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JANTELOVEN IN DENMARK AND NORWAY — TO BE OR NOT TO BE?

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The paper focuses on the concept of the Jante law (*janteloven*), formulated by A. Sandemose in 1933 in his novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor. Fortelling om en morders barndom* (*A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks. A story about a murderer's childhood*), which later became an element of the cultural code of Denmark and Norway. In this study we follow C. Levisen in his distinguishing between the “literary Jante law”, described by A. Sandemose in his novel, and the “linguistic” Jante law, which is a collocation in the Danish and Norwegian languages. This lexicalization of the concept has been brought about by the specific Scandinavian mentality, conditioned by a number of reasons (the agrarian Scandinavian culture, the Lutheran ethos). In the modern Danish and Norwegian languages the concept of *janteloven* is negative and is used in specific types of discourse (sports, popular culture, business, politics, psychology, schooling, immigration problems, feminism). Besides, there are numerous reformulated Jante laws (*den positive jantelov, den omvendte jantelov, antijantelov, jenteloven, Danskerloven*), which proves the precedence of the notion in the Danish and Norwegian cultures. The dominating American individualistic culture influences the development of a new system of values (ambition, self-concern, pushiness are no longer viewed as negative qualities), which results in a conflict between the traditional and the new in the Danish and Norwegian cultures: the Jante law comes into conflict with the so-called achievement culture (*præstationskulturen*). As a social construct and a secret regulator of public relations the *janteloven* has found its place between the number of other concepts (*hygge, trivsel* and

so on), yet the *janteloven* has been specifically reflected in political practices, both in its formal expression (development of various “canons”) and in the methods of countering the imposition of certain phenomena on the part of government authorities.

Keywords: *janteloven*, Law of Jante, Danish, Norwegian, Scandinavian mindset.

...endelig kan vi slippe for evigt og altid
at høre for den dødssyge Jantelov
som en skrupskør norsk forfatter
har påduttet os...

(Benny Andersen “Skabssvenskere”)

INTRODUCTION

Each culture has its key words which are connected with specific social values and are reflected in the minds and manners of people. In Scandinavia such key set of social codes is the Jante law (Danish, Norwegian: *Janteloven*; Swedish: *Jantelagen*; Icelandic: *Jantelögin*; Faroese: *Jantulógin*), which denotes a social attitude of disapproval towards expressions of individuality [Levisen, 2012; Trotter, 2015].

The Jante law was created by the Danish-Norwegian author Aksel Sandemose in his novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor. Fortelling om en morders barndom* (*A Fugitive Crosses His Tracks. A story about a murderer's childhood*) [Sandemose, 2002], published in Norway in 1933 and translated into Danish in 1938. The novel is set in the early 20th century in the fictional town of Jante, modelled upon his native town Nykøbing Mors, Jutland. The novel, which caused heated debate, is a satirical description of the life of people in provincial Denmark with pettiness, greediness and ignorance of its inhabitants, and the ten commandments of the law formulated in the novel formed part of the cultural code of Scandinavia. Numerous research in the field of anthropology and social psychology have revealed that the Danes and the Norwegians consider the Jante law as an integral part of their culture [Jenkins, 2014; Gopal, 2000; Bromgard, Trafimow, Linn, 2014]. To what extent this concept is instilled in the Norwegian culture is shown by the 2018 *Almost Perfect* photo project by three Scandinavian photographers. Each of them focused on some typical characteristic of their country. The Swedish photographer pictured Sweden as the most secular society in the world, the Norwegian photographer focused on the Jante law, while the Danish one showed inebriated young Danes, the alcohol consumption in the country being the highest in Europe [Ramskov Erichsen, 2018].

Though many modern Scandinavians see the Jante law as something authentic, a similar phenomenon can be found in other cultures as well: see the Dutch expression “doe maar gewoon, dan doe je al gek genoeg” (“just act normal, it’s already crazy enough”) and “boven het maaiveld uitsteken” (“don’t put your head above ground level”), Scottish “A kent yer faither” (“I know your father”), Australian “tall poppy syndrome”, Japanese 出る釘は打たれる (“the nail that sticks out gets hammered down”) and the notion of “crab mentality”, wide-spread among the native Filipinos. The author himself described Jante as follows: “But Jante was everywhere; it loomed on the Canadian prairie, it stretched forth across the United States, it blossomed in Jevnaker as it flourished in Jutland” [Sandemose, 1936, p. 88].

Though similar, these phenomena have their own specific cultural features, and being elements of a cultural code can undergo semantic transformation. The paper focuses on outlining the most modern trends in perceiving the Jante law by Danish and Norwegian native speakers, establishing the connection between it and the concept of *hygge*, and defining points of contact between *janteloven* as an ideological concept and ways of its promotion within certain public policy spheres, including those aiming at developing and maintaining an attractive image of Denmark and the Danish culture inside and outside the country. The data from Aranea Web Corpora Project [Araneum Danicum Beta] were used as the study material.

