

Negotiating « German-ness » within the Transatlantic Space : The German-Argentine Community of Buenos Aires

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Summary

Although Argentina was a Spanish colony (1580-1810), its immigration from German-speaking Europe is 400 years old and in the current state, the German-speaking population consists of approximately one percent of the total population. Argentina is a nation of immigrants in which people of different geographic origin built up networks of belonging, and communities that formed around imagined shared origin constitute Argentine society. The German-speaking community in Buenos Aires makes up a diaspora in the post-modern sense as it disposes of German schools abroad financed by the Federal Republic of Germany, publishes a newspaper in German, has German religious institutions, German companies, and a number of other institutions, clubs and associations.

Presenting a case study of the German-speaking community in Buenos Aires at the beginning of the twenty-first century, my research project examines community life and identity construction in order to get a better understanding of the functioning and maintenance of the community. Based on my interviews with twenty members of the community, I am going to discuss the meaning ascribed to the term « German-ness ». While « German » in Buenos Aires has multiple references – as it can refer e.g. to German-speaking culture or the (current) nation state – it is also constructed in opposition to the stereotype of an *Argentine* character. Ideas of an essentialist « German-ness » remain predominant, while belonging to and participating in the German community are no longer restricted to those with German ancestry and offer social and material benefits.

Key words : Diaspora ; Migration ; German-ness ; Community Studies ; Identity Construction.

Introduction

« What the parents value [in the German schools] is that they believe that their children are really being educated [*erzogen*] there. They have a bit of Prussian-ness in the back of their minds [*Sie haben Preußentum im Hinterkopf*], I think. What do I know ! I am someone that is rather chaotic. And some mothers in my son's class are much better organized than me ! They assume that I must be better organized than they are because I am German ! That [Germans] are organized, punctual, exact, determined, honest. Honesty... wherever I go, they would all give me a credit. When someone sees me and they know I am German, then they say: 'it doesn't matter, you can pay next time when you come back'. They don't do that with my housemaid » (1).

This article explores the phenomenon of « German-ness » in a German community outside of Germany. It is a case study of the German community in Buenos Aires at the beginning of the twenty-first century (Alemann S.R.L., 1988 ; Hepe, 2005)(2). Just as the United States and Australia, Argentina is a nation of immigrants, in which people of different geographic origin built up networks of belonging. In Argentina, communities that formed around imagined shared origins constituted Argentine society(3). Borrowing a concept of Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall, my main argument is that « German-ness » in Argentina is a floating signifier that has its particular manifestation in the German-Argentine community(4). Its history and the constant negotiation of its identity is thus at the center of my study. Methodologically, I use the concept of sociability as an analytical category to examine Argentine « German-ness ». According to Pilar González Bernaldo, « Sociability refers to social practices that connect a group of individuals that take part in these and aims at analyzing the role these links can play »(5). In a second step, I use *histoire croisée* as an inspiration to rethink the analysis of cultural communities in a transnational approach (Werner et Zimmermann, 2006 : 31–50)(6). There is a number of terms used at times interchangeably for similar approaches such as entangled history, shared history or connected history (Douki and Minard, 2007 ; Subrahmanyam, 1997). I choose, however, to employ the French term *histoire croisée* as I want to stress the element, which distinguished this approach from all others: its insisting on the implication of the researcher in the work process and thus in the process of knowledge production (Werner and Zimmermann, 2004 : 36). By starting with the German community in Argentina as a field of inquiry from which to deduct conclusions, I proceed in an inductive manner. I focus on the development and constant change of the different elements involved in my analysis, as well as the diverging terminologies, concepts, languages, and disciplines.

Whereas intercultural transfer studies « follow the path of an idea that was transferred from one culture to another » (Adam, 2012 : 3), I would argue, *histoire croisée* adds a temporal dimension to it : I not only analyze the transfer of a concept – « German-ness » in the German-Argentine community – from point A to point B, but I also discuss the concept in its spatial (between Argentina and the German-speaking countries in Europe) and in its temporal (from the 1850s to 2010) dimension. In this context, my overall aim is to focus on the tension between the knowledge production process and the object produced by this knowledge/process: the members of the German community as well as its historians were and are active agents in the ongoing process of identity negotiation (Adam, 2012 : 3). As far as sources are concerned, I use the interviews I made with members of the current German-Argentine community between August 2007 and October 2009, as well as writings on the German community.

According to *histoire croisée*, I consider it important for my analysis to establish a connection between both the micro and macro scale of analysis (Werner et Zimmermann, 2006: 44). « German-ness » in Argentina is conditioned both by its spatial location in Argentine society on a micro scale and the global North-South relations between Argentina and Germany on a macro scale, where German economic interests for the « *Standort Deutschland* » come into play(7). The situation I encountered when starting my research in Buenos Aires was that of cooperation between individuals in Argentina who appropriate « German-ness » as an attribute, and the German state that is fostering positive stereotypes and beliefs of German superiority in Argentina in order to improve its economic position on the world stage. My study focuses on this phenomenon that is profitable for both individuals in Argentina and Germany, but that has to be seen critically: it is enforcing ideas of inequality grounded in national and racist ideas. The current world is organized in nation states and every human being's identity is forced into the straightjacket of a national identity (Anderson, 1983 : 3 ; Butler et Spivak, 2009 : 72). But access to citizenship at the place of birth is not always guaranteed. Even though the German citizenship law of 2001 loosened the requirement of German ancestry, German society still refuses granting « German-ness » (being German) to people without German ancestors as in the case of families in which the children are born in Germany to parents who were born abroad (Haupt, 2011). At the same time, German society is not aware of « German-ness » outside of Germany. Among Germans, there is little awareness of German communities, which often date back into the nineteenth century, outside of Europe.

