once more. Based on a primary study of literary production among the Danish immigrant community in Argentina and using theoretical tools from postcolonial studies, the article discusses the process of formulating one's identity during the migration and integration process, in this specific case, when the migrants feel spiritually and morally superior to the majority society they are expected to integrate into.

Keywords: Migration, Denmark, Argentina, linguistic vitality, (ethnic) institutions, literature as a contact zone, hybridity, identity.

1. Introduction

On July 9, 2016, the Argentines commemorated their country's bicentenary. For some of this ethnically diverse nation, it was an anniversary of their motherland, for others of their new home country. Argentine citizens of Danish descent, whose population is estimated at approximately 50,000 persons today (Nicolaisen & Sigvardt 2011: 17), may feel split on this issue. The first Danes settled in Argentina some 175 years ago, and the main current poured into the country between the years 1870–1930, mostly for economic or "socio-psychological"[1] reasons. Cases of political refugees were virtually non-existent. One could therefore expect the descendants of these people to ardently wave the blue and white flags of their new homeland.

And yet, Danish flags were also flying at the bicentenary festivities in the areas where Danish communities live today.[2] Regardless of their place of birth, most people with a

[1] By "socio-psychological reasons" I especially mean the personal desire for freedom and the hope for a new, better life that both North and South America embodied at the time of mass migration from Europe.

[2] Besides the capital city Buenos Aires, Danish migrants tended to settle mainly in the triangle between the cities Tandil, Tres Arroyos, and Necochea some 500 km south of Buenos Aires. Another larger community lived in the subtropical province of Misiones.

Danish background never ceased to identify themselves with Denmark—or at least to relate strongly to this Nordic country. Sentimental reasons and the awareness of one's roots are only a part of the explanation. Another factor, resulting from my field research and primary study on Danish migration literature, seems to be their specific form of high self-esteem that was ethnically conditioned.

This article offers several explanations of the continued strong ties to Denmark. It traces the migrants' strategy to reformulate their new identity in Argentina and to embrace the local values without having to immediately dispose of their crucial old ones. Using examples from texts produced by or about the Danes in Argentina, the article illuminates the main points of the Danish migrants' narrative in Argentina, one that resulted in a specific style of their integration there. Danish immigrants and their descendants became fully fledged members of the society; however, they also managed to create and sustain a universe that was originally driven by a certain sense of exclusivity or almost superiority to the local population and environment. Interestingly, this sense of exclusivity resulted in a backlash when the migrants or their descendants revisited Denmark. It became clear that their Danish universe in Argentina had become far too hybrid and had over time diverged from developments in Denmark. This encounter triggered yet another need for the migrants to reformulate their identity.

2. Background

The framework of this article draws on the concept of linguistic vitality. This concept is defined as the interest of members of an ethnic community to remain a distinct unit with specific culture and language. Linguistic vitality can be measured by means of factors such as demographic data, community status, and institutional support (Šatava 2009: 77). A dense network of ethnic institutions and a rich community life enabled Danish immigrants to keep up their mother tongue in Argentina. Their language, in turn, created a universe where the Danish culture, traditions and mentality could be preserved—in other words, a space allowing for the preservation of one's original identity.

As the article will demonstrate, much of the Danish culture and traditions morphed into a culturally hybrid form due to the new environment. Still, these traditions and elements of culture were considered and referred to as Danish or "Danishness" (Den danske ordbog, Moderne dansk sprog 2016: *"Danskhed"*), especially in early texts. Later texts also use the term "little Denmark" ([*et*] *lille Danmark*) (Johansen 1934: 199).

The other factors of language vitality are rather marginal in the case of Danes in Argentina. Demographically, the community was small in number compared to other migrant groups.[3] For a couple of years, its status became slightly more privileged within

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Smaller communities live also in San Carlos de Bariloche under the Andes, and in the coastal city Bahía Blanca and its surroundings (Coronel Dorrego).

[3] The Argentine Institute of Statistics (INDEC) does not even pay special attention to Danish immigrants, grouping them in the immigration statistics in the category "rest of Europe". Some numbers are provided by the Argentine Ministry of Agriculture from the years 1857–1903. According to them, Danes occupied 12th place among the most populous immigrant groups (Ministry of Agriculture 2015). We know, however, that these statistics are incomplete.

the massive influx of migrants[4] after the Immigration and Colonization Bill (Ley N° 817 de Inmigración y Colonización) was passed in 1876. By this provision, North European settlers with farming (i.e. colonizing) experience were officially preferred to South Europeans (Italians) that otherwise dominated the currents of mass migration (Bjerg 2009: 21–22).

However, the governmental support in place only provided for toll waivers, free accommodation for several days after the migrants' arrival to Argentina, or facilitating seasonal transport to the assigned parcels of land. The support was granted on an individual basis and did not explicitly apply to the whole community. Neither did it guarantee a warm welcome from the local population or a fortunate life for the migrants. Moreover, there is no evidence in the analyzed texts that the law worked as a strong pull factor for the Danish migrants, or as a source of their self-esteem. Instead, their self-esteem seems to stem rather from the belief in Danish efficiency and work productivity, which contrasted with the perceived characteristics of the Argentine population.[5]

The belief in their own abilities gave the Danish migrants a certain sense of superiority to the local society that they were supposed to integrate into. Although individuals might not always have lived up to this self-esteem in their deeds, their more successful peers; the aforementioned dense network of ethnic institutions with efficient organization; and an abundant community life managed to create and add another layer to the mere geographical meaning of the words "Denmark" *(Danmark)*, "Dane" *(dansker)*, and "Danish" *(dansk)*, as the analyzed texts exemplify.

Suddenly, being from Denmark became associated with positive character qualities, although the migrants had left Denmark because of their open dissatisfaction with their life there (Bækhøj 1914: 25–26; Nissen 1943: 76–81). What is even more striking in the texts is that people (literary subjects) that did not fit the positively charged meaning of the sign "Dane" were either explicitly excluded from it, or strangely absent from it. Jacques Derrida's understanding of signification, namely the deferral of the meaning of signs, comes to mind here (Derrida 1991: 61). In this paper, I argue that the positive charge of the meaning of signs "Danish", "Denmark", or "Dane" was only added after the migration process to Argentina was completed.