1. THE JANTE LAW IN A. SANDEMOSE’S NOVEL

C. Levisen points to a mistake made by numerous scholars who do not distinguish between the “linguistic Jante law” and the “literary Jante law”, which results in inaccurate conclusions. According to him, in the modern Danish language *janteloven* has been lexicalised, and the novel which gave rise to the concept provides important clues to how this concept became lexicalised [Levisen, 2012, p. 147].

In an attempt to understand and make sense of what was happening in the country between the two wars, Aksel Sandemose writes a book series¹ about Espen Arnakke, in which he studies the behaviour of a man who committed a dreadful act — a murder. To understand the reasons and find an explanation the author immerses himself in studying

¹ “En sjømann går i land” (1931), “En flyktning krysser sitt spor” (1933), “Det stod en benk i haven” (1937), “Brudulje” (1938).

the society which gave birth to him, using this specific case to picture the overall atmosphere and trends. “Why do people behave irrationally? Why, unlike animals, do people act against their own interests?” [Ustvedt, 1976, s. 179]. In his works the author tries to bring to the surface everything irrational, vague and mysterious that lives in any person and may result in a crime.

All four novels are structured in the way to constantly remind the reader of an inseparable connection between the murder and the young man’s past, as well as the place he grew up. In that community something strange is happening to people: they close from each other, watch others with morbid suspicion and distrust. They are always ready to “put others in their place” [Eggen, 1962, s. 535]. The demands and threats the hero had heard since childhood were skillfully formulated in the Jante law, which went on to become a common concept for sociologists, anthropologists and writers all across Scandinavia:

1. Du skal ikke tro at du er noe.
2. Du skal ikke tro at du er like meget som oss.
3. Du skal ikke tro at du er klokere enn oss.
4. Du skal ikke innbille deg at du er bedre enn oss.
5. Du skal ikke tro at du vet mere enn oss.
6. Du skal ikke tro at du er mere enn oss.
7. Du skal ikke tro at du duger til noe.
8. Du skal ikke le av oss.
9. Du skal ikke tro at noen bryr seg om deg.
10. Du skal ikke tro at du kan lære oss noe.

These are the Jante Law’s ten commandments, by means of which “Jante holds Jante down” [Sandemose, 1936, p.77]. Carefully read, the Jante law is not a law in the generally accepted sense. While articles of a regular law cover various spheres, the Jante law line after line repeats the same demand in a slightly different form. The Jante law alludes to the Ten Commandments revealed to Moses by God. While the Ten Commandments are about moral principles and values, the Jante law “demands subservience from a person, not only in terms of outward behaviour, but also in terms of the person’s character, their knowledge and beliefs” [Taratonkina, 2005, p.18].

In the novel there is the eleventh commandment, an implied one: “Maybe you don’t think I know something about you?” [Sandemose, 1936, p.137]. This insidious question most fully displays the nature of

people in Jante, with their distorted psychology. The turpitude is in deception and ambiguity, in the fact that a reference is not made to something specific but takes advantage of anyone's sense of uncertainty and low self-esteem. The unknown "we" puts a person in a subservient position, and their cherished dream now is to get into the company of such people. Vague demands are the best way to use the person's fear and uncertainty against him or her, to expel. Everyone is afraid of being somehow different and subject to moral disapproval on the part of others [Taratonkina, 2004, p. 159–166].

Though this "law" was not enshrined in any legal code, which formally makes it unnecessary to abide, many people in Denmark and Norway still follow it. Thus, websites which introduce the culture of Norway point to the fact that the Jante law is still a part of Norwegian culture and mentality.

The same sites give recommendations on finding balance between personal freedoms and being part of the group [Janteloven — En Komplet Guide på Norsk; What is Janteloven?; Janteloven (Law of Jante): Insights into Scandinavian Culture]. Many think that the Jante law promotes equality, cooperation and sense of community. Others believe it limits freedom of expression and creativity, restrains the personality and plurality of its expression. This dualism is rooted in history.

2. HISTORICAL REASONS OF ENTRENCHMENT

The Jante law was formulated by A. Sandemose only in 1933, ninety years ago, yet in Scandinavia it is perceived as an authentic element of the Nordic cultural code. As V. Studentsov rightly points out, it is some kind of an "open secret", which was known to everyone yet before A. Sandemose no one bothered to write about it' [Studentsov, 2022a, p. 8]. Truly, a similar concept is mentioned in works of famous Danish writers. For instance, back in the middle of the 19th century S. Kierkegaard described the life in the country's capital as follows:

Jeg er netop blev [en] til Noget — og derfor er mit Liv at betragte som forspildt her i Kiøbh., hvor man kun kan leve lykkelig og yderst behageligt saa længe man er Ingenting, her i Kiøbh. **hvor der ikke siges stort Andet end Ondt om enhver der er Noget**², hvoraf aabenbart følger, at den der [er] Ingenting, med Stolthed kan sige: mig siges der intet Ondt om [Kierkegaard, 2000, s. 194].