Firstly, I argue that a specific « German-ness » based on imagined shared origin is created in Argentina through the different groups and waves of German-speaking immigrants as they negotiate their relation to each other and with Argentine society. « German-ness » is thus not something fixed and stable, not imposed or created exclusively by the official nation state (the Federal Republic of Germany and its predecessors) ; « German-ness » is, on the contrary, something constantly in flux, subject to change : it is an (empty) signifier which is filled with meaning according to the circumstances and needs of the speaker. It is precisely the rich history of « German-ness », which allows for an extremely diverse identification with this term. I choose to use « German(-ness) » as a singular category of analysis for the phenomenon for two reasons : the interviewees, which served as my primary source, all referred to « German » as if it were singular ; secondly, I want to look at precisely this phenomenon, of how the actors create a single « German-ness » within the transatlantic space, despite all differences in waves of migration and social/political disparities.

In the process of a need for new generations to maintain the German community in Argentina, German education and socialization in the German schools provide access to the German community via German companies. My second argument is that this « German-ness » as imagined shared origin – often based on stereotypes and physical characteristics – gave way to « German-ness » as a cultural identity(8). « German-ness » as national identity comes into play through the presence of Germany, Switzerland and Austria in Argentina(9). The ambiguity of the definition of the term « German-ness » as language, ethnicity and nationality creates a complex situation, which I am going to analyze within the next few pages. I will first focus on the spatial dimension of the creation of « German-ness » in the German-Argentine community and then on the temporal dimension, before I look further into the memory of the members of the German-Argentine community. Of course, this is an artificial attempt to disentangle time and space, but I consider it necessary for analytical purposes.

I. The Spatial Dimension : Between Argentina and German-speaking Europe

Transfer studies need a point A and a point B. Point A here is Germany – or rather German-speaking Europe – and point B is Argentina. What is transferred from A to B is « German-ness ». In this sense, « German-ness » is « what is German ». I argue, that this « German-ness » is constantly defined and redefined in this transatlantic space between Argentina and German-speaking Europe, a space that is simultaneously a geographic and mental space(10). People socialized in Germany moved to Argentina, and there, they encountered a German-Argentine community(11). « German-ness » was constituted from the moment language came into play: and there are two groups involved in the process : the German-speaking people in Argentina that speak about themselves, and the scholars who study them(12).

In this first part, I will provide background information on Argentina and German-speaking countries in Europe and the give a characterization of the German community in Buenos Aires. To a certain degree, the relations between German-speaking states and Argentina can be understood as part of the tensions between the global North and South (Frankfurt Research Center for Postcolonial Studies, 2010). According to Nestór García Canclini, Argentina is torn between being considered a Latin American country and its aspiration to be part of the « First World » (García Canclini, 2007 : 1). Under the name Viceroyalty of the River Plate, Argentina was a Spanish colony that became indépendant in 1816(13). It currently has 40.1 million inhabitants with 2% indigenous people, which means 98% are of European, African and Asian origin (Auswärtiges Amt, 2010). Most immigrants came from Italy and Spain (Bjerg, 2009 ; Devoto and Miguez, 1992 ; Devoto, 2006 ; Moya, 1998). In 1914, 30% of inhabitants were foreigners with 11.7% Italian and 10.5% Spanish share(14). In 1960, there were still 13% of foreigners residing in Argentina (Devoto, 2003 : 420). In the 2010 census, there are only 4.5% foreigners in Argentina (15).

There is a high social inequality in Argentina and the (oligarchic) elites exercise great influence (Romero, 2003 : 15 ; Waldmann, 2007 : 26). With the financial crisis of 2001, 50% of the Argentine population became poor and 20% of the active population became unemployed (Ronquié, 2007 : 7). But the pauperization of the Argentine population had already started in the 1970s under the military dictatorship and the State violence (1976-1983), the Falkland Wars in 1982, the hyperinflation of 1989 and 1990, and the neo-liberal reform of Carlos Menem since 1991 (Kessler, 1999 : 71). Buenos Aires is the political, economic and cultural center of Argentina with 2.77 million inhabitants in the city center and 13.1 million in Greater Buenos Aires, representing 32% of the Argentine population (Auswärtiges Amt, 2010). Approximately one percent of the population is German-speaking.

On the European continent, the European Union is currently the most important political entity, that assumed many political rights formerly monopolized by the nation state : Europeans have the right to work and live anywhere within that territory. German is the most widespread language and the official language in Germany, Austria, and one of the official languages in Switzerland, Belgium and Luxembourg(16). I focus on the first three and largest states. 70% of the Swiss population is German-speaking and the collaboration with Germany occurs in all domains (Riquet, 2007 : 1094f). Austria is also closely linked to Germany financially and culturally, despite a growing Austrian nationalism (Riquet, 2007 : 1094f). Germany is currently a « great economic and financial power » in the center of Europe (Gougeon, 2009 : 6f).