Moreover, when we read the whole body of texts structurally and generalize the plots, we may conclude that the deferral of the meaning of the signs "Denmark", "Dane", and "Danish" and their positive charge emerge under three further conditions:

(1) Nostalgia and homesickness affect the subject of narration.
(2) There is hope that one day the subject might be able to re-visit his or her motherland.
(3) The migration process has been completed successfully—in the economic, social, and also in the moral sense.

[4] From the mid-1850s till 1914. Historians and statisticians generally designate the era of mass migration to Argentina between the years 1870 and 1914, where an estimated 6 million immigrants arrived in the country, mainly from Europe.

[5] Another root of the Danish sense of being special was no doubt their Protestant religion, which distinguished them from the predominantly Catholic environment in Argentina. This factor is only dealt with briefly in this article, as such an analysis would require a different set of materials.

Naturally, a strong feeling of homesickness was present in Argentina due to the constant recalling and maintenance of values, behavior patterns, and cultural practices from Denmark. Yet, when the migrant had the opportunity to re-visit Denmark, suddenly, his or her motherland seemed alien, ineffective, and spoiled to him/her. This eventually created yet another need of reformulation of the migrant's Danish identity when s/he returned to his or her South American home country. The resulting reformulation was, as this article will demonstrate, far from predictable or systematic.

3. Materials

The analysis is based on primary sources collected during research trips to Argentina and Denmark (in 2009, 2010, and 2016). By estimation, 90% of them are in Danish. They were collected in the towns where Danish migrants have historically settled (Buenos Aires, Tandil, Tres Arroyos, Necochea, La Dulce)—both in community libraries as well as in bookshelves of private residences. Only a few of the sources are also available in Denmark.

The body of these 55 texts varies greatly in genre: from novels, short stories, memoirs, edited diaries, (auto)biographies, essays, and travel literature, to yearbooks, special festive editions, and brochures. Additionally, there are also various secondary sources, such as anthropological and historical studies or university theses devoted to the Danish immigrant community in Argentina. To my knowledge, there are more studies to come both in Denmark and in Argentina, as well as more primary sources that can be expected to emerge in course of the following years.

4. Context

In order to give a better idea of the material and spiritual context, let us also briefly mention the ethnic institutions maintained and events held by the Danish community in Argentina. The enumeration is based partly on my own field research, and partly on an earlier description of the history of Danish ethnic institutions (Vrbová 2014).

The purpose of this catalogue is to demonstrate the saturation of the above mentioned Danish universe on Argentine soil. The institutions and events listed also served as opportunities for Danish migrants and their descendants to speak Danish and momentarily forget about the local cultural conditions of their new home. As we will see, the opportunities spanned basically across all layers and crucial situations in one's lifetime, from cradle to grave.

Let us remain in the present and consider the typical life of a hypothetical elderly lady with Danish heritage in 2017.[6] For the purpose of this example, we will say she lives in Tres Arroyos or Tandil, in one of the cities with higher presence of Danish migrants, in the south of Buenos Aires province in the pampa. Most of her day takes place in Spanish: shopping, talking to neighbors, making phone calls and electronic communication, and

[6] Women of senior age are prevalent at the gatherings of the Danish community in Argentina these days. Usually, they are already second generation of Danish migrants in Argentina, though one may still encounter first generation migrants.

even talking to her grandchildren. Yet, whenever she speaks to her peers, she might find herself switching to Danish, and when at home, her look may slide from the picture of the Danish Queen Margarethe 2nd on the wall to other material objects that refer to Denmark and Danish culture. In the evenings, she may read Danish books (published in Argentina), visit lectures in the local Danish club (whose premises are adjacent to the local Danish Lutheran church), participate in a ladies' club, teach Danish, read messages in Facebook groups featuring news from Denmark, or just visit her friends and talk about the good old times in Danish sports clubs and at Danish summer feasts, which additionally served as matchmaking opportunities.[7] On Sunday, she goes to the church to listen to the priest preaching both in Danish and Spanish (Spanish being the main language nowadays, but with the liturgy in Danish). Then she may visit the cemetery to clean the grave of her ancestors. The gravestones not only have Danish names on them, but also differ in style from the tombs and other burying modes of Argentine Catholics. Whenever she goes out, she will pass places in the city that bear signs of the Danish presence: be it a milestone at Solar Danes (Plaza Pellegrini) in Tres Arroyos with quotations of three famous Danish authors and thinkers (Grundtvig, Andersen, Kierkegaard), or in Tandil, the street named Fugl after the founding father of the Danish community life in Argentina.

Her ties with Denmark can be furthermore re-affirmed at regular events such as the annual *sommerfesten*, 'summer feast'.[8] At the regular five-day seminar *Fem dage* / *Cinco días*, she may get an update on the current developments in Denmark. The Danish community gathers at an *estancia* 'farm' to meet and listen to a *foredragsholder/e* 'lecturer/s'. Typically a leading personality from an area of Danish public life will be invited to Argentina at the expense of the community in order to speak of his or her field of work. The opportunity to listen to current Danish language also plays a significant role at such events. At the same time, the gatherings strengthen the sense of commonality and connectedness[9] and make the Danes appear as a sort of closed group within Argentine society.

As we can see, Argentine citizens of Danish descent still have abundant opportunities to speak the language of their ancestors and to connect with their culture. These interactions may also affect other crucial situations in one's lifetime. Primarily, though, they demonstrate the commonality and connectedness of the community and give them a feeling of groupness.[10] What today may seem as a simple free time activity, used to serve as a significant social network that could save individual lives from economic disasters

[7] According to several informants and sources, until as late as the middle of the 20th century, parents with a Danish immigration background preferred their children to marry within the local Danish community. Ethnically mixed marriages were considered undesirable (Møller 2007: 79, 85).

[8] This summer feast is actually sort of reversed Midsummer's Night taking place in November, i.e. during summer in the southern hemisphere.

