

The Brudevals, 'Danishness' and lived reality

Inger Damsholt

ABSTRACT

This article represents part of the author's ongoing empirical study of the Danish *brudevals* (bridal waltz) tradition recognized by the means of three characteristic conditions: a specific piece of music by Niels W. Gade, a particular group choreography in which a circle of clapping guests slowly move closer to the newlywed couple and a final section of the ritual in which guests cut the tips of the groom's socks. The purpose of the article is to highlight how current realisations of the dance reveal the brudevals as a dynamic living tradition and to show the complexity of the political implications it can have when dancing it. Drawing on Sarah Ahmed's affect theory, the article argues that different negotiations of the brudevals naturalise various understandings of 'Danishness'. The article argues that an alternative contemporary form of the brudevals, which incorporates a montage of international popular dance and music, produces a version of national identity that underlines the notion of world citizenship as a significant part of being Danish. In realisations of the brudevals danced by same-sex couples, a kind of 'Danishness' is produced through affect that naturalises and celebrates *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex and asexual* (LGBTQIA) marriages. Finally, a Turkish-Danish brudevals produces a multiculturalist understanding of 'Danishness', which does not conform to a specific national cultural heritage but can encompass several ethnic groups.

ABSTRACT

Denne artikel repræsenterer en del af forfatterens fortløbende empiriske undersøgelse af den danske brudevals-tradition der her genkendes på grundlag af tre karakteristiske betingelser: et specifikt stykke musik af Niels W. Gade, en bestemt gruppekoreografi, hvor en kreds af klappende gæster bevæger sig langsomt tættere på brudeparret og et sidste afsnit af den rituelle dans, hvor gæster klipper spidserne af brudgommens sokker. Formålet med artiklen er at fremhæve hvordan nutidige realiseringer af dansen viser brudevalsen som en dynamisk levende tradition og at understrege kompleksiteten af de politiske implikationer, det kan have, når man danser den. Med udgangspunkt i Sarah Ahmeds affektteori argumenterer artiklen for, at forskellige forhandlinger af brudevals naturaliserer forskellige forståelser af danskhed. Artiklen hævder, at en nutidig form for alternativ brudevals, der indeholder et break med en montage af populærmusik og tilhørende dansebevægelser, producerer en version af danskhed, som understreger forestillingen om 'verdensborgerskab' som en væsentlig del af det at være dansk. I andre brudevalse, der danses af to af samme køn, produceres en slags danskhed, der naturaliserer og hylder *Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex and asexual* (LGBTQIA) ægteskaber. Afslutningsvis producerer en tyrkisk-dansk brudevals en multikulturalistisk forståelse af danskhed, som ikke er begrænset til en bestemt national kulturarv, men kan omfatte elementer der peger i retning af forskellige etniciteter.

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Introduction

This article represents part of a larger ongoing empirical study of the brudevals tradition in Denmark.¹ During the first two decades of the new millennium, I focused my research on popular social dance practices specific to Denmark. While I have published several articles on the Danish Lanciers tradition (Damsholt 2009 and 2014), the present article is the first presentation of results from my study of the Danish brudevals tradition.² As I was born in Denmark and have lived in this country for most of my 55 years, I have attended many weddings here, including my own. Apart from the experience and knowledge I acquired as an insider of Danish culture, my knowledge of the brudevals stems from a vast amount of material, including historical archival material (for example, dance descriptions, sheet music, feature films and YouTube videos). From this 'insider' position, my view as a researcher is that systematised empirical knowledge of the history of the brudevals tradition and its contemporary practice is scarce (see Andersen 2020, Kaivola-Bregenhøj 1983 and Kofod 2008 & 1996). *The Great Danish Encyclopaedia* states that the dance is derived from August Bournonville's ballet *A Folk Tale* (1854) with music by Niels W. Gade and describes it in the following manner:³

The guests stand in a circle around the dancing couple and clap their hands. Gradually, they approach the bridal couple and make the circle smaller. When all the guests are close to the bridal couple, the groom is lifted in the air by the male guests and the tips of his socks are cut off. (Jensen 2020)

On the basis of my lived experience and my ongoing research of different materials, I have characterised the contemporary Danish brudevals as meeting three conditions, which are as follows: it must have a specific piece of music by Niels W. Gade («Brudevals» from 1854), a particular group choreography (a circle of guests clapping and slowly moving closer to the bridal couple) and a cutting ritual (guests cutting the tips of the groom's socks). According to a contemporary source, some believe that the sock cutting ritual is carried out, because 'guests want to prevent the groom from «making his socks green» with other women', while some guests might 'tear the bride's veil apart and take a piece home, which should bring happiness' (Brudevals, 2020).