² Here and further our bold text.

H. C. Andersen wrote about the “levelling” mentality in his novel *The Two Baronesses* as well:

Vi ere Alle eet Stykke, Alle gjorde af samme Klat Jord; En kom i Avispapir, en Anden i Guldpapir, men **den Forgyldning skal Klatten ikke være stolt af**. Der er Adel i enhver Stand, men den stikker i Tanken og ikke i Blodet [Andersen, 1849, s.215].

A whole number of historical reasons contributed to the development of this mentality. First of all, among those were close social ties formed by the geographical factor and agrarian culture of Scandinavia, which was long in isolation, on the margins of Europe. In the peasant culture, which is characteristic for its solidarity and mutual assistance, unwritten rules become really relevant, and shame regulates the social behaviour. Shame is based on the fear of losing connection with the community, being a mechanism of maintaining public order and unity of people. Some sociologists view shame as a primary emotion which governs the expression of other emotions (anger, fear, love and grief) [Simonova, 2014, p.267].

According to R. Jenkins, as time passed the peasant mentality, which did not allow anyone to stick out of the group, assimilated the socialist idea of equality. This idea was reinforced by modern nation-building, which placed an emphasis on assumed cultural, social and economic homogeneity of the small country. Though the idea of equality (“Vi er alle ens”) contradicts the 21st century reality, it still plays an important role in everyday life of the Danes [Jenkins, 2014, s.32–33].

Overall, the Scandinavian ideology is a quaint combination of individual and collective values. According to B. Studentsov, the Scandinavians are “adherents of ‘horizontal individualism’”: they “tend to see the people around as their likes and do not strive to change their status” unlike representatives of the culture of vertical individualism, who “focus on sticking out (‘of the crowd’), by all means increasing their social status” [Studentsov, 2022a, p.7].

Another factor which influenced all aspects of life in Scandinavia, including mentality, is Lutheranism with its special ethos [Anttonen, 2018; Borioni, 2014; Østergaard, 2003; Stepanova, 2021; Studentsov, 2022b] and such values as piety, law-abidingness, diligence and modesty. The latter was apparently most significant for the Jante law. According to *The Great Danish Encyclopedia*, it is connected with the Scandi-

navian idea that happiness can be achieved using specific rules which imply careful and humble behaviour: modesty helps avoid greediness on the part of people around you, while pride, according to the Danish saying, is not going to do you any good — “hovmod står for fald” (“pride comes before a fall”) [Janteloven].

It was characteristic for Protestantism to work hard, be thrifty, not to put your interests first. The sense of community, unity, modesty and unpretentiousness were a powerful creating force which played a crucial role in restoring Norway and Denmark after World War II and establishing a welfare state. In this respect the Jante law can be definitely viewed as something positive.

3. JANTELOVEN AS A LEXICALISED UNIT IN THE DANISH AND NORWEGIAN LANGUAGES

In the Danish language the word *janteloven* has emotional and evaluative connotations. This concept is negative to such extent that it can be verbally opposed by highly emotional discourse words [Levisen, 2012, p. 150]. C. Levisen gives the following examples of the opposition of the Danes to *janteloven*: the 1987 New Year’s speech of the Danish Queen Margareth II, in which she called on the people to reverse the Jante law, saying “You must not believe that you are worth nothing” [H. M. Dronning Margrethe II’s nytårstale, 1987]; shocking behaviour of Danish handball trainer and former world champion Anja Andersen, who regularly wore a T-shirt with the print “Fuck janteloven!”, and a new approach in schools rephrasing the Jante law into positive rules to promote self-worth and to prevent bullying in schools [Levisen, 2012, p. 149–151].

There are different variants of the positive Jante law, the anti-Jante law [Janteloven og den positive, omvendte jantelov] or an updated Jante law in the new reality [Louw, 2020]. The content analysis has been conducted to evaluate the frequency of usage. The search for *fuck janteloven* in Google gives 24,700 results, *den positive jantelov* — 27,200, *anti-janteloven* — 31,200. In search queries connected with *janteloven* in the Danish segment the Google Trends service gives “prins Henrik”³, “Anja Andersen” and “fuck janteloven”; in the Norwegian segment, the title of

³ Prince Henrik of Denmark (1934–2018) was the husband of the Danish Queen Margareth II, born in France, who was often criticized for being unable to adapt to Denmark and accept his new status.

the novel *En flyktning krysser sitt spor*, Petter Northug⁴, Daniel Kvammen⁵.

