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Published in:
Transforming Identities in Contemporary Europe

DOI:
[10.4324/9781003245155-2](https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003245155-2)

Publication date:
2023

Document Version
Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Citation for published version (APA):
Lapiņa, L. (2023). “Welcome to the most privileged, most xenophobic country in the world”. Affective figurations of white Danishness in the making of a Danish citizen. In *Transforming Identities in Contemporary Europe: Critical Essays on Knowledge, Inequality and Belonging* (pp. 16-32). Routledge.
<https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003245155-2>

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2 “Welcome to the most privileged, most xenophobic country in the world”. Affective figurations of white Danishness in the making of a Danish citizen

Linda Lapiņa

Introduction

Naturalization might appear to be the ultimate claim to Danishness – a migrant born outside Denmark can make. This chapter discusses the affective figurations of Danishness that emerge in white Danes’ born with citizenship reactions to my becoming a Danish citizen. I trace the affective, embodied labour of white Danishness, showing how it emerges as a self-contradictory achievement and practice.

I was struck by the affective ambivalence that came to the fore when I spoke about my citizenship application with white Danes. While migrants often simply congratulated me, Danes would display mixed feelings, including shame and resentment. Using memory work and autoethnography, I analyse material from two temporal moments: a conversation in the summer of 2016 briefly after my citizenship application, and three reactions following my procurement of a Danish passport in the beginning of 2019.

The conversation in July 2016 happened at a lunch table at a Danish university. I was a PhD student at the time, attending a seminar. Jens, a male Danish professor, my senior in years and in academic accomplishment, expressed disbelief and even outrage hearing about my citizenship application. Jens is a central figure in my analysis because he embodies a Danishness framed in opposition to the Danish state, Danish citizenship and mainstream channels of political participation. It is interesting to explore whether Jens’ adamant opposition to nationalism and essentialism might contribute to reproducing patterns of privilege and Danish exceptionalism that he speaks out against. This dynamic resonates with a recent study that analyses how homonationalist discourses articulate Danishness as liberal-mindedness, in opposition to conservative views of culture, religion, citizenship and political action (Hansen, 2021). Furthermore, while the central role of the interaction with Jens in my analysis poses ethical dilemmas related to consent and anonymity that I address below, it enables me to point to paradoxes and affective ambivalence of self-critical Danishness as an

aspiration that shapes knowledge-production – also in this chapter. Instead of approaching Jens’ expressions as individual viewpoints, I am interested in how they delineate ways of thinking and relating in predominantly white and Danish academia that, while seeking to be critical of whiteness and Danishness, also reproduces it.

I discuss how Jens’ questioning of my motives and my need and/or desire for citizenship enact and distribute the labour of Danishness. The interaction assigns the responsibility for reproducing Danishness, the Danish state and the violences it commits, to aspiring citizens *like* me. At the same time, the agency of certain others remains unaddressed, whether this be Jens and white Danes born with citizenship *like* him; “deserving”, legitimate citizenship applicants to the extent that these might exist; or people in situations where citizenship remains outside their horizon of possibilities. Drawing on Sara Ahmed’s (2010) conceptualization of happy objects and Lauren Berlant’s work on cruel optimism (2011), I examine how Jens’ framing of my application as unjustified, simultaneously (excessively) Danish and unDanish, enacts a composite Danishness: taken for granted while containing its own negation.

The second part of the analysis visits brief encounters in the beginning of 2019: two exemplary text messages and one face-to-face interaction. The white Danish-born friends of various ages and genders partaking in these encounters congratulate me, while also expressing (self-)irony, discomfort, guilt and unease of Danishness. I draw on Ursula Le Guin’s story “Those who walk away from Omelas” (1973), exploring how Danishness emerges like a luxurious robe adorned with blood diamonds, protective and ill-fitting at the same time.

Danish citizenship as accumulated labour

Danish citizenship, known as “*indfødsret*” or Danish birthright, is awarded by law. The Danish parliament votes on a list of names of candidates whose citizenship applications comply with current requirements. I applied for Danish citizenship in the summer of 2016 and had my name incorporated in the legal proposition in December 2018. At the Borgerservice (“