Within a Nordic context, it is particularly interesting to note that the word 'brudevals', which is known in all Scandinavian languages, generally denotes the more international concept of the 'first dance' of a married couple. Nevertheless, in the context of Danish weddings, the word 'brudevals' also connotes the three characteristic elements described above. This is obvious when comparing broadcasts of the 'first dances' performed by the three Scandinavian crown prince-/crown princess-couples in 2001, 2004 and 2010 (Ragnar Bang Huseby 2013, RoyalLife CZ 2014 and Anneliese Lohse 2010). The Norwegian and Swedish couples perform their first dances to different pieces of music, and eventually, guests join in with the couple dancing. The Danish couple, however, performs a traditional Danish brudevals to Gade's music in which a group of clapping guests gradually encircles them. And although the broadcast of the

royal Danish wedding did not document any cutting ritual, other sources have indicated that the Danish Crown Prince had the tips of his socks cut off after press photographers had gone (erla@bt.dk 2004).

Rather than confining the brudevals to a number of necessary or sufficient conditions in a static dance tradition, the purpose of the present article is to highlight how current realisations of the brudevals in Denmark reveal its character as a dynamic living tradition. My ongoing research suggests no one-to-one simplicity in the relationship between the brudevals as a habituated practice and its discursive deliberations. In this day and age, any practice that has the character of being a Danish tradition is in danger of being used by conservative nationalist parties as the norm for 'real Danish people'. This can be seen in the patenting of traditional Danish food, clothing, dance and so on. In this article, the intention is not to de-politicise the brudevals or to claim that it is an innocent tradition. My intention is to show the complexity of the political implications it may have when dancing the brudevals, thus I do not accept the idea that we all have super-agency to determine the meaning of what we are doing.

In writing this article, I am inspired by Sarah Ahmed's theoretical framework as presented in *The Cultural Politics of Emotions* (2004), in which she turns to the question of how we can theorise positive affect and the politics of good feeling. Starting from the notion that emotions are cultural practices rather than psychological states, Ahmed argued that bodies or individuals become aligned with popular ideology inside a community through emotions (Ahmed 2004, 1). The idea is that affect is material rhetoric and that affective power can dictate the modes of lives and function as a gateway into the social world. While Ahmed primarily analysed how written or spoken texts perform emotion, her theoretical framework is inspiring when considering the political implications of affect in a dance practice like the brudevals. Thus,

in this article, I start from the notion that a dance tradition, like the repetition of words, elicits an emotional response that grows upon repetition and enhances social alliances and notions of national identity.

In the context of my ongoing research, it seems crucial to emphasise the fact that the arguments in the present article are not based on extensive field work, such as formal participant observations or ethnographic interviews. The constitution of 'weddings in Denmark' as a field that can be investigated systematically through field work would obviously provide a richer body of data that might illustrate the complexity of the brudevals as a dynamic living tradition in a more convincing manner. Nevertheless, in this article, I dare to make arguments about 'Danishness' in the brudevals that are based on my insider knowledge of the tradition as well as a vast amount of archival material. To illustrate the complexity of the brudevals as a dynamic living tradition, I refer to an array of current material found on the Internet, including nine realisations of the brudevals documented by wedding guests and uploaded on YouTube by bridal couples or their guests. Obviously, the arrival of the Internet 2.0 and the consequential possibility of studying people online has 'prompted discussion among both the research community and the general public about the ethical implications of researching humans, their information, and their activities in large-scale digital contexts' (Fiesler, Young, Peyton, Bruckman, Gray, Hancock and Lutterset, 2015). In other words, just because something is legal does not mean it is ethically plausible. Briefly, my position on the ethics of using the lived reality documented in the nine YouTube videos examined herein is that they constitute published material. I assume that the bridal couple and their guests agreed to the videos being uploaded. Furthermore, while it might be true that many people do not fully understand what 'publicly available' really means or its ramifications, I do not think that I am

compromising anybody's privacy by referring to the videos in the context of my article.