I analyze the sociability of the German-Argentine community in regards to the spatial dimension on three levels of actors : individuals, organized groups, and society. On the individual level, I distinguish between those socialized in German-speaking Europe and those socialized in South America(17). Some of the interviewees are descendants from Volga-Germans, others from Silesians, Yugoslavians, Austrians, Swiss-Germans ; some were born in Germany, Austria, others in Paraguay and Argentina; some are second- or third-generation immigrants in Argentina, some arrived only years ago. Rather than focusing on people that are « German » descendants (imagined shared origin), who spoke German (language) or had a German passport (nationality), my sole criterion for the selection of interviewees was their identification with the German community of Buenos Aires. Finding concrete numbers is not easy. According to the 2001 census, there were 10,362 German citizens residing in Argentina(18). However, according to the German Federal Foreign Office, there were 45,000 German citizens residing in Argentina in February 2010. 30,000 of them possess dual citizenship (Auswärtiges Amt, 2010). The same office stated there were one million people with German origins in Argentina in 2010. According to an official German government publication from 2003, there were 500,000 German-speakers in Argentina (Bleek, 2003). Those persons born in Argentina often have a parent, grandparent or other close family member who lived in a German-speaking country. Several interviewees explained the procedure to obtain a German passport at the German Embassy in Buenos Aires if they could prove their German ancestry. Some were well informed about recent legal changes with regards to dual citizenship. The interviewees perceive the German passport as a door or an entry pass to Germany and the European Union. The majority of the interviewees have two passports, many just a German, Austrian or Swiss. Some even receive a pension from the German government. Some have spent several years in Germany and then returned. Several interviewees described how their individual life seems to be divided into three phases, where the German aspect plays a stronger role in childhood and parenthood through involvement in the German schools, whereas (young) adulthood is predominantly Argentine(19).

In the current German-Argentine community, the Federation of German-Argentine Associations (*F.A.A.G.*), the German-Argentine Chamber of Commerce and the German embassy as well as the consortium of German schools (*AGDS*) are institutions functioning in close cooperation. The Swiss and Austrian Embassies and Chambers of Commerce are also in close contact. There is a great variety of associations and institutions that was created between 1843 and 2003 : in the lists of the *F.A.A.G.*, an astonishing 260 to 300 associations are listed, but half of them are no longer active. These associations were founded by first-generation immigrants and mainly evolved around themes like leisure activities, religious groups, regional emigrant identities or mutual aid associations. These associations are now mostly sustained by an aging membership and hold little attraction to the young. Those establishments with a somewhat official character continued contact with Germany, Austria or Switzerland. The Goethe Institute is subsidized by Germany and its self-declared mission is to represent the entirety of the German-speaking culture in Argentina. The same goes for the German Academic Exchange Service (*DAAD*), active in Argentina since 1980 with a mission to promote academic exchange between Argentina and Germany. The contact with and aid from Austria and Switzerland is also developing more and more (Alemann, 2010 ; Saenz Araya de Schwald and Fornieles, 2009).

As far as geographical location is concerned, the institutions and associations are mostly to be found in two areas : Buenos Aires downtown and the wealthy Northwestern suburbs. The German House with the German Chamber of Commerce, the Goethe Institute, the office of

the DAAD and the German Club (which also holds now most events of the European Club) are in the Corrientes Avenue, located between the *obelisco* and the port. Also in the city center is the Protestant Church in Esmeralda street. Only two German schools are located in the center : the Pestalozzi School and the Cangallo School. The following institutions are located in Palermo, the Northern part of the Federal Capital : the German Catholic Church St. Bonifatius, the Jewish Aid Association (*AFI*), the German Hospital, *Plaza Alemania*, and the German Embassy. The office of the journal *Argentinisches Tageblatt* was downtown, in the Carlos Pellegrini Street before it moved to the suburbs. The school *Instituto Ballester* is located in Villa Ballester, the rowing club *Teutonia* in Tigre, the suburbs Florida, Martinez and San Isidro in Greater Buenos Aires. The composition of the German-Argentine community is very heterogeneous but currently mainly associated with the wealthy.

II. The Temporal Dimension : Histories of Germans in Argentina

The second dimension to look at in the study of the development of « German-ness » in the German-Argentine community in Buenos Aires is the temporal one. To a certain extent, it is a journey back in time. Studying « German-ness » through sociability, involves a reflection on the method and conceptual definition of their identity and the perception of it. It is scholars who have been deciding about the selection of individuals for study. Migration studies exist only since the 1970s as a distinct subfield. However, there is no comprehensive study of German migration to Argentina or of the German-Argentine community. There is, nevertheless, a variety of scholars who have written on particular groups or on specific time periods. They have dealt with many different migrant groups and have developed various terminologies within different national academic cultures.

The most prominent scholar of general immigration to Argentina is Fernando Devoto. He addresses the issue of conceptualizing the term ‘immigrant’ for Argentina and the changes in definition that have occurred over time (Devoto, 2003 : 20f). Between colonial times and the twentieth century, immigrants were civil servants and merchants, foreigners and exiles, agents of civilization and workforce, and passengers, refugees and tourists (Devoto, 2003 : 23–42). He dates the emergence of community institutions in each « ethnic community » to the 1850s (Devoto, 2003 : 240). Important in the beginning was particularly the creation of mutual aid societies(20). Devoto states that in 1960, the German community made up 2.4% of those migrants coming from Europe (26,995 individuals), whereas the Italian constituted 44% and the Spanish 36% (Devoto, 2003 : 421). Important changes occurred on both sides of the Atlantic over time: while Argentina underwent a nation building process in the nineteenth century (Romero, 1994; Sabato, 2008), boundaries in Central Europe changed repeatedly in 1871, 1914 and 1945 (Berghahn, 2005 ; Blackbourn, 2003). Hernán Otero has worked on the role of the state in the construction of statistics and thus the creation of « national identities » in Argentina (Otero, 2007). In his work on the Franco-Argentine community during World War I, he estimates the size of the German-Argentine community in 1914 as being 100,000 members(21).