[9] *Connectedness* is used here in Brubaker's (2004: 47) sense of the term.

[10] Brubaker defines *groupness* as "the sense of belonging to a distinctive, bounded, solidary group" (ibid.).

and social isolation in the new, wild country.[11] These are also the roots of the Danish belief in their own powers and the efficiency of their community in Argentina.

5. Method[12]

Despite the diverse genres of the analyzed texts, all of them convey a more or less direct experience with migration and life in diaspora. Herein, the literary subjects share the experience of an active formation of one's hybrid culture with an ambivalent relationship both to the power center (Argentina) and to what I call the "reference center" or "the culturally and spiritually imperial center", i.e. Denmark. Hybrid culture and ambivalent relationship refer to two basic concepts in postcolonialism: hybridity and ambivalence. [13]

Regardless of the literary genre, we can consider all texts as a space-time where various indicators, motifs, and figures of speech enable us to deduce historical and social processes of that era. Furthermore, we can indicate the position of the literary subject within these processes and trace his/her relationship to them.

When searching for the answer to the question of what status the community seeks to maintain through the language of their ancestors, one is inevitably led to the issue of identity (and identity reformulation) during the migration process. Thus, in the analysis of the texts, I chose to focus on the images of Denmark and being Danish as well as on the meaning in the signs "Denmark" (*Danmark)*, "Dane" *(dansker)*, and "Danish" *(dansk).*

Structural analysis and postcolonial reading method, along with the use of several key postcolonial and poststructuralist concepts, predominantly based on Homi Bhabha's and

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[11] For the history of Danish ethnic institutions in Argentina and their organization please refer to Vrbová (2014).

[12] Due to the limited space of the article, the background explanation of the materialist and poststructuralist postcolonial formulations that are used in our analysis is very condensed, as is the description of the historical conditions of the Danish migration to Argentina. For further reading, I refer to Vrbová (2015), where both issues are dealt with in much more depth and refer to a more robust bibliography.

[13] As for *hybridity*, Hall, Held and McGrew (n.d.) characterize it as a result of a cultural identification with roots in several cultures. They see it also as a process of creating one's identity in time basing on various crossovers and cultural mixes that are more and more common in the globalized world. Bhabha associates hybridity with interspace(s) and temporality and considers it a result of colonial power that constantly has to authorize the truth and authenticity. From the point of view of the colonizer/center, he calls it "the production of discriminatory identities that secure the 'pure' and original identity of the authority" (Bhabha 2004: 159).

Ambivalence/ambivalent relation refers to the relationship(s) between the colonizer/center and the colonized/periphery. Their relationship(s) cannot be called opposite partly because they are dependent on each other, and partly because the colonized/periphery is complicit in the power system, no matter how they try to resist and rebel it. The colonizer/center may not only abuse their superior position either in order to exploit the colonized/periphery. At the same time, they may bring civilization progress through various channels. Ambivalence expresses itself also in the (cultural) representations and mimesis of the center that are produced in the periphery.

Jacques Derrida's coining, have proved to be the most suitable for the following analysis. Further explanation of these methods follows below.

Explicitly articulated motifs that refer, or are connected, to Denmark and being Danish enable us to apply a structural analysis to the text. As a result, a set of key concepts that are associated with Denmark and the subject's relationship to it can be established. I have worked with a set of approximately 30 key concepts that associate home, family, one's motherland, countrymen and foreigners, mother tongue, objects related to Denmark, church, school, community life, health and illnesses, food and drinks, fauna and flora, means of transport, customs and habits, ideas about the future and memories of the past, encounters with Argentine society, binary oppositions civilization vs. barbarity, the present vs. the past vs. the future, and others.

In addition, grammatical elements such as the use of pronouns and adverbs (*here–there*, *our–their*) proved relevant too. The linguistic strategy of inserting Spanish words into the Danish text could be used as a hint of the subject's/author's position in Argentine society (to what extent he or she considers Spanish a tool for his or her communication). Also, the possible addressee (at least in outline) of the text can be reconstructed in this way.

These pieces of information can serve for a further analysis of how the text is organized and to what purpose. Another element that could be positively observed in the physical text are words with emotional tint: especially those of affection and pleasure. Again, emotions in the text may be simply expressed by means of grammar—by the sentence structure or employing an element of alienation (a Spanish expression in the Danish text, for example).

What can a postcolonial reading method add to this analysis? Most importantly, it offers us a different perspective of the texts. In short, postcolonial reading method uses the concepts and methods of postcolonial studies and applies them to the text. The core issues of postcolonial studies are power and control, the mode of controlling others, and the relationship between the dominant and the marginalized, the center and the periphery. All of these can be traced and observed in texts. Texts are considered the medium of language which, in turn, is a medium of capturing reality. Literature becomes a contact zone[14] where—through postcolonial reading—one can decipher individual voices of various subjects, concealed voices and topics, shifts and deferrals of meanings, and the process of negotiation and translation. By deferrals of meaning, I refer again to Derrida's term *différance*, which is based on the principle that "the signified concept [of a sign] is never present in and of itself, in a sufficient presence that would refer only to itself" (Derrida 1991: 63). That is—according to Derrida's further elaboration on this term—not only are all concepts integrated into a system within which they refer to each other, but

[14] This term is coined by the American linguist and professor of Spanish and comparative literature, Marie Louise Pratt. As she put it in her paper *Arts of the Contact Zone*: "I use this term to refer to social spaces where cultures meet, cloth, and grapple with each other, often in contexts of highly asymmetrical relations of power, such as colonialism, slavery, or their aftermaths as they are lived out in many parts of the world today" (Pratt 1991: 34). Literature, according to Pratt, represents one of the forms of the contact zone.

also because of the subjective perception that every reader (or addressee in general) adds to each sign.