How is the brudevals Danish?

Surrounded by cheering spectators, a couple of formally dressed men take up the dance floor, which is lit in the manner of a discotheque. One man is tall, large, light skinned, slightly bald and wears a black suit. The other man is short, petite, brown skinned, black haired and dressed in a shining white suit with a corsage on his left lapel. As the performance starts, the «Time of my Life» song from the final scene of the classic Hollywood dance film Dirty Dancing (1987) is heard and the two men embody the iconic dance moves of the choreographic parts of Johnny (Patrick Swayze) and Baby (Jennifer Grey). At first, the tall man in the black suit represents Johnny, but soon, the gender roles are switched, and the short man in the white suit kneels down to catch the tall man in the black suit in an ironic imitation of the way Johnny catches Baby in the film. The dancing continues with a montage of popular music to which the dancing couple performs a series of dance moves partly derived from music videos. Three minutes into the performance, Niels W. Gade's «Brudevals» is heard, and the spectators immediately start to sing along and clap their hands on the down beats of the music. The two men now take a dance hold and perform a waltz. At the beginning, the tall man in the black suit leads the dance, while the short man in the white suit follows. After a while, the men change roles, thus 'queering' the way this phenomenon is seen in many other contemporary couple dance practices. Towards the end of the first run-through of the music, the guests have started to move in on the couple,

and by the time the music ends, both men are lifted up by some of the guests, stripped of their shoes and the tips of their socks are cut off.

The YouTube video *Peter & Peter – Brudevals*, which I have described above, is described by the uploader as 'a slightly atypical «Brudevals» at our wedding August 11, 2012' (Borg, 2013). But why would it be considered 'atypical'? One interpretation of this might focus on the fact that the dance starts with a montage of popular dance and music. Another interpretation might focus on the fact that it is performed by two men who 'queer' the waltz as well as the enactment of moves from Johnny and Baby's iconic final mambo in *Dirty Dancing*. Finally, my own description of the video highlights the fact that the short man in the white suit has black hair and brown skin. While this observation most likely has little to do with the uploader's description of the dance as 'atypical', very often, at least in the Danish context, phenotypic traits are immediately associated with territorial belongings and migration.⁴

But how is a brudevals like the one described above Danish? In this article, I argue that affect in the brudevals relates to narratives of 'liveable lives', including same-sex and inter-ethnic marriages. This means that versions of 'Danishness' are also naturalised through affect. To highlight the complexity of the brudevals tradition in relation to notions of national identity, I use as a framework for the article the brudevals danced by Peter and Peter, which points to the themes of my main analysis. First, I highlight how the existing trend of an 'alternative' brudevals, that refers to international viral first dance videos on YouTube, produces a kind of 'Danishness' that underlines the notion of world citizenship as a significant part of being Danish. Second, I propose that realisations of brudevals performed by same-sex couples produce a kind of 'Danishness' that naturalises and celebrates Lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender, queer/questioning, intersex

and asexual (LGBTQIA) marriages. Finally, I highlight the fact that the brudevals can be negotiated in ways that combine two different ethnicities, producing a notion of 'Danishness' that does not conform to a specific national cultural heritage. In this context, it seems important to underline the difference between the habitual practice of the brudevals and its discursive deliberations. In other words, when locating different notions of 'Danishness' in current realisations of the brudevals, I oscillate between describing explicit elements and unpacking elements that have not been understood before.

Globalisation, digitalisation and 'first dance' choreographies

The popular media's definition of a 'first dance', such as that in the English version of Wikimedia, stresses that the music to which the married couple dances is highly varied, 'with modern chart hits often being selected' (Wikimedia Foundation Inc. 2020a). It also suggests that 'some modern couples either slow dance or learn a dance, whether it be a ballroom dance style or a choreographed dance routine' (Wikimedia Foundation Inc. 2020a). That Wikimedia's definition of a 'first dance' is vastly documented becomes clear when browsing the many videos uploaded on YouTube showing first dances at Euro-American weddings. Thus, many couples perform a slow dance to a modern chart hit, but more importantly, many couples present themselves in a choreographed montage of signature dance moves from Hollywood films and music videos. Signature dance moves typically originate from popular dance films, such as *Grease* (1978), *Footloose* (1984) and *Dirty Dancing* (the «Time of my Life» finale in particular) and music videos, such as Sir Mix-A-Lot's «Baby Got Back», Beyoncé's «Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)», Psy's «Gangnam Style», *Ylvis's «The Fox (What the Fox Say)»* and «Harlem Shake» (for example, Fijiterp89 2014, Jake Britt 2016 and Luke

Walker 2013).