German-speakers started building a community in Buenos Aires beginning in the 1840s : people from different régions in Central Europe as well as from the Volga région came to Buenos Aires prior to World War I(22). Between 1933 and 1939, mainly exiled opponents of the Nazi régime arrived in Argentina and created their own schools, synagogues, journals, and associations (Groth, 1996 ; Jeackisch, 1989 ; Rinke, 1996 ; Schnorbach, 1995 ; Zur Mühlen,

1988). In spite of the influence of Germans opposed to Nazism, the majority of the German community fell in line with Nazi policies. After World War II, a number of Nazis and Nazi-followers fled to Argentina, the most prominent of course being Adolf Eichmann and Erich Priebke (Abós, 2007 ; Göñi, 2002 ; Meding, 1992 ; Nexton, 1992 ; Patingre et Barrault, 2005 ; Stangneth, 2011). In 1955, the German community was successful in regaining much of its capital that had been confiscated after Argentina had declared war on Germany in March 1945. The Foundation of the Federation of German-Argentine Associations (*F.A.A.G.*) and West German minister of economics Ludwig Erhard played an important role in this recovery of property (Lege, 2007 : 29). Since the 1950s, Germany and Argentina intensified trade relations and a number of multinational companies sent Germans to live in Argentina as expatriates (Foellbach, Rottenaicher et Thomas, 2002). Today, the German-Argentine community includes descendents from many of these disparate immigrant groups and those active in the associations are mostly unified in their aim to continue to maintain « German-ness ». The Community of German-Argentine Schools (*AGDS*) was founded in 1965 (*Arbeitsgemeinschaft Deutsch-Argentinischer Schulen*, 2009). It is also financially supported by the German government through the Central Agency for German Schools Abroad (*Zentralstelle für deutsche Auslandsschulen – ZfA*). Since 2007, Germany sustains German schools in Argentina through the program *PASCH-Schools : Partners of the Future* (*Schulen : Partner der Zukunft*, n.d.).

Historians take up an important role in the process of shaping and reshaping « German-ness » in Argentina. Their understanding of « German » changed particularly in the 1990s. Whereas Anne Saint Sauveur focuses on political identification and clearly differentiates between Swiss immigrants and those from Prussia, Beatrice Ziegler focuses on the shared language and cultural traits of « Germans » from Germany, Austria and Switzerland (Blancpain, 1994 ; most recently see Otero, 2009 ; Saint Sauveur-Henn, 1995 ; Ziegler, 1996). Jean-Pierre Blancpain's main interests are Germans in Chile, but he expands his findings on this group to the whole of South America. Making use of the distinction in the French language between *allemande* and *germanique*, he advocates that historians should consider the shared cultural traits of all « Germanic peoples », while underlining their imagined shared origin as Germanic.

Most historians have focused for too long on German migration to the United States and only in the 1990s acknowledged that Germans moved in great numbers to South America, too (Kamphoefner, 1999)(23). Although most historians on Germans in Argentina have not adopted the concept of German-language diaspora instead of German migration as Dirk Hoerder has conceptualized it, members of the German community speak of their « German-speaking community » (Hoerder, 2002)(24). There was, thus, a change of self-designation from *deutsch* (German) and *germanisch* (Germanic) to *deutsch-sprachig* (German-speaking). An example for the self-awareness of the German community of its political positioning in the past has been the discussion of the editors of the two German newspapers during World War I when Theodor Alemann and Hermann Tjarks were debating the name of the German organization expressing alliance with the German Empire : *Germanischer Volksbund* (Germanic Federation) or *Deutscher Volksbund* (German Federation) (Volberg, 1981 : 157). Being himself a member of a family with Swiss-German origin, Alemann (*Argentinisches Tageblatt*) favored an organization including all German-speakers in Argentina, but it was Tjarks's (*Deutsche La Plata Zeitung*) suggestion that focused on loyalty to the German Empire that was adopted.

German life in Argentina is reflected in the many publications of clubs and associations formed by those who found a new home in Argentina and current clubs, associations and institutions are proud of their history (Alemann S.R.L., 1988 ; *Congregación Evangélica Alemana en Buenos Aires : su historia, 1943-1993* 1993 ; Deutscher Klub, 2005 ; Hepe, 2005 ; Knieß, 2009 ; Lege, 2007, 2008 ; Lütge and K. W. Hoffmann, 1955 ; Schmidt Hebbel, 1943). The case of the Goethe School - today the most prestigious and prosperous of the German schools abroad, with most expatriates' children - gives, however, insight into parts of its challenging story as several school mergings occurred in its history(25). First founded in 1897 as a boys' school, it fused with a girls' school and adopted the name Belgrano School in 1914. Several name changes and mergings occurred between 1931 and 1951. The first teachers from Germany arrived only in 1957, which marked the beginning of a new era of German involvement and interest in the German-Argentine community.