The process of negotiation and translation are Bhabha's terms (Bhabha 2004: 25). Both refer to processes of establishing new hierarchies and new meanings of signs. Negotiation is an act of engagement with an ideology or an authority's claims in time, of contradictory and antagonistic instances "that open up hybrid sites and objectives of struggle, and destroy those negative polarities between knowledge and its objects, and between theory and practical-political reason" (ibid.). It is especially the temporal dimension of this concept that Bhabha emphasizes. The process of translation requires an open space where time and individual interventions of negotiation can be absorbed and regulated without the expectation of a teleological analysis or consistency with the unifying thought (Bhabha 2004: 38).

As we know from previous work in postcolonial studies (see e.g. Loomba 1998: 16; McLeod 2007: 9), there is no such thing as postcolonial theory or universal claims about (post)colonialism. One has to collect pieces of information on the particular era one wants to study and make a choice about the appropriate postcolonial formulations or the disciplinary approaches one wants to apply. Postcolonial methodologies depend always on the concrete historical context and the disciplinary frame one wants to explore. For this reason, McLeod (2007: 9) labels postcolonialism as a "hinged concept", defined as follows:

> "[a hinged concept which] articulates together particular historical and material conditions on one hand, with strategic, often contestatory ways of representing, knowing and transforming such conditions on the other. (…) [it] describes, evaluates and helps to configure a *relationship*: between reality and its representations; between what we study and how we study it; between thought and action."

Now, how is postcolonial reading method applied in the specific context of this analysis? By focusing on the images of hybrid culture and the ambivalent relationships to the centers (both the power center and the reference center), the dynamics of the image of Denmark over time becomes observable. The text becomes a contact zone where various cultures clash and the subject of the text must order them into a hierarchy. We may also observe clashes of various codes of knowledge. This is crucial for tracing the above-mentioned high self-esteem and sense of superiority among the Danes in Argentina.

Furthermore, historical and social processes can be discerned from the texts. Danish migration to Argentina (and, in some cases, back to Denmark) was not a coincidental chain of unique cases, but rather a social process within a broader historical context, and its form was regulated heavily by both the Danish and the Argentine government. The integration of Danish migrants into the then young Argentine nation is another social phenomenon that can be traced within the texts.

Finally, the analysis explores Danish migrants' strategies to keep aloof from the customs and habits of the dominant society in their new country and to maintain their own traditions. In this manner, they created a separate hierarchical organization of authority and power from their fellow Argentine citizens. The demarcation of the center

and periphery of this power and authority within the code of knowledge was also different. Through a postcolonial analysis, by observing the literary subjects' preferences and respective authorities, one can decipher and restore these pieces of information whilst setting them in their appropriate context.

Additionally, the analysis also relies on Derrida's concept of archi-writing (Derrida 1991: 66), and, more specifically, his concept of the open, never-ending reference of signs to other signs that results in a deferred meaning of every text and its constantly incomplete significance (Derrida 1991: 64). It has proven fruitful to depart from his idea that signs are always understood subjectively. That makes the text constantly open and ready for new readings—be it because of the events that have happened after the text was composed or owing to facts that become revealed at a later point in time. In the end, not even the author can control the meaning of the text, because s/he cannot influence neither the reader's understanding, nor the deferred meaning. The meaning, according to Derrida, is never present in the text (Derrida 1991: 65–66) because of the time delay and the openness of interpretation.

This literary tool has helped me substantially to reveal layers of meaning in the signs "Denmark", "Dane", and "Danish".

6. Quotations

I will now shift my attention to the significant quotations from the analyzed texts. They go one step further and illustrate the above-mentioned argument about the high self-esteem of the Danes in Argentina. They show how a positive quality was added to the signs "Denmark", "Dane", and "Danish"—and how easily one could be dissociated from these signs if s/he did not live up to certain expectations.

The four texts quoted illustrate how this deferred meaning emerges. *Eldorado. 20 Aar i Sydamerika* (1938) by Nina Raben Engwald, Tage Nissen's *De mange Fold. En mands liv* (1943) and *Et Livs Kamp gennem 70 Aar* (1947) by Carl Buus had been written in Danish. *Memorias de Juan Fugl. Vida de un pionero danes durante 30 años en Tandil – Argentina. 1844–1875* were published in Spanish in 1989 but are based on an older Danish, hand-written original.

After a brief introduction of the context, I have marked the relevant phrases in bold. The following section will provide further interpretation and comments on these marked passages.

(1) Hans Christensen Fugl (1811–1900), a founding father and probably the greatest success story of the Danish community in Argentina, tightly connected with the region of Tandil, produced two volumes of memoirs (around 1880 and in 1895). To my knowledge, five more books have been written about him. The following quotation comes from his later memoirs, which were re-published in 1989. The hand-written Danish original from 1895 was typed and translated into Spanish by Alice Larsen de Rabal. The passage is about Fugl's encounter with Signe Jakobsen, the wife of his friend. Mrs. Jakobsen had run off with an Argentine gaucho, abandoning her dysfunctional marriage. Fugl is asked to visit the hut where she now lives in order to bring her back to her husband. The gaucho ushers him in:

Larsen de Rabal (1989: 159)

(...) [S]e levantó enseguida y fue hasta la pieza donde ella estaba, ***semivestida acostada sobre un miserable catre de varillas atadas, y cubiertas con un cuero de vaca.*** *No tenía ropa de cama ni tampoco una frazada. Sólo se cubría con su vestido. (...) Yo me detuve en la puerta y me dirigí a ella en castellano.*

- *¿Has leído la carta de tu madre? ¿Es verdad?*
  Ella se ahogaba en llanto y ***me pedía que le hablara en dinamarqués****.*
  Yo le contestaba en castellano diciendo:
- *No.* ***No te hablo más en danés pues no te reconozco como connacional ni digna de hablarte en mi idioma patrio.***

(…) [H]e got up immediately and followed me to the room where she was, **half-dressed and lying on a poor sofa made of sticks tied together and covered with a cow skin.** She did not have bed linen or a blanket. She only covered herself up with her clothes. (…) I remained at the door and asked her in Spanish.