While some 'first dance' videos that include an improvised slow dance seem to highlight the intimacy of the couple, choreographed dance routines or montages highlight the 'first dance' as a theatrical stage production. In general, it seems that in this day and age, 'first dances' blur the concepts of the 'participatory dance', 'theatrical dance' and 'screen dance'. More specifically, a 'first dance' is often choreographed as a live event in reference to particular instances of the screen dance, such as the «Time of my Life» finale of *Dirty Dancing*. However, it may also be conceived as a screen dance in the sense that video documentations of it are expected to have a significant after life on social media. In her article, «Screendance 2.0: Social Dance-Media,» Harmony Bench used Beyoncé's official video for «Single Ladies (Put a Ring on It)» when identifying 'viral choreographies' as specific dancing in viral videos in which social media users contribute with re-performances of specific choreography (Bench 2010, 204–206).

When browsing the many videos uploaded on YouTube that document brudevals dances at weddings in Denmark, it seems clear that Peter and Peter's negotiation of the traditional dance represents a more general trend of performing an 'alternative brudevals' (Bryllupskanalen 2020a). Many videos document realisations of the brudevals that insert a choreographed routine of popular music and signature dance moves into the traditional form. Usually, the brudevals starts with Gade's «Brudevals» music, and the couple enters the dance floor while guests get ready to clap their hands and move in on the couple. After a while, Gade's music is suddenly interrupted and a montage of popular music and signature dance moves unfolds. As a conclusion to the dance, Gade's music returns and the guests initiate the traditional group choreography moving closer to the couple, after which the cutting ritual unfolds (see, for example, Larsrefshauge 2008, Tomas Mygind 2013, Bo Berggreen 2013 and DJ Sjass

2013). While Gade's music may refer to a historical era of national romanticism, the montages of popular music and dance can refer to a more general notion of the 'olden days' within the lifetime of the newlywed couple and their friends, including iconic dance moves from the films and videos of their youth or childhood. In this sense, the alternative brudevals refers to a more or less mutual heritage of popular music and dance moves shared by younger generations, who are generally not familiar with dancing the waltz.

With the insertion of a choreographed montage of popular music and dance moves from a globalised digital context into the traditional form, the alternative brudevals can be read as producing a kind of 'Danishness' that disturbs the notion of Denmark as a closed nation state with a particular national culture. Thus, the alternative brudevals refers to a community conception and form of 'Danishness' that focuses on world citizenship as a significant part of being Danish. Alternative realisations of the brudevals suggest that part of Denmark's national cultural heritage is shared with the rest of the world or that Denmark is part of a larger global community that shares a mutual heritage of popular culture. As such, the alternative brudevals suggests an overarching sense of global uniformity or even notions of 'McDonaldisation' or 'Disneyfication', which suggest the internationalisation of United States mass culture entertainment values. However, it ought to be underlined that the global popularity of the Korean music video «Gangnam Style» *and the ensuing flow of K-pop* seems to have challenged the hegemonic status of the United States when it comes to popular music and dance. In any case, the alternative brudevals produces a kind of 'Danishness' that does not conform to a specific national cultural heritage but underlines a global heritage of global citizens.

Rainbow weddings and rainbow families

What is enacted in the brudevals is the climax of the romantic wedding narrative. This includes an awkward tension between an institutionalised and ritualised choreography and the expectation of genuine feelings felt by the newlyweds in the middle of the circle of guests. Thus, the practice of the brudevals is suffused by specific ideas of romantic love and specific feelings the bride and groom are expected to have for each other. These may include excitement connected with the historical concept of the wedding night as the most romantic and 'hot' night of one's life. In principle, the couple's dance hold represents their first close physical encounter and thereby, the initial phase of the wedding night. The encircling movement of the guests reduces the size of the dance floor, which constitutes a visceral unification of the two, and many couples end up in a close embrace, often kissing each other passionately. The encircling choreography also foreshadows the sock cutting ritual, which marks the monogamous nature of the expected marital relationship into which the bridal couple is expected to enter. Thus, the Danish brudevals can be read as a practice that celebrates the family as an institution. In other words, the affective energy of the clapping circle of guests seems to be saying, 'This couple is now recognised as a family and thereby, part of our community made up of networks of families'.