C. Levisen considers three major types of *jante*-discourses [Levisen, 2012, p. 151–155]. They still function in the Danish Internet space:

1. The first type presents the Jante law as a real social evil. In such texts there is a talented victim bullied by an “imaginary collective majority” (see, for instance: [Buch, 2011; Gjersøe, 2002]).
2. In the second type of discourse authors recognize the existence of the Jante law, yet do not consider it a given, hence it can be discarded. The US is often seen as a role model in this respect (see, for instance: [Seier, 2018; Nordmenn er verdensmestre i normer, 2016]).
3. In the third type of discourse authors pose a bold question of whether the Jante law is dead or alive, thus provoking further debate (see, for instance: [Er Janteloven død? [fotball]; Janteloven er død!, 2019]).

The corpus analysis allowed us to isolate types of discourses in which the concept of *janteloven* is used. Among these are: sports (1), popular culture (2), business (3), politics (4), psychological problems (5), schooling and upbringing (6).

- (1) (DNK) ...**janteloven** virker til at være en by i Rusland for den hurtige kantspiller. Braithwaite har ambitioner, og han er ikke bange for at sige det højt... [Martin Braithwaite].
(NOR) Petter Northug, Mannen fra Mosvik har for eksempel i lang tid uttrykt at han “**driter i Janteloven**”, og at den aldri har stått i veien for han [Petter Northug tar nytt oppgjør med Janteloven, 2020].
- (2) (DNK) Det må hverken være for street eller for frækt, det skal være elegant. Det handler om **at sige fuck janteloven** uden at træde nogen over tæerne, siger hun og indrømmer, at det er en svær balance at ramme [Brandt Hald, 2014].
(NOR) For bloggere handler det mye om hvor mye psykisk press du tåler. Det kan være hardt. Følger du ikke strømmen, er det alltid noen som

⁴ Petter Northug (b. 1986) is a Norwegian cross-country skier and double Olympic champion of 2010, who often appeared in the media because of scandalous behaviour and changed his nickname on Instagram* for @jantelov1.

⁵ Daniel Kvammen (b. 1988) is a Norwegian songwriter and musician who in 2020 released his *Janteloven* single.

* The product of the Meta company, whose activities are recognized as extremist in the Russian Federation.

reagerer på det du gjør, forteller hun. — Men for meg er det enkelt. **Drit i janteloven**, og gjør hva du vil! [Motebloggeren: Janteloven har jeg merket mye].

- (3) (DNK) Det er umuligt at lave forretning i det her land, fordi **janteloven** forbyder folk at tjene penge... [Lykkeberg, 2007]
(NOR) Milliardær og hotellmogul Petter Stordalen kan med trygghet kalles en av de mest fargerike personligheter i norsk næringsliv. Han kan **janteloven** ord for ord, men forretningsmannen, som innvier sine hoteller ved å ankomme på jetski eller rappellere ned langs fasaden i ekte James Bond-stil, har lite til overs for ideen om at ingen skal tro at de er bedre enn andre [Hvis du er den smarteste personen i rommet, har du et problem, 2017].
- (4) (DNK) Fordi, at en borgerlig-liberal regering skal være en borgerlig-liberal regering — ikke bare af navn, men også af gavn. Der er mange gode ting i det, som regeringen har spillet ud med. Men det er også vigtigt at føre en aktiv værdipolitik. Gå op imod **janteloven**. Gå op imod laveste fællesnævner [Ulveman, Beck Nielsen, 2016].
(NOR) Regjeringen gjør rett i å heve seg over den realpolitiske versjonen av Janteloven som foreslås av Asle Toje [Nordbakken, 2019].
- (5) (DNK) “Du må ikke tro du er noget”. “Du skal ikke komme for godt i gang”. Sådan siger **janteloven**. Mange af os har en modvilje eller angst for at tale, tale højt eller fylde noget i sociale sammenhænge [Petersen, 2019].
(NOR) Forskning utført av forskere ved STAMI og Universitetet i Bergen viser at det er mye mobbing på norske arbeidsplasser, og da bør man spørre seg hvorfor det er det i et land som har et så fantastisk demokrati. Det mener jeg handler mye om disse fundamentene, de stygge gruppemekanismene som også kan kalles mobbing — et annet ord på **Janteloven** [Den norske Janteloven er som gift på arbeidsplassen, 2022].
- (6) (DNK) Og hvor vi anderkender at nogle børn er intelligente og det også er ok. Et Danmark hvor **janteloven** er smidt i skraldespanden og forældre ikke behøver gå på listefodder fordi deres børn tilfældigvis ikke er ordinære [Intelligente børn: Forum, 2012].
(NOR) Det norske skoleverket diskriminerer 10–15 prosent av elevene, de mest evnerike, helt fra de begynner i første klasse. Disse barna har ikke noe tilbud som matcher evnene deres, og slik har det vært i alle fall siden **Janteloven** ble nedskrevet... [De evnerike barna går fortsatt for lut og kaldt vann, 2018].

Texts in which Jutland or the Juts are mentioned can be considered as a separate group. The Danes connect the Jante law with this Danish region, as A. Sandemose's native town of Nykøbing Mors is located in Jutland:

Jeg er **jyde**, men tror ikke på **janteloven** [Mosbech, 2015].