- Have you read the card from your mother? Is it true? She burst in tears and **asked me to speak in Danish**. I answered her in Spanish:
- No. **I will no longer speak Danish to you because I no longer recognize you as my countrywoman or worthy of being addressed in the language of my motherland.**[15]

(2) Contrary to Madam Jakobsen, Fugl himself is described in very positive terms by his biographers. This description comes from a book cover of *De mange Fold* (in a loose translation: An abundant harvest) published in Denmark 43 years after Fugl's death.

Nissen (1943: book cover)

(...) Hans Fugl, der Trin for Trin arbejder sig op og hvis Trang til virkelig Frihed og Selvstændighed først bliver tilfredsstillet, da han staar i det nye Land hinsides Havet og skal til at bygge sig en Tilværelse op, kun udrustet med ***de bare Næver, et godt Hoved og sine solide, danske Kundskaber****. (...) Den vidner om* ***dansk Vilje og Kraft i det fremmede*** *og den vil øge Forstaaelsen for Landsmænd i den nye Verden og skabe et Baand af Fællesfølelse mellem Hjemlandet og det nye Fædreland.*

[15] All English translations are mine.

(…) Hans Fugl, who gradually works himself up and whose desire of real freedom and independence is satisfied only when he finds himself in the new country on the other side of the ocean and has to build up new existence, only equipped with **his bare hands, a good head and solid, Danish knowledge**. (…) [The book] gives testimony of **Danish will and power in an alien environment** and it is going to rise understanding for our countrymen in the New World and establish a mutual feeling between the home country and the new fatherland.

(3) The female writer, Nina Raben Engwald, explains the idea of her husband that resulted in his employment as a prospector and agitator for a new scrap of land that was opened up for colonization in the North Argentine province of Misiones in the 1930s:

Engwald (1938: 89–90)

En af de Bestemmelser, der blev taget deroppe, var, at de skulde koloniseres med Danske i første Omgang. Hvis en Kolonisation skal lykkes, ***gælder det først og fremmest om at faa fat paa de rigtige Mennesker straks****, og det var min Mands faste Overbevisning,* ***at der ikke fandtes nogen, der var bedre til at løse Koloniseringsopgaven end danske Landmænd – de er dygtige og grundige i deres Arbejde og stræber i Reglen efter at kunne naa videre end til blot at klare Dagen og Vejen.***

One of the decisions that was taken up there was that it should be colonized by Danes in the first round. Should a colonization process succeed, **it is of utmost importance to get the right people from the very start**, and it was my husband's firm belief that **there was nobody better to this colonization task but our Danish countrymen – they are apt and diligent at their work and they usually strive after being able to reach further in life than just to make ends meet.**

(4) In the biography or autobiography[16] of Carl Buus, a Danish businessman, farmer, and a highly religious man influenced by the Danish thinker N. F. S. Grundtvig (1783–1872), we find this passage.

[16] From the nature of the text, and from the absence of any paratext of the book respectively, it is not clear whether the author of the text is Buus himself or somebody else who had written about him.

Buus (1947: 49)

I et Land som Argentina, desværre for stærkt præget af ***den spanske Races lave Kultur og Præg****, maatte det ganske naturligt* ***glæde ham, at turde haabe og tro paa Flertallet af hans Børn og Slægt ønskede at bevare og hjælpes af Fædrenes Tro og Slægtstradition.***

In a country like Argentina that is sadly far too influenced by **the low culture and style of the Spanish race**, naturally, he had to be quite **happy about being able to hope for more of his children and relatives that wished to retain and seek help in the faith and family traditions of their (father) ancestors.**

7. Analysis

The ethnic institutions maintained by Danes in Argentina have been conducive to the preservation of the Danish language, at least at a conversational level. The question is, thus, what sort of significance did this language maintenance hold for the Danish community? In other words, what kind of status and specific features did the community want to retain through their original language?

The four quotations here may provide a hint to the answer.[17] In the first quotation, there is a clear cultural expectation regarding the behavior of Danes. Obviously, being Danish (in Argentina) is associated with positive character qualities. Oddly enough, when somebody does not live up to this idea, it does not affect the deferred positive meaning of the signs "Denmark" or "Dane". Instead, the individual in question becomes excluded from these signs. Madam Jakobsen serves as a good example of this exclusion: regardless of her (publicly known) unhappiness in the marriage, in Fugl's eyes and the eyes of other protagonists, she does not behave like a good Christian wife, and therefore does not deserve to be counted as Danish.[18]

Conversely, it is less clear what is meant by Fugl's "Danish will and power" in the second quotation. It is also unclear if these qualities would still be referred to as Danish even if Fugl were, for example, French. From this particular book, however, we can

[17] These four quotations present a concise illustration of the argument I am working with for the purpose and within the scope of this article. For further examples and a more detailed elaboration of the topic of Danish (re)formulation of their identity during the migration process to/in Argentina I refer to my Ph.D. thesis (Vrbová 2015: 205–290).

[18] Still, even the texts record that not all Danes in Argentina have been exemplary Christians and successful pioneers. Drinking seems to have been quite a problem, especially among single men (Johansen 1944: 64). Johansen describes liquor shops as people's meeting point in the pampa and he claims that his countrymen were far worse about drinking than people from the Southern nations. Dybdal Møller mentions cases of suicides among Danish pioneers (Møller 2007: 53). Texts by other authors hint that neither Danish women, nor girls were always the embodiment of virtues. Although history is written by the winners, we must not forget about these people, and regard them as a supplement of the Danish-Argentine community, they cannot be parted from.

observe that the signs "Danish" and "Dane" bear the connotation of fair and brave behavior, smart solutions, hard work, and successful problem-solving. These connotations are also employed in Raben Engwald's text, in which Danes are considered as agents of civilization thanks to these characteristics, which are seen as prerequisites for colonization. Finally, from the text of Carl Buus, a certain cultural and spiritual superiority emerges that is also ethnically conditioned.

This articulated feeling of superiority and high self-esteem among people of Danish descent points back to my main argument in this article. What is worth noting is that the association of these positive qualities with the signs "Denmark", "Dane", and "Danish" emerged only after the migration process to Argentina was completed. Denmark was rarely described as a good Christian country with fair-minded and smart people before Fugl, Buus, and Raben Engwald (as protagonists) had set off on the journey (Bækhøj 1914: 21–25; Nissen 1943: 10–17; et alia).