Considering the brudevals in the larger context of weddings, marriages and families, the dance is related to broad political discussions about what we are supposed to strive for in society. In her article «Happy Objects,» Ahmed highlighted how happiness functions as a promise that directs life towards marriage.

Happiness is an expectation of what follows, where the expectation differentiates between things, whether or not they exist as objects in the present. For example, a child might be asked to imagine

happiness by imagining certain events in the future, such as his or her wedding day, 'the happiest day of your life'. (Ahmed 2010, 41)

Contributing to the affective narrative of the practice of the brudevals, Jens Werner, widely known as a judge on the Danish version of *Strictly Come Dancing*, explained, 'The most intimate and most private, besides the wedding night, is probably if one is allowed to dance the brudevals with ones chosen one, because... there are a lot of memories that flare up, reserved for only the man and the lady, or whether it is a man and a man, or a woman and a woman, it does not matter, but the couple, and I think that is not found elsewhere' (Bryllupskanalen 2020b). In this context it needs to be highlighted that the legal rights of the LGBTQIA community in Denmark are some of the most extensive in the world. Same-sex sexual activity was legalised in 1933, and Denmark was the first country in the world to recognise civil partnerships for same-sex couples in 1989. Since 2010, Denmark has allowed same-sex couples to adopt jointly, and in 2012, the registered partnership act was replaced by a gender-neutral marriage law. As such, I propose that the same-sex brudevals refers to a community conception and form of 'Danishness' that celebrates rainbow families and underlines a part of the national cultural heritage that has to do with LGBTQIA rights. Thus, the affective intensity of the brudevals also (re)produces other political conceptions of normality in a presentation of other norms that suffuse the dance. In other words, part of the affective intensity of the same-sex brudevals might have to do with the fact that the two individuals of the couple are proud to be 'out of the closet' but also proud to embrace the marriage institution through their practice of the brudevals.

Documentations of same-sex 'first dances' in Denmark found on the Internet show that the practice of the brudevals is negotiated in different ways. To demonstrate this, I have compared the same-sex

brudevals danced by Peter and Peter with a same-sex brudevals danced by Carina and Maibritt, which was documented in a YouTube video entitled *Brudevals Marie Key Uden Forsvar* (Maibritt Overgaard 2013). Considering the three characteristic conditions defined earlier, the two realisations are similar in the sense that they include the particular group choreography and the cutting ritual. In both dances, the guests form a circle around the bridal couple, clapping and slowly moving closer to them, so the circle became smaller. The two realisations are slightly different in their respective negotiations of the sock ritual. In this context it ought to be underlined that Carina and Maibritt are (cross-) dressed in a traditional heteronormative manner: one as 'the groom' in a black suit, and one as 'the bride' in a traditional Euro-American white dress and veil.⁵ Thus, while Peter and Peter are both lifted in the air to have the tips of their socks cut off, only the groom has the tips of the socks cut at the end of the brudevals danced by Carina and Maibritt. Moreover, Carina and Maibritt's brudevals concludes with a tradition in which the groom removes the bride's garter using his mouth.

A big difference between the two realisations of brudevals has to do with the use of musical accompaniment. Peter and Peter's realisation includes the characteristic «Brudevals» by N.W. Gade (1854), but Carina and Maibritt's brudevals is solely accompanied by a Danish chart hit from 2012 entitled «Uden Forsvar» (Without Defence). Both pieces of music have the potential to produce a notion of 'Danishness'. Much of the affective intensity of Peter and Peter's brudevals could be due to Gade's music being related to a larger understanding of Danish national heritage. Yet many Danish citizens might actually think of Gade's music as belonging to a more global notion of wedding music on the same level as Felix Mendelsohn's «Wedding March» (1842) or Richard Wagner's «Bridal Chorus» (1850). In contrast, much of the affective intensity of Carina and Maibritt's

brudevals could be due to the use of a Danish love song by Marie Key, who is an iconic singer-songwriter in the Danish LGBTQIA community (Marianne Kongerslev 2016). Finally, both realisations of the brudevals highlight the complexity of the traditional dance as negotiated in reference to a larger context of modern Euro-American wedding celebrations. Thus, Peter and Peter begin their dance with a montage of popular dance and music, while Carina and Maibritt dance to a modern chart hit.