The periods of German mass migration to Argentina before and after the world wars are rather well studied. However, the history of German-speakers settling in Argentina begins with merchants from Hamburg and Antwerp (first Dutch, then Belgium since 1830) such as the Bunge and Tornquist families (Ceva, 2009 ; Harispuru et Gilbert 2009). In both cases, the men that came to Argentina married into the local (Spanish) elite (Harispuru et Gilbert, 2009 : 65)(26). They were also involved in the creation of the first German-speaking associations such as the Protestant Church on Esmeralda Street in 1843 (Schmidt Hebbel, 1943). A number of schools and clubs was established, such as the German Club (Lege, 2007 ; Wolf, 2009). This German Club started out as a gymnastics association in 1855. When it turned into an elite leisure association with restricted membership in 1911, the New German Gymnastics Association (NDT) was founded(27). At the same time, German-speaking settlers in Argentina constantly responded to political changes on the European continent, such as the creation of the German Empire in 1871. The journal *Deutsche La Plata Zeitung* founded before 1871 – and turned into the dominating German news in South America by Hermann Tjarks from the 1880s onwards - as well as the journal *Argentinisches Tageblatt*, founded by Theodor Alemann in 1889, regularly celebrated the Emperor's birthday and the advertisements of newly founded restaurants and hotels with names such as « *Gasthaus zum 'Deutschen Bund'* » and « *Zum Fürsten Bismarck* » in Buenos Aires reflected the close connection to German events of the time (Alemann y Cía., 1889 ; Arndt and Olson, 1973 ; *Deutsche Zeitung : Organ der germanischen Bevölkerung am Rio de la Plata*, 1936).

III. Selective Memory : Tensions between Imagination and Manifestation

In the conception of the German-Argentine community as an « imagined community » in reference to Benedict Anderson, memory plays an important role in the construction and reconstruction of identity and thus « German-ness ». At the same time, « German-ness » has its concrete manifestation in this heterogeneous community. In this last section, I will explore the tensions between the imagined community and the manifestation of the floating signifier. I choose a number of statements from interviewees to illustrate their way of thinking(28). They deal with the following themes : the place of the German community in Argentine society ; the German community as a-political ; the German schools ; a « German being » ; family history and traditions. A representative of the Federation of German-Argentine Associations (*F.A.A.G.*), whose father immigrated to Argentina at the beginning of World War I states that :

« The important aspect is that all communities in Argentina co-exist peacefully. The best example is the rowing clubs. There are fourteen rowing clubs in Tigre. There are Swedes, the Germans, the Italians, the Spanish, eh, the Jews, the Swiss, the French, etc. ok ? And that is sort of the best example that Argentina as a community forms a whole from these profoundly different mosaic pieces »(29).

The interviewee illustrates Argentine society as divided into groups and thus aims at justifying the existence of the German community within Argentine society according to a multi-cultural society. He also states that,

« In this political society, there are very few Germans, or German-Argentines, or Argentines of German origin, because it is all haywire. One shouldn't offend people today, but... the Spanish here have it all from their viceroy, they all courted [*den Hof machen*] and it always went : the friend got an appointment or a permission, ... and with the Italians it goes the same way, almost. And the language is Spanish and the character of the people here is Italian, and these, they are not very liable, they are so ... they fight through [*durchboxen*], and, if one wants to participate in politics, one sometimes cannot understand, because, it is not very sportsmanlike how they behave or how they do politics. German [in Argentina] is commerce [*Geschäft*] and does not participate in politics, that's a mistake... »(30).

The interviewee reveals rather profound prejudice on the supposed « character of peoples » while « the Argentine » becomes associated with the majority groups of Italians and Spanish. As he divides influence in the public sphere in « politics » and « commerce », he concludes that Argentine society determines Germans to be a-political. Along the same lines, the editor of the German newspaper *Argentinisches Tageblatt* states :

« The German community is accepted and respected in Argentine society, but it does not exercise any political influence. The Germans – with rare exceptions ! – have not participated in Argentine politics. Néstor Kirchner is the first one with German ancestors. The first one ! »(31).

Pilar González conceptualizes the emergence of social life and associations as sociability. In *The Origins of the Argentine Nation*, she argues that the elites that emerged from the meeting spaces often imposed their vision of the nation on the rest of society (González Bernaldo, 2006a : 4–7). When talking about philanthropy, Thomas Adam approaches the same idea from the perspective of the elite (Adam, 2009). Based upon Torstein Veblen's idea of the leisure class, he concludes, however, that with activism in philanthropy, elites created a parallel world to the « traditional » political world. What is interesting here for my study is that several interviewees insisted on the non-political character of the activities of the German community(32). Clinging to the economic part of German influence in Argentina enables members of the German community to claim to be a non-political community(33). If I, however, rely on the definition of « political » according to cultural studies, all actions are essentially political, in particular those linked to culture (Hall et Du Gay, 1996 ; Hall, 2007). In this sense, sociability of the German community of Buenos Aires creates its own sphere of influence that operates parallel to official state politics of the Argentine nation, but exercises nonetheless influence on it as all cultural actions are linked with and intertwined with each other. Whereas most interviewees considered German characteristics as timeless and abstract, an interviewed couple – the husband is the son of Jewish refugees and born in Argentina, whereas his wife is a Protestant from Germany – discusses particular current German characteristics :

[Husband:] « What are the actual characteristics of the Germans 2008 ? We have to think about that now ! Efficiency [*Gründlichkeit*] ! ... System, order. Social responsibility. ... That the state somehow takes more responsibility for the individual than the smaller entities. ... If they are in trouble, then the Argentine population either organizes in the nuclear or the extended family. ... Nobody thinks directly of the state ».