The deferred positive meaning of the signs "Denmark", "Dane", and "Danish" first appears on Argentine soil. Furthermore, several other factors had to also be at play. This becomes obvious after we have generalized the plots in the body of the analyzed texts:

- Nostalgia and homesickness affect the subject of narration,
- There is hope that one day the subject might be able to re-visit his or her motherland,
- The migration process has been completed successfully—in the economic, social but also the moral sense.

These three factors may work together simultaneously, or only one or two of them may be present. Gradually, they affect the image of Denmark in a way that it mutates into a certain utopia[19] and sort of a paradise lost (Vrbová 2015: 290). Both the utopia and the paradise lost are the matter of the past, not a state to come. In my Ph.D. thesis on the topic (ibid.) I work with the specific body of literature that has attempted to establish links between utopia(s), paradise lost and America, or Argentina respectively. In this article, nevertheless, we may also recall Homi Bhabha's take on Utopia(nism) that he links with cultural diversity; and hereby with migration. Utopia(nism), according to him, serves as a safe harbor for mythic memory of a unique collective identity of a separated, totalized culture.[20]

From the analyzed Danish texts it becomes clear that the signs "Denmark", "Dane", and "Danish"—with deferred meaning when used in Argentina—have grown to encompass a special, hybrid universe, and they ceased to refer only to the country in northern Europe. Subsequently, this universe acquired the name "little Denmark" ([*et*] *lille Danmark)* (Johansen 1934: 199; Møller 2007: 8, 35) and became the ground of the so-called Danish-Argentine identity.

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[19] Utopia in the sense of an ideally perfect place, not the reference to the work of Thomas More.

[20] "Cultural diversity is also the representation of a radical rhetoric of the separation of totalized cultures that live unsullied by the intertextuality of their historical locations, safe in the Utopianism of a mythic memory of a unique collective identity" (Bhabha 2004: 50).

Despite the active community life and the interest in maintaining the Danish language as well as the culture even in the vast pampa or the wild jungle of Misiones, it is important to reiterate that it was never the explicit goal of the Danish immigrants to reconstruct a new Denmark in Argentina (Vrbová 2015: 274, 291). In other words, certain aspects of Denmark and being Danish were supposed to be left behind when moving to Argentina. A quote from Tage Nissen's biography of Hans Fugl demonstrates this clearly in the description of the first-generation settlers:

> "Only very rarely did the free, fresh life—a lot more satisfactory especially for peasants—evoked feelings of homesickness after the old, cultivated and rigid existence in the fatherland. Yet the traditions from home, the valuable heritage that they had brought along with them, was guarded and protected with the deepest feeling of piety and love." (Nissen 1943: 310)

These traditions, whose performance was often improvised in the simple, culturally and climatically distinct conditions, mutated gradually into the rituals of the Danish-Argentine community and laid foundations of its identity.

It was never the aim of the Danish migrants or the Danish government to colonize Argentina in the sense of taking the land and forcing native people or other groups to accept Danish ideological values (Vrbová 2015: 219). On the contrary, the Danish community in Argentina has always acted as a closed, exclusive club that was only accessible to people with ethnic ties to Denmark.[21] And, as the above-mentioned examples from the texts show, even these people had to fulfill a certain idea of "Danish" behavior in order to find acceptance in the community.

It became clear early on that the Danish migrants were not cultivating "pure" and "original"[22] Danish culture and values, but were rather creating a hybrid cultural space between Denmark and Argentina (and possibly other cultures as well in some cases). In the literature, this hybrid culture is usually referred to as the "Danish-Argentine identity". Various studies from past decades have been documenting the gradual shift of the stress in the expression, from "Danish", on the slash (-), and finally to "Argentine" (Jarnum 2006: 3). At a certain point, it was obvious how this Danish-Argentine community had deviated, at times even excluded itself, both from the mainstream Argentine social discourse and the original Danish discourse.

In the case of the Argentine discourse, we may see it as a deliberate exclusion that, however, did not necessarily lead to a social marginalization. More or less voluntarily, the Danish community chose to position themselves as subaltern in Argentine society. Here I refer to Bhabha's (2004) use of the term *subaltern*. In his understanding—put simply—the subaltern are the constantly shifting margins of the unit that some people tend to call "a nation" (Bhabha 2004: 225). The subaltern's perpetually changing presence and form within the dominant unit ("a nation") force it to constantly review its position

[21] For example, the Protestant congregation in Tandil. Until 1903, only persons with Danish background were allowed to become members (Bestyrelsen for den protestantiske Menighed i Tandil 1927: 15) and take part in its events. Similarly with other institutions and activities.

[22] Here I refer to Bhabha's aforementioned definition of hybridity. See footnote 13.

and census. The subaltern are represented by minorities as well as diasporas, and they also serve as the reference of antagonism (the binary opposition *us vs. the others*). Simultaneously, however, they constitute a part of the whole. They supplement the dominant society, filling in a certain interspace.

The Danish-Argentine discourse became de facto a supplement in the dominant Argentine discourse by limiting its linguistic and cultural boundary. Still, the Danish-Argentines had no problem accepting the social values of this dominant discourse in most everyday situations. In the binary opposition *us vs. the others*, they could pass smoothly onto the side of *us*; however, they also kept creating situations where they deliberately excluded themselves from this dominant discourse and became *the others.*

What is the typology of these situations? Certainly, it was the Danes' Protestant faith that made them different from the local population.[23] The welcoming immigration politics of the Argentine government, which were especially targeted at the Nordic protestant colonizers, may be considered as another contributing factor to this self-exclusion. The migrants might have gotten the impression that they had a choice: to accept the values of the new society or to retain their original ones, as the Argentine government expressed an explicit interest in using the Nordic migrants' skills to colonize (and thereby to civilize) the country, without imposing any heavy requirements on their social or cultural integration.[24]

The third type of these situations where Danes distanced themselves deliberately from the main axis of the dominant ideology and discourse in Argentina, was their rather high self-esteem and belief in their own superiority. The connectedness and commonality of their community through various traditions and events, the dense network of their ethnic institutions that were able to assist individuals in almost every life situation, and the possibility to use Danish language at these occasions presented a safe haven in the life of Danish migrants.