Migration and ethnic minorities in Denmark

Connected to a more universally recognised wedding concept, the Danish practice of the brudevals is implicitly aligned with wedding traditions and ‘first dances’ that represent different ethnicities worldwide (Beau-coup 2020). These traditions and dances are part of the cultural heritage brought to Denmark through migration. The Turkish community is currently considered the largest ethnic minority group in Denmark, thus, unsurprisingly, many weddings in Denmark are traditional Turkish weddings reproducing Turkish wedding traditions, including a Turkish ‘first dance’.⁶ Documentations of such weddings are found on YouTube, including the television portrait of the wedding of Bahar and Selahattin, both descendants of Turkish immigrants, which was celebrated in a large sports gymnasium in a suburb of Copenhagen (videoarkiv ishøj 2012). As the bridal couple arrives at the gymnasium, a Turkish announcement states that they are ‘about to dance the first dance of their life together’ and that ‘they have chosen the piece of music themselves’. This ‘first dance’ appears as a simple improvised slow dance during which the couple talks to each other, and children sprinkle them with rose petals.

Considering conservative nationalist politics, a Turkish wedding in Denmark can be regarded just as nationalist as a Danish wedding in Denmark – or a

Danish wedding in another country – can. Reading a wedding as nationalist is obviously predicated upon the idea that what is enacted represents ‘Turkishness’ or ‘Danishness’ respectively – and that this is a necessary prerequisite for the wedding to be proper and that the wedding is seen to sustain a specific national community. One of the terms often referred to in Danish debates about migration is the concept of a ‘parallel society’, referring to the self-organization of an ethnic or religious minority or group of immigrants. In the perspective of Ahmed’s affect theory, the repetition of concepts, such as ‘parallel society’, in public texts represents material rhetoric that aligns some bodies inside a community while marginalising ‘other’ bodies in ‘other’ communities. In a Danish context, the use of the ‘parallel society’ concept often implies that a minority group wants minimal social and cultural contact with the majority society, and as such, it is seen in opposition to concepts like ‘integration’ and ‘assimilation’.

So, what happens when people of so-called ‘Danish descent’ marry someone from ‘outside’ of Denmark? Some realisations of the brudevals seem to highlight the fact that an ‘outsider’ is assimilated or integrated into Danish culture, such as the aforementioned brudevals performed by the Danish Crown Prince Frederik and Crown Princess Mary, a former dual citizen of Australia and the United Kingdom. Their brudevals emphasises the fact that when you marry into the Danish royal family, you must integrate or assimilate by embracing the new nationality in terms of language, religion, norms and practices. In her essay, «Happy Objects,» Ahmed suggested that migrant individuals and families are under pressure to integrate, ‘Although integration is not defined as «leaving your culture behind» (at least not officially), it is unevenly distributed, as a demand that new or would-be citizens embrace a common culture that is already given’ (Ahmed 2010, 49).

Nevertheless, some descendants of immigrants,

who were born and raised in Denmark, insist on performing their dual identity as a hyphenate ethnicity brudevals. An example of this is the story of Steen and Süheyla, which is based on many hours of interviews with a man of Danish descent and a woman of Turkish descent, who did not wish to reveal their real names (Width Bindslev 2015). At the beginning of their wedding reception, which takes place in a large sports gymnasium holding about 500 people, the arrival of the couple culminates with a traditional Turkish first dance, ‘...the music shifts tempo into a slower pace...the first song Süheyla sang for him (Steen) in Turkish...’ (Width Bindslev 2015). Later in the evening, the couple performs the Danish brudevals.