It should be mentioned that, according to R. Jenkins, Jutland evokes dual associations in the Danes: on the one hand, it is a deep backward province, while on the other hand Jutland is perceived as a depository of the traditional Danish values [Jenkins, 2014, s. 48].

In Norway there is no such connection between the Jante law and a specific region; however, people firmly associate it with the life in province:

Jeg har vokst opp i **en liten bygd** og har selv følt **janteloven** på kroppen [Næss mot nye høyder, 2003].

Besides, there is a concept of *bygdedyret* (the beast), invented by Tor Jonsson (1916–1951), a writer, to describe negative aspects of countryside societies in Norway. *Bygdedyret* is often called a countryside version of the Jante law:

Det sies at **bygdedyret** er **en form av janteloven**. Bygdedyret hater annerledeshet og har en moralsk pekefinger for hvordan man skal oppføre seg [Skår Ertesvåg, 2016].

The analysis of the Norwegian material allowed us to single out texts dedicated to feminists and powerful women as a separate group:

Nei til **feminisme** som er preget av misunnelse, **jantelov**, sarkasme og selvhøytidelighet [Breen, 2012].

In this respect it should be mentioned that the Norwegians not only created *antijanteloven* (anti-Jante law) or *den omvendte janteloven* (reversed Jante law), but also actively use *jenteloven* (Swedish: *jäntelagen* 'girls' law'), which was written by Gudrun Hjelte, a Swedish journalist. In the Norwegian textbook for foreigners *Bo i Norge* [Manne, 1987] it is phrased as follows:

1. Du skal tro at du er noe.
2. Du skal tro at du er like god som alle andre og alle andre er like god som du.
3. Du skal tro at du er like klok som andr, av og til klokere.

4. Du skal vite at du er like bra som andre. Hvis du vet at du gjør ditt beste, kan du sette pris på dem som er bedre.
5. Av og til vet du mer enn andre.
6. Du er ikke mer enn andre, men du er enestående som alle andre.
7. Du duger til mye.
8. Le av deg selv og din verden — det gjør deg fri.
9. Du skal tro at mange bryr seg om deg.
10. Du skal tro at du kan lære andre en god del og lære av dem.
11. Hvorfor? Fordi du er noen, en som trengs.

Numerous Danish authors of Internet posts point out that *janteloven* is used as a cliché, as well as a synonym of greed or public opinion to justify failure and lack of success. It has become a convenient manipulation tool on the part of representatives of cultural, economic, political or sports elite to explain their failures and fiascos (see, for instance, [Lykkeberg, 2007, 2016; Börneblogger, 2009]).

Another type of discourse where this concept is often found is discourse connected with immigration policies and problems related to immigrants (in more detail see [Gurova, 2021, p. 135–136]). In this respect the literary text of *Danskerloven* (the Law of the Danes) by Maja Lee Langvad⁶, which is a kind of a parody of the Jante law and confirms precedence of the expression at hand [Dette er Danskerloven], is of special interest:

1. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du er født i Danmark.
2. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du snakker flydende dansk.
3. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du er dansk statsborger.
4. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du bor i Danmark.
5. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi dine bedsteforældre tror det.
6. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du respekterer de danske love.
7. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du hejser Dannebrog i din have.
8. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du kalder nogle for nydanskere.
9. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du vil dø for Danmark.
10. Du skal ikke tro, at du er dansker, fordi du føler dig dansk.

⁶ Danish writer of South Korean origin, co-editor of literary magazine *Banana Split*.

In the 21st century we are witnessing conflicts between the Western and non-Western civilisations, conflicts of mentalities and cultures across the globe, that is why the problem of integration and immigration is not characteristic of Denmark or Norway alone. The cross-cultural conflict between the traditional and the new in the Danish and Norwegian cultures as a result of globalisation should not be regarded as something specific as well. Vertical individualism is becoming wide-spread in the modern culture: today it is important to be competitive, to stick out of the group, to be different [Kirkebæk, 2016, s. 82]. Thus, the Jante law comes into conflict with the so-called achievement culture (præstationskulturen) [Gurova, 2021, p. 135; Rudå Herløv-Nielsen, 2023], and, according to philosopher Arno Viktor Nielsen, it is being replaced by “X faktorloven” (the X-factor law) [Kofoed Poulsen, 2008]. The American individualistic culture which dominates social media undoubtedly influences the development of new values in young people, and ambition, self-assurance, self-assertiveness are no longer considered negative.