In the case of the Danish community's—it's actually disconnection or deviation—from the dominant ideology and discourse in Denmark, however, the process might have not always been so voluntary. The following paragraphs about the gradual development of the Danish-Argentine identity and the image of little Denmark in the texts of these migrants outlines this development.

It is true that the majority of Danes emigrated to Argentina (or to the Americas in general) in order to escape the harsh economic conditions in Denmark. Another important motivation to make the journey was psychological: the desire to live more freely than the rigid social structures of Denmark would allow at that time, to fulfill one's life dreams (Johansen 1934: 11–12; Nissen 1943: 85). In that sense they made a choice and a choice was also made about what to bring along when setting out for the unknown country. This

[23] Due to the limited scope of this article, this issue is only briefly touched upon here. A separate study on this topic, based on less accessible materials in Argentina, would be desirable otherwise.

[24] The only exception may be the requested language integration: from 1884 (6 years after the Immigration Law was passed), children had to be formally educated in Spanish by native speakers. To put this provision in practice took another decade, though (Agertoft 2005: 64–66).

constitutes the ruling principle in the concept of little Denmark: it was based on personal selections of traditions and habits and driven by individual nostalgia for Denmark.

Unlike the term "Danish colony" (*danskerkolonien* or just *kolonien*), little Denmark was more strongly oriented towards the past. While the colony was rather a description of the material presence (sometimes together with visionary plans for future), little Denmark had certain features that made it resemble a museum. However, due to the subjective selection of the Danish elements as well as the external conditions in Argentina, the carefully conserved Danish traditions morphed into hybrid forms. Gradually, a whole discourse was added: a discourse of the community that was gathering harsh lessons of pioneer life and interacting with new cultures and environments. And yet, it did manage to retain ties to the country they or their ancestors once had come from. Cultural representations, such as books, newspapers and cultural events played an important role here.

Around the mid-1920s yet another feature came into play: the ambition to be seen and appreciated from the cultural imperial center, i.e. from Denmark itself. Little Denmark ceased to be a mere receiver of cultural representations from the reference center (Denmark), and it became itself a producer of cultural representations. These are the years when Danish books came out of Argentine publishing houses, and newspapers were being printed. Community and cultural houses were founded and a church in the downtown of Buenos Aires was built thanks to private donations.[25] Lecturers from Denmark[26] were not only supposed to visit and update the community about the recent development in Europe, they were also expected to watch their countrymen (or former countrymen) in an alien environment; to appreciate their achievements; and to spread the news about them after having returned to Denmark (Johansen 1934: 199–200).

The Danish lecturers did appear to be impressed (or at least they pretended to be). Upon his return to Denmark, Frederik Schrøder, a Danish teacher at the Askov folk high school, wrote the following words about the Danish community in Argentina: "It is wonderful to see how people out in the distance can guard the Danish family silver on the spiritual level" (quoted in Møller 2007: 102). Thirty years later, priest Otto Helms from the Tandil played with an image of a nuclear blast in Denmark in one of his texts. He expressed the idea that even if this tragedy happened, "Danishness" would not perish from the surface, because the world could be populated with the Danes from Argentina who managed to preserve the Danish culture on an equal level like the members of the Danish community in Denmark (Møller 2007: 102–103). However, this idea was soon criticized due to its many problematic points, such as omitting the much broader reality in Argentina among the Danish migrants.

Last but not least, on the topic of little Denmark, I wish to quote the author and pioneer Oluf Johansen. He was quite realistic and aware of the factors that had caused the close and firm attachment to Denmark, Danish culture, and Danish self-esteem out in the

[25] The first Danish church on the Argentine soil was built in Tandil in 1877. In 1927, the last element, a huge bell cast in Denmark, was added. Churches/chapels in the other Danish towns, Tres Arroyos and Necochea are from the first decades of the 20th century.
[26] The first seminar *Fem dage/Cinco días* took place in 1923.

wilderness. It was exactly the nostalgia of home; a higher level of civilization in Denmark that migrants no longer encountered in Argentina (especially in the wild Misiones); and the opportunity to interact with other Danes,[27] that made the Danish migrants stick more to their original identity rather than exchange it for new American values: "And it is not certain at all, if we would have been so Danish, had we stayed at home" (Johansen 1934: 209). In reality, little Denmark was gradually becoming more hybrid.

Why, and how does that cohere with the Danish community's involuntary divergence from the dominant ideology and discourse in Denmark? Well, the more persistently Danish immigrants tried to preserve their original identity in Argentina, the more shocking was their encounter with real Denmark upon their visit or return home. Economic and social progress, language development, and, last but not least, the Danes' attitude towards people coming from abroad, albeit they spoke Danish, were so unexpectedly different, that it made the Danish Argentines realize how hybrid their own identity in Argentina had become, without them really noticing it.

The above quoted Oluf Johansen was a shining example of the reformulation of Danish-Argentine identity when he revisited Denmark in the mid-1930s. He realized how visibly the country he had been calling home all his life in Argentina had changed. He now felt more like a guest than a resident of Denmark. He noticed the development of the social welfare state and considered it effeminate for young men to collect social benefits if they could not find appropriate work. He was critical of schools, because he thought they made children read books instead of gathering real life experience (referring especially to the Argentine wilderness). Cinemas, according to Johansen, showed adventure movies from the Wild West—but that was what one normally experienced when he or she moved to Argentina.

These observations led him to the conclusion that the Danish culture was more authentic in Argentina than in Denmark: "Social service and theatre cinema.—The Old Romans called it 'bread and circuses', when their time was on the decline. *But they had colonized and their culture still lives on*" (Johansen 1939: 126; italics are in the original). The sign "home" loses its meaning "in Denmark" for Johansen. It is to Argentina that he goes "home" (Johansen 1939: 128). He spent the rest of his life there.