The brudevals is on at 24:00 hours, as Süheyla and Steen have decided. The Turkish band does not know the song, so instead, Süheyla and Steen dance to a Turkish waltz, while their friends draw closer and closer together on them. To the great surprise and joy of the Turkish guests, the friends finally lift up the couple, cutting a piece of Süheyla’s veil and of Steen’s socks. (Width Bindslev 2015)

As Gade’s music is replaced by Turkish music, so the dance itself becomes a Danish-Turkish brudevals referring to several ethnicities at the same time. But more importantly, this brudevals is danced in the context of a Turkish wedding reception in Denmark long after a traditional Turkish ‘first dance’ has already been performed. Thus, these circumstances seem to disturb the implicit asymmetrical power relations associated with the Turkish minority, if a ‘minority’ is defined as a group that has no power to define the norm. More importantly however, it highlights that the Danish norm – the ‘brudevals’ – can be negotiated, thus making room for other ways of dancing it.

Conclusion

In this article, I have considered different ways in which people in Denmark seek to negotiate the brudevals as something that can be inclusive and encompass them as individuals. In other words, different ways of practicing the brudevals that seem to be stating, ‘This dance is also for us!’ In reference to Ahmed’s affect theory, I have explored the political implications of affective intensities in the practice of the brudevals and its potential to enhance social alliances in notions of ‘Danishness’ that do not conform to a specific national cultural heritage. I have proposed that the alternative brudevals, which includes dance elements from popular dance films and music videos, produces a community conception and form of ‘Danishness’ that includes a digitalised global heritage and underlines world citizenship as a significant part of being Danish. Secondly, I have proposed that brudevals danced by same-sex couples produce a kind of ‘Danishness’ that naturalises and celebrates LGBTQIA marriages. Finally, I have proposed that individuals who are considered ethnic ‘outsiders’ can align with a notion of ‘Danishness’ inside a community through affect produced in the brudevals. The brudevals danced by the Danish Crown Prince and Crown Princess enhances the larger assimilation of Crown Princess Mary into Danish culture. But more importantly, the Turkish-Danish brudevals danced by Steen and Süheyla shows that the Danish norm can be negotiated by combining the traditions of two different ethnicities.

In a final remark, I would like to return to the danger of the brudevals being colonised by conservative nationalists, as mentioned in the introduction, and the possible reluctance people might feel towards performing the dance. I am intrigued by recent migration research that questions the so-called ‘national identity argument’, according to which cultural diversity is a threat to the shared (national) values underpinning social cohesion and redistributive justice. Highlighting that there is no consensus among

political theorists about *which* values we need to share to foster social cohesion, research reveals that empirical investigations suggest that ‘liberal citizenship’ and ‘multiculturalist’ values produce more social cohesion in terms of trust and solidarity as opposed to conservative or liberal nationalist values (e.g. Breidahl, Holtug and Kongshøj 2018). Considering the brudevals tradition within this theoretical framework, we might conclude that liberal democratic values allow people to dance a ‘first dance’ in whatever way they want and that multiculturalist values represent a substantial opportunity to perform one’s own traditions.

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Notes

- 1 The literal translation of the Danish word 'brudevals' is 'bridal waltz'.
- 2 I would like to thank Birgitte Schepelehn Johansen, Willem Brooke-deBock and my colleagues in the research group Dance in Nordic Spaces, who have all commented on various versions of this articles.
- 3 All quotes from Danish texts have been translated by the author.
- 4 According to recent figures from Statistics Denmark, approximately 10% of the population in Denmark have been defined as immigrants or descendants of recent immigrants, who are people born in Denmark from migrant parents or parents without Danish citizenship. The majority of these citizens are migrants or post migrants from so-called 'non-western countries' (Statistics Denmark 2020).
- 5 While Carina and Maibritt did not change roles as leader and follower, their dance hold was 'queered', possibly unintentionally, as the groom unconventionally placed the left arm around the bride's waist, whereas the bride placed her right hand on the groom's shoulder.
- 6 According to recent statistics, there are approximately 30,000 people from Turkish backgrounds in Denmark, including immigrants and descendants (Statistics Denmark 2020).

BIOGRAPHY

Associate professor, PhD, **Inger V. Damsholt** is Head of Studies at the Department of Arts and Cultural Studies at the University of Copenhagen. From 2002–2006, she was *Chairman of the Nordic Forum for Dance Research*, and as an extension of this work, she contributed to the establishment of the Nordic MA in Dance Studies programme as well as the research group Dance in Nordic Spaces. Her publications on traditional

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