[Wife:] « Whereas I, as a German citizen, if I have some kind of difficulty, the first thing I do is run to some kind of office and see what possibilities I have that the state helps me out of my misery. ... In the case of unemployment, I go to the Federal employment office. If here someone is unemployed, he makes sure to call his cousin »(34).

A new idea here is that the political organization of Germany and Argentina have a current effect on differences between people socialized in these two states, the difference being here the one between « welfare state » and « welfare society »(35). In the case of Germany, people are used to help from the state, whereas in Argentina, people rely on family and friends.

On the stereotypes on Germans, the editor of the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* and Swiss-German-Argentine in the fourth generation follows :

« The opinion of other Argentines of Germans : well, they appreciate them generally. The German virtues are well known : work enthusiasm, studiousness, honesty, competency. All these things are known and as such the Germans here are valued. Always ! It comes from the Spanish tradition, the Spanish have also always valued the Germans. Maybe because they were not neighbors (laughing). And so it was inherited from them »(36).

With Léon Poliakov, it could be imagined that ideas of German superiority were transferred to Argentine popular consciousness from Spain as cultural concepts and memory were adopted via the Spanish language (Poliakov, 1974). About himself, the editor of the German newspaper says :

« In my temperament, I am less Latin [*lateinisch*] than others. ... The temperament of the Argentines is very Romanic [*romanisch*], very Spanish/Italian anchored. ... We [Germans] are more measured [*gemessen*], more rational and we are understood as such here. But since Argentina is a multiethnic state [*Vielvölkerstaat*], and people descent from all kinds of European ancestors, one is accustomed to deal with people of different origin. It is not noticeable. ... The German nature is less quick-tempered, more rational, in the way how one expresses himself and converses and states arguments »(37).

The editor confirms here as well his deeply rooted belief in « different peoples », which does not only concern language and culture but also a person's character. These ideas of distinct peoples co-exist with those experiences of younger community members that identify « German virtues » not as something inscribed in the genes but as part of a learning experience.

German imagined shared origin and German culture function as a strategy for social advancement. Simultaneously, this origin-oriented « German-ness » is constituted in opposition to the Spanish/Italian dominated receiving society. Since culture has no essence but is always constructed, cultural identity is always a positioning against someone/something else in society (Hall, 2007 : 315). The following quotation is of an employee of the German-

Argentine Chamber of Commerce who makes sense of his family history in the following way :

« I am born in Argentina. My mother language is Spanish of course. [I have both the Argentine and German citizenship.] I also speak German and English, and a bit of Portuguese. ... My great-grandparents were Germans. Technically, my grandparents were also Germans. Only, they were Volga-Germans. They were actually born in the Ukraine. But they had the German citizenship. In this sense, my great-grandparents were born in Germany. They were the last ones. My grandparents are born in the Ukraine, what is the Ukraine today and was Russia back then, but they had the German citizenship. [These are my mother's parents.] Those of my father are all from Spain. ... My grandparents were Mennonites, and there is this story : ... Sometime before World War II, I think already before World War I, no, before the second one, they had received land from some Tsar. They just said 'ok, come here, these lands are yours if you work them'. And that's why they were there. And then came World War II and they were expelled from Russia. And that's why, so they still used the German language. It was mixed a little with Russian or some other dialect, but it was still German and they also had the German customs that of course had very much to do with Religion. But they were always recognized as Germans. And in this sense, I inherited [German] citizenship from them. My mother was born then in Paraguay. Because, after World War II, my grandparents had nothing. They were in Berlin and they had hardly any food, just like everyone else, and then they first went to a German Mennonite colony in Paraguay, with the name Colonia Volendam. By the way, it still exists. My mother is born there. And after a few years, they came here to Buenos Aires »(38).

It is curious how he links « German-ness » to the right to German citizenship, while being also aware of the adaptation of culture, as in the case of Volga-Germans. He emphasizes that his grandparents were always accepted as Germans without specifying by whom. The importance of self-identification and external labeling is also present in a statement of the F.A.A.G. representative (second generation in Argentina) as he states : « I don't see myself as a typical German. I am a German born in Argentina. But the people see a vision, that one does not perceive oneself »(39). On German characteristics, he states :

« This is something, that one exploits [*ausschlachten*] here, because the punctuality, the trust, the keeping one's word and all that, that is part of that [German-ness]. These are things, which are appreciated here in Argentina, by Italians, by Spanish, or Italian, Spanish or any other origin! (Little pause) A little stubborn, a little, eh, no so obliging, or, how to put it, not so considerate [*freundlich*] or a bit *frío* [=cold], that is well known »(40).