Similar impressions but a different conclusion can be found in the text of another author, Mads Fuglsang (1905–1988), who is labeled as the representative of working-class literature in Danish literary history. His autobiographical text *Fra Argentina til Storstrømsbroen* (1976, 'From Argentina to Storstrøm Bridge') can be characterized as a Bildungsroman that takes place in Denmark, Argentina and then, again, in Denmark, in the 1920s–1930s. Fuglsang (as protagonist) claims to have never really come to terms with the idea of staying in Argentina (Fuglsang 1976: 62). Despite his vivid memories of the poor conditions and social injustice he had experienced in Denmark, he suffers from homesickness, and ultimately, he decides to return.

The memories revive and reveal their urgent presence again as soon as he alights from the boat in the Esbjerg Bay in Denmark:

[27] Danes were often the only neighbors, as the vast Argentine countryside was quite desolate.

> "Again, I felt this indefinite mighty being over myself that controlled every step of mine and grabbed deeply into my daily life with its laws, rules and restrictions. Wherever I turned to in this big kindergarten, I saw raised forefingers and punishing canes." (Fuglsang 1976: 136)

Nevertheless, unlike Johansen, Fuglsang decided to stay in Denmark.

Similar instances of disillusionment with Denmark can be found in other texts as well. If we are to generalize them, we can say that there is a gradual devolution of the two images of Denmark in the texts: the imagined Denmark (referring to *Imagined Communities* by Benedict Anderson 1991) and the experienced Denmark. The imagined Denmark is often personal, conditioned by one's roots and memories, but also strongly influenced by the community life within the Danish-Argentine discourse. The experienced Denmark is no longer a poor, socially and morally rigid country. It has mutated into an image of a country that is growing in wealth, with a social welfare system that is getting more complex and too pampering for the taste of Danes from Argentina. The schooling system, and hereby the code of knowledge that had been appreciated in the pampa by the first Danish generations and considered as a symbol of civilization, loses its effectiveness and productivity in their eyes.

The public morals, meanwhile, are becoming more liberal—far more than in Argentina, which is assessed critically by the Argentine Danes. The awareness of history and culture especially from 19th century and the beginning of 20th has disappeared among the population. This leads visitors from Argentina to feel that they have lost common ground. The feeling of alienation is further accentuated by the rather xenophobic behavior of Danes towards people with a foreign accent in their Danish and a place of birth outside Denmark.

Regardless of whether the literary subject aimed to remain in Denmark permanently or to stay there for a visit—we may clearly see the emergence of a hybrid interspace between the imagined and the experienced Denmark. This interspace evoked a feeling of being a subaltern stranger in a country that for a long time in Argentina had been considered the fatherland. But the ties to this fatherland were so strong that one had lived in another hybrid interspace already in Argentina. Physically, he or she may have been in the pampa, but mentally s/he had dwelled in the universe of Danish-Argentine discourse, not being aware of the hybridity of this universe.

Encounters with the experienced Denmark resulted in the need to reformulate one's migrant identity. This is especially clear when observing the new meaning layers of the signs "home" and "foreigner". Generally speaking, the sign "home" loses its exclusive reference to Denmark. Conversely, the sign "foreigner" broadens its meaning, referring to how the subject felt both in Argentina and in Denmark.

From the body of the analyzed texts, it is not possible to state that only one strategy of reformulation turned out to be dominant. [28] The texts display all possible solutions as to how one can reorganize one's ties to the power center (Argentina) and the reference center (Denmark), which exercised its influence on the cultural and spiritual level. For example,

[28] As there are certainly more primary texts and anthropological studies to be expected, the body of literature is not complete, and it is early for definite conclusions.

the result did not need to terminate with the losing of a huge chunk of one's identity. Johannes Bennike, the protagonist of one of the texts, got his identity reformulation wrapped up in a conciliatory way: "Denmark and Argentina—Copenhagen and Buenos Aires became the poles of his existence. The poignant homesickness can end up in double fortune if the new country can be conquered without losing the old one!" (Johansen 1944: 118). However, almost all texts show yet another shift in the meaning of the signs "Denmark", "Dane", and "Danish". One of the striking changes is that the positive connotations of these signs have weakened, and the ties to the once cultural imperial center have seemingly lost their firm grip.

To put it metaphorically, in line with the title of this article: after having visited Denmark, the subject in question could calmly deposit the Danish survival manual in the wilderness back onto the bookshelf. He or she knew it had done its job and would now no longer be needed for immediate consultation.

8. Conclusion

In departing from texts written by migrants, this article has documented the rise of the so-called Danish-Argentine narrative among Danish immigrants in Argentina. This narrative has been shown to be rooted partly in nostalgia for one's native country. More importantly, however, it has stemmed from the high self-esteem of the immigrants, especially their belief in their own efficiency and productivity which contrasted with the perceived characteristics of the local Argentine population.

The article shows that this high self-esteem can be observed by deconstructing the signs "Denmark", "Dane", and "Danish" in the texts. Certain conditions had to be fulfilled, so that this meaning layer was present in the signs. First, the positive charge of the signs only emerged in Argentina with deferral and only after the migration journey was completed. Second, three other factors had to be at play, either altogether or only some of them: the subject of narration was affected by nostalgia of Denmark; he or she could nourish a hope to be able to re-visit the Nordic country; and his or her migration story was a successful one.

Selected Danish traditions and habits were preserved in Argentina by the migrants through ethnic institutions or at regular events held by the community. However, they had to be adapted to the new environment, socioeconomic, and cultural conditions in Argentina. Therefore, a hybrid interspace emerged in which the migrants have dwelled until today, with ambivalent relations both to Argentina and Denmark. At times, this interspace was called little Denmark, and its cultural representations were appreciated by visitors from Denmark. Yet, when the members of the Danish-Argentine community visited Denmark, they realized the irrevocable hybridity of their community and its divergence from the development in current Denmark. The understanding that little Denmark was no longer matching the current developments in Denmark led to the need of yet another reformulation of the Danish migrants' identity in Argentina. However, no regular pattern of processing this reformulation was found.

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