Considering the Jante law from the linguistic point of view, C. Levisen states that a lot of scholars interpret it in a wrong way. He proposes the following cultural scenario for *janteloven* in the framework of Anna Wierzbicka’s semantic theory:

Semantic explication for *janteloven* ‘the Jante law’:

- something;
- people can say what this something is with the word *janteloven*;
- someone can say something about something with this word when this someone thinks like this:
 - a) at many times it is like this:
 - b) some people in a place feel something very bad towards someone in this place, because they know that this someone thinks like this:
 - “I am not like everyone else here”;
 - “I don’t want to do things like everyone else here does things”;
 - c) because of this, these people think like this about this someone:
 - “This someone is someone bad”;
 - d) because of this, these people want this someone to feel something bad they want bad things to happen to this someone; they want this someone to think like this:
 - “I am like everyone else here”;
 - “I want to do things like everyone else here does things”;

e) because of this, these people do bad things to this someone at many times;

f) **everyone can know that it is very bad when it is like this;**
everyone can know that these people are very bad people;
everyone can feel something very bad when they think about it
[Levisen, 2012, p. 155–156].

According to C. Levisen, the final component (f) is most crucial to the concept of the Jante law, and observers who miss this aspect misinterpret the concept altogether. “It is very bad when it is like this” models a strong refutation of the prototypical scenario. Thus, component (f) turns an “anti-social” scenario into an “anti-social” concept, making the Jante law a battle cry for a “positive sociality” in which abusive social behaviour and thinking will not be tolerated [Levisen, 2012, p. 156].

The analysis confirmed the assumption that the concept of *janteloven* is perceived by the Danes and the Norwegians as something negative, which is proved by the following characteristics: *et stort problem i Danmark* (a big problem in Denmark), *talentløse menneskers egen forklaring* (an explanation of the talentless), *en undskyldning* (an excuse), *et PR-redskab* (a PR tool), *skyklapper* (blinkers), *pøbelvælde* (power of the mob), *en stopklods* (stop valve);

destruktive kraften i bygde-Norge (destructive force in provincial Norway), *misundelse* (greed), *mobning* (bullying), *den grå masse* (sheeple).

Besides, a whole range of synonymous expressions has been found confirming the intolerance of this concept and the need to discard it (Table 1). In Norway *janteloven* is perceived ambiguously. On the one hand, A. Sandemose wrote about malignity of unanimity, conformity and intolerance to other people. In this vein in 2005 the Jante law was officially buried as an archaic way of pressurising people, which destroys their self-esteem and excludes individuality [Begraver janteloven nok en gang, 2012]. On the other hand, it is important for Norwegians that a person should not neglect interests of other people, put his or her interests first. In this context *janteloven* is a way to call a person who has crossed the lines to order. Nevertheless, despite a more tolerant attitude to this concept, the Norwegian language also has similar expressions:

The corpus data analysis has shown that in the modern Danish and Norwegian languages the Jante law is opposed by *selvtillid/selvtillit* (self-confidence), *anderkendelse/anerkjennelse* (recognition), *storhed/storhet* (greatness), *nyttænkende/nytenkende* (innovative), *anderledes/*

Table 1. Compatibility of *janteloven* with verbs in the Danish and Norwegian languages

Danish	Norwegian
skide på janteloven	drite i janteloven
fuck janteloven	fuck janteloven
pisse på janteloven	pisse på janteloven
bekæmpe janteloven	bekjempe janteloven
afskaffe janteloven	avskaffe janteloven
bryde med janteloven	bryte med janteloven
være imod janteloven	være mot janteloven
slippe fri fra janteloven	slippe unna janteloven
trodse janteloven	glemme janteloven
fordømme janteloven	heie mot janteloven
sætte janteloven til vægs	begrave janteloven
smide janteloven væk	gi pokker i janteloven
smide janteloven i skraldespanden	ta eit oppgjør med janteloven
sætte (lægge) janteloven til side	myrde janteloven
lægge janteloven på hylden	
skyde janteloven til hjørne	
sætte janteloven ud af spil	
skrotte janteloven	
give janteloven fingeren	

annerledes (different), *et karrieremenneske / en karrierejeger* (a career-minded, ambitious person), *talentdyrkelse/talentsdyrkelse* (development of talents), *ambitioner/ambisjoner* (ambitions), *succes/suksess* (success), *stolthed/stolthet* (pride), which proves the value of the abovementioned qualities in the modern Danish and Norwegian cultures.

4. JANTELOVEN: POLITICS AND CULTURE

According to C. Levisen, *janteloven* makes the actual message very similar to the one encoded in more straightforward and positive concepts like *hygge* and *tryghed* (security) [Levisen, 2012, p. 158]. In this respect special emphasis is put on the assumption that in certain cases *hygge* acts as a means of social control and achievement of standardisation of behaviour [Linnet, 2009, p. 24].

B. Henningsen rightly sees the political aspect in *hygge*, arguing that over the past two hundred years the development of the Danish national identity has been tightly connected with the task of building a social state, the cornerstone of which is social cohesion (*sozialer Zusam-*

menhalt), *hygge* being an essential part of it. According to Henningsen, preservation of social cohesion in the modern society is achieved in the following way: any new member of the Danish society shall, first of all, internalize “Danishness”, in a way, that is consistent with the public perception of it. This kind of “cultural canon” is, in his opinion, linked with the existing order of things and thus subconsciously broadcasts the first Jante commandment: “You’re not to think you are anything special” [Henningsen, 2023].

Therefore, it seems reasonable to examine specific social practices through which the functions of *hygge* and *janteloven* transpire simultaneously attaining political dimension. First of all, they make themselves known through purposeful policy-making of the public authorities, which resulted in ministry regulations known as “canons”⁷. Thus, in 2006 the Danish Ministry of Culture issued a document called Kulturkanonen — the Danish Cultural Canon. It includes 108 works of architecture, fine art, arts and crafts, design, cinema, literature, music, theatre along with works for children.

The preface to the Cultural Canon states that it unites everything that 1) “is recognised or chosen by someone as the best or genuine (*det bedste eller rigtigste*)”; 2) “may be used as a reference point or a model (*rettesnor eller forbillede*) to define the quality of something”; 3) “may be used as a guidance or a starting point (*vejledning eller pejlemærke*) to study something”; 4) “represents major (*største og vigtigste*) Danish cultural heritage assets”. Further in the text it is said that the cultural canon is to 1) “serve as a compass showing the trends and landmarks (*retninger og milepæle*) of the Danish history and culture”; 2) “become a starting point for debate” [Kulturkanon, s. 4].

The abovementioned key characteristics are similar on the way that they reflect an established social consensus, the weight and authority of which is unchallenged, see the adjectives used (“the best”, “the genuine”, “the reference point”, “the role model”). In the text the abovementioned

⁷ After the emergence of the Cultural Canon in the 2000s the following canons appeared: the literary canon (*litteraturkanonen*) in 2005, the historical canon (*historiekanonen*) and the democratic canon (*demokratikanonen*) in 2006, and the Danish values canon (*Danmarkskanonen*) in 2016. The scope of this study doesn’t allow to dwell on them, but they obviously should be addressed in a separate article. For the purpose of this study it should be mentioned that *janteloven* was not included in the Danish values canon.

characteristics appear as an objective reality or a set of patterns out of control of the cognising subject (“a compass”, “a direction”, “a landmark” (*milepæl*)). Besides, the text itself explicitly states that these works have been recognised and chosen by somebody non-personalised (possibly collective), which makes them all the more authoritative. In the framework of this paper the primary importance of the “canon” postulated aimed at formation of the individual’s perception of the culture is of no coincidence, as any discussion requires common reference points well-known to everyone, which is another allusion to *janteloven*.

This finality of judgement obviously caused criticism. For example, in one study the canon was blamed for assuming the self-proclaimed guiding role, setting certain standards, while the vague and evasive nature of the “quality” test cannot become a credible criterion in relation to works of art, which is all the more relevant, as “including certain works into the canon leads to excluding everything else” [Johannesen et al., 2006, s. 3].

Besides, from the point of view of critics the Ministry of Culture’s initiative to a certain extent undermines the efforts to integrate Denmark into globalisation processes, as this project is definitely backward-looking [Johannesen et al., 2006, s. 4], while in the society of the future the national boundaries will be eroded, mutual penetration and collision of different cultures will turn groups of people into some kind of diasporas in their native countries, while the disparity between the centre and the periphery will be eliminated [Johannesen et al., 2006, s. 4]. The “absurdity” of the idea put forward by the Ministry of Culture may be illustrated by a colourful metaphor: “people sitting around a tiled stove waiting for globalisation to come while making efforts to gather around something significant and typically Danish”. Furthermore, to confirm scepticism in respect of the project the author quotes the words of British sociologist Z. Bauman on the individualisation of the process of identity development [Johannesen et al., 2006, s. 5]. Danish critics focus on the extinction of territorial, professional or class communities, which are the guardians of identity (apparently the recognition of this role is to a certain extent a fundamental belief to be appealed to).

Finally, the author argues that nostalgic cherishing of “Danishness” constitutes an attempt to appropriate the understanding of this particular “Danishness”, therefore, the development of such canon and discussions arising therefrom will undoubtedly become a self-glorification project, which will result in division of the society into “a great com-

munity of the Danes and those disadvantaged who are not part of it” [Johannesen et al., 2006, s. 6].