Here, the interviewee even states how he makes use of the stereotypical images for his own good standing in society. In their book *Ethnicity Inc.*, John and Jean Comaroff describe this phenomenon and they suggest the concepts of « nation-branding » and « marketing of ethnicity » in the present (Comaroff et Comaroff, 2009 : 122). In this context, the following statement of a graduate from a German school without German ancestors comes not as a surprise :

« Of course, I am not of German origin. We [my family] are purely Argentines. On the contrary, my great-grandparents are Italian on one side and Spanish on the other. Thus German ? No, not at all. And how we got to the [German] school : simply because this school was recommended to my parents as being a very good one in general. And when they got to know German culture a bit better - how it is

with education, how formal they are, how serious they take education, how the school offers permanent connections with Germany and the possibility to travel there, that there are German professors teaching here -, they [my parents] really liked the school in general, and the contact with Europe most of all, and that's why they sent us [seven children] to this school »(41).

The editor of the *Argentinisches Tageblatt* explains the particularity of German schools in Argentina in the following way :

« The German-speaking schools today are mainly *Begegnungsschulen* [International schools with a dual system] ! Mainly pure Argentines that send their children to German schools because they are good schools! Not because they learn German. And then they have to learn German! But the main reason is because they are good schools ! And that the children learn something there. That teachers are not on strike. That is very important. ... The graduates from German schools generally have started a good career. They worked for the companies or professions where they had established contact before, and their education contributed to that. This is appreciated until today, and ever more ! ... [These schools are] parents' associations, not commercial companies. And most of them are recognized by Germany and many of them are aided through teachers and help for construction and such. They maintain a certain discipline and demand a lot of learning matter from the kids... They are good schools. As I said, they are not commercial as the English-speaking schools that are not from the English, but from Argentines that learn English. These are commercial enterprises. Not all, but most of them ! But the German schools are not ! They are sustained by the parents. And this has proven its worth as a model and is valued in the Argentine society. One can see that at the number of enrollment of infants in German schools ! »(42).

The vision of the German school described here is that of institutions of discipline, order and efficiency, thus the « German virtues » as described by several interviewees. The editor also explains the mechanism of how former students work for German companies. He identifies the « authenticity » of German schools as they are - unlike English schools - an integral part of the German community. Along the same lines, a German teacher from Germany at the Goethe Institute states :

« If you, as a German, live in Argentina, you already have a bonus. Okay ? They see first of all that you are German and you are already someone in society, you already have a certain value. If you really correspond to that is first of all secondary. ... So, Germans have a good reputation in Argentina ! ... I think they have a rather high [position in society], the people that come from the German schools, they have some weight in the economic life. Because they occupy qualified jobs accordingly »(43).

Pierre Bourdieu introduced the term symbolic capital when describing a situation where an agent is attributed a certain value in society for specific knowledge (Bourdieu, 1982 : 68). According to Bourdieu then, education in a German school turns financial capital into cultural and symbolic capital (Bourdieu, 1983). The German school receives financial aid from the German state, which has itself an economic interest in Argentina. The interest of the wealthy Argentines in the German school is linked to the good image of Germany in Argentina (stereotypes from the nineteenth century linked to wealth of the current state) and the insertion in the local job market via multinational companies. The concepts of Bourdieu and the Comaroffs help to deconstruct the idea of « German superiority » in modern-day Argentina, as their ideas allow to address and explain the encountered phenomenon.

Conclusion

« German-ness » has traditionally been studied in the focus of ethnicity, whereas people's identification with the nation of their ancestors has been taken for granted and their relation to it simplified. I propose a new way of looking at « German-ness ». Analyzing the sociability of the German-Argentine community provides the means to illustrate how identities are constantly shaped and reshaped throughout space and time. In the case of the German-Argentine community, looking at the transatlantic scope gives way to a transnational approach where neither a German nor an Argentine nation(state) are static units.

« German-ness » as a floating signifier has been constantly negotiated and is still re-negotiated within the German-Argentine community that exists in the transatlantic space. This community, which was first constituted by German-speakers from Europe from the 1840s on an imagined shared origin being a strong component in its identity, turned into a rather closed community after World War II that opened up to broader Argentine society beginning in the 1980s and started to « recruit » new members from within Argentine society. However, in contrast to earlier decades, financial qualifications seem to play a much larger role than qualifications based on origin. To roughly summarize this change: at first, the community was based on the idea of imagined shared origin, which then changed to a community based on shared cultural identity.

For centuries, migrants have left continental Europe for Argentina and they have constituted a community that provided a home for newcomers. In Argentina, a « Germanic » imagined shared origin was created, in opposition to an Argentine (Italian/Spanish) one. Over time, this imagined shared origin has been broadened to cultural identity (based on self-identification). The access to this cultural identity is provided mainly through the German school, which is only accessible to the wealthy. « German-ness » as a floating signifier has a particular manifestation in the German-Argentine community but this community is by no means a type of exceptionalism as further research shall demonstrate.

Endnotes

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(1) Between July 2007 and October 2009, I interviewed twenty persons active in the German community born between 1922 and 1983. The length of the conversations varies between a half-hour to two hours. Language of communication was German, Spanish or a mixture of both. See interview 15 and 16, September 2008; length 2h17, 46 pages : 38.

(2) I will use the English term « community » here, even though I want to stress the fact, that it is not a closed group, but rather a loose assembly of different actors, more or less organized in associations

and institutions. *Deutsche Gemeinschaft* or *colectividad alemana* are the local terms used, see Lütge et al. (1981).

(3) I use the term imagined shared origin instead of ethnicity. Since ethnicity has so many possible definitions, I replaced it by the aspect I am focusing on.