The abovementioned reaction to the Ministry of Culture’s attempt to formalise the components of the Danish cultural code expressed in the works of culture is remarkable. On the one hand, the state presents itself as a transmitter of the opinion of the unidentified majority, viewing it positively as a method of maintaining social cohesion and protection of *hygge* in the social dimension. Yet at the same time the state imposes the “negative” *janteloven*, as it appropriates the right to form the truth. Thus, the attempt of the state to create a collective *hygge* runs into obstacles. First of all, the opponents start perceiving the imposed notion of *hygge* as its destruction, through the opposition “us (Danish) — them (from outside)”. Secondly, they fail to form the “positive” *janteloven*, challenging the validity of the “negative” one [Levisen, 2012, p. 151]. This attempt is made as we start talking about globalisation going beyond *janteloven*, by removing all contradictions through dissolution in the “big world”; yet this approach lacks sustainability. The critics rapidly go to extremes as they condemn themselves and begin imposing the oppressive *janteloven*, simply substituting the opponent and dictating their opinion as the only true one. To this end they appropriate the right to label globalism as *hygge* (*inde i varmen*) and anti-globalism as *anti-hygge* (*ude i kulden*), then identify themselves with the new *hygge* advocates, seeing in them (albeit to a certain extent ironically (*de andre stakler udenfor*)) the victims of the proponents of the “Danishness” (*vores knagefællesskab*) as the advocates of *janteloven* while ignoring the fact that the substitution has been made.

CONCLUSION

The Jante law, created by Aksel Sandemose in 1933, is part of the cultural code in Scandinavia and exists in two hypostases, as a literary text and a lexicalised expression in the Danish and Norwegian languages. The lexicalization of the expression was facilitated by the peculiar Scandinavian mentality, which is a result of historical development and geographical factors.

The concept of *janteloven* has a negative connotation and is used in certain types of discourse (sports, popular culture, business, politics, psychology, schooling, immigration problems, and feminism). The precedence of the concept is shown by the texts which are reformulated

Jante law commandments. In many cases the notion of *janteloven* is used as a cliché, a convenient way to justify failures and lack of successes.

Consistent association of *janteloven* with Jutland in Denmark and the countryside in Norway shows the connection between this concept and the phenomenon which is characteristic for local countryside communities in many countries of the world, which is proven by similar expressions in other languages.

Processes which arose as a result of globalization and Americanization of the Danish and Norwegian cultures have resulted in changed attitude to such qualities as initiative, ambition, self-confidence and assertiveness, which shows transformations in the Scandinavian mentality in view of the changes in the society.

As a social construct and a tacit regulator of social relations *janteloven* is in line with a number of other concepts (*hygge*, *trivsel* and so on); however, *janteloven* is peculiarly visible in political practices, both in its formal aspect (development of various “canons”) and in methods through antagonizing the imposition of certain phenomena on the part of decision-makers. Thus, *janteloven* reveals itself both in “positive” and in “negative” aspects: on the one hand, through the state “pushing” the people into acceptance of certain practices aimed at development of homogeneous social structure; on the other hand, through civil society institutions establishing a soft system of “checks and balances” in the framework of the public discourse aimed at reaching a consensus on a number of matters. In the end, both aspects naturally supplement the existing imperative standard and legal regulation, and in certain cases prepare people for introduction of certain formal rules of behaviour.

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JANTELOVEN В ДАНИИ И НОРВЕГИИ — БЫТЬ ИЛИ НЕ БЫТЬ?

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В статье рассматривается феномен закона Янте (*janteloven*), сформулированного А. Сандемусе в 1933 г. в романе *En flyktning krysser sitt spor. Fortelling om en morders barndom* («Беглец пересекает свой след. Рассказ о детстве убийцы») и впоследствии ставшего элементом культурного кода Дании и Норвегии. Вслед за К. Левисеном в данном исследовании разграничиваются «литературный закон Янте», описанный А. Сандемусе в романе, и «лингвистический закон Янте», имеющий в датском и норвежском языке характер устойчивого сочетания. Лексикализация понятия способствовал особый скандинавский менталитет, обусловленный рядом исторических причин (аграрная культура скандинавских стран, лотеранская этика). В современном датском и норвежском языке понятие *janteloven* имеет отрицательную коннотацию и употребляется в определенных видах дискурса (спорт, поп-культура, бизнес, политика, психология, школьное образование, проблемы с мигрантами, феминизм). Кроме этого, существуют разнообразные переформулированные заповеди закона Янте (*den positive jantelov, den omvendte jantelov, antijantelov, jenteloven, Danskerloven*), что свидетельствует о прецедентности понятия в датской и норвежской культурах. Доминирующая американская индивидуалистическая культура оказывает влияние на формирование новой системы ценностей (амбициозность, самоуверенность, напористость теперь не воспринимаются как отрицательные качества), вследствие чего прослеживается конфликт между традиционным и новым в датской и норвежской культуре: закон Янте вступает в противоречие с так называемой культурой достижений (*prestasjonskulturen*). Как социальный конструкт и негласный регулятор общественных отношений, *janteloven* органично вписывается в ряд других концептов (*hygge, trivsel* и т. д.), однако особое отражение *janteloven* находит в политических практиках, причем как в своем формальном выражении (выработка разнообразных «канонов»), так и в методах противодействия навязыванию отдельных явлений со стороны органов власти.

Ключевые слова: *janteloven*, закон Янте, датский язык, норвежский язык, скандинавский менталитет.

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