(4) Introduced by Claude Lévi-Strauss, Homi Bhabha and Stuart Hall have made the concept useful for cultural studies, see Bhabha (1996) : 55 ; Hall (1997).

(5) See also González Bernaldo (2006a) ; translation by the author. « *La sociabilidad remite a prácticas sociales que ponen en relación un grupo de individuos que efectivamente participant de ellas y apunta a analizar el papel que pueden desempeñar esos vínculos* ». See González Bernaldo (2004 : 434).

(6) Choosing a « pragmatic and inductive approach, » « the process-oriented dimension » and the « focus on multiplicity of possible viewpoints and divergences resulting from languages, terminologies, categorizations, conceptualizations, traditions, disciplinary usages », allowed for « raising the question of the construction of the object both from an empirical as well as from an epistemological standpoint ».

(7) Standort Deutschland is the term used by German government officials to promote trade with Germany and attract foreign investment, see http://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/DE/Aussenpolitik/Aussenwirtschaftsfoerderung/AufgabenAA_node.html

(8) I rely here on the definition of culture according to cultural studies, see Hall et Du Gay (1996) ; Hall (2007).

(9) All three German-speaking states have official institutions in Argentina such as chambers of commerce, embassies, but only Germany entertains German schools abroad, the DAAD and the Goethe Institute.

(10) This study was undertaken at the University Paris Diderot and the original text is written in French, which allows some kind of « external view » on both Argentina and German-speaking states. For the inspiration of « German-ness » as a mental space, see Anderson (1983) : 1–7.

(11) Even today, there are individuals and families that migrate to Argentina from German-speaking countries. During the last two centuries however, there were two waves of mass migration, one before World War I and the second one during and after World War II.

(12) Practically, these two groups overlap in cases such as the book from the German Club, see Lütge and K. W. Hoffmann (1955).

(13) For the development of an Argentine nation, see González Bernaldo (2006a).

(14) Foreigners here are people that do not have Argentine citizenship, see Devoto (2003) : 294.

(15) <http://www.indec.gov.ar/>

(16) Even though Switzerland is not part of the European Union, it has close economical and political ties to its members.

(17) By socialization I understand here the internalization of certain norms and behavioral patterns prevailing in a society by an individual.

(18) <http://www.indec.gov.ar/>

(19) See interview 8, February 2008 ; length : 1h05, 23pages.

(20) The first one was the *Sociedad Mutual de Beneficiencia de los Artesanos Franceses* (French Artisans' Friendly Welfare Society) of 1832, see González Bernaldo (2006b : 86) ; for the

development of mutual societies in Buenos Aires see also González, González-Bernaldo, et Suriano (2010).

(21) His estimations are based on language affiliation, which includes groups Volga-Germans, Austro-Hungarians, see Otero (2009 : 24).

(22) For the Volga-Germans, see *Alemanes del Volga, 1878-2003: ein treues Volk; 2. Congreso Argentino de descendientes de Alemanes de Rusia* (2004), Blumenthal (2001) ; for Germans in Argentina between 1850 and 1914, see Flachs (2005) ; for German Jews, see Gerchunoff (2010), Maier Schwerdt et Schwab (2001), Mirelman (1988,1990), Newton (1977), Popp et Dening (1977) ; for the most comprehensive work, see Saint Sauveur-Henn (1995).

(23) For an important study of German-speakers in Brazil, see Luebke (1990).

(24) See « Misión institucional », URL : <http://www.faag.org.ar/newwebsite/inst-mision.php> Consulté le 4 septembre 2011).

(25) http://www.goethe.edu.ar/de_geschichte.htm

(26) The brothers Matias (1762-1819) and Jorge Tornquist (1777-1843) came to Argentina at the beginning of the nineteenth century.

(27) In the nineteenth century, German socialists in Argentina complained about the elite character of this German club, see Carreras, Tarcus, et Zellner (2008) ; *Deutscher Klub* (2005).

(28) All of the above statements represent, of course, the inside view of this community as all interviewees were members of the community. Further research investigating outside views could complement this self-image.

(29) See interview 8, February 2008 ; length : 1h05, 23pages : 6f.

(30) Interview 8, February 2008 ; length : 1h05, 23pages : 20.

(31) Interview 1, March 2008 ; length : 0h35, 15 pages : 9.

(32) See interview 1, November 2007 and March 2008, interview 5, November and December 2007 and interview 7, March 2008.

(33) Strangely enough, only one interviewee mentioned the German-speaking heritage of the former Argentine president Nestor Kirchner. See interview 5, November and December 2007.

(34) Interview 15 and 16, September 2008 ; length 2h17, 46 pages : 40.

(35) Amy Singer uses the concept of « welfare society » in her study of Islamic societies, see Singer (2008) : 179f).

(36) Interview 1, March 2008, length : 0h35, 15 pages : 9.

(37) Interview 1, March 2008, length : 0h35, 15 pages : 7.

(38) Interview 13 : 4.

(39) Interview 8, February 2008 ; length : 1h05, 23 pages, 21.

(40) Interview 8, February 2008 ; length : 1h05, 23 pages, 20.

(41) Interview 6 and 7 (in Spanish), February 2008 (length : 1h19, 29 pages), 2.

(42) Interview 1, March 2008 ; length : 0h35, 15 pages, 10.

(43) Interview 15 and 16, September 2008 ; length 2h17, 46 pages, 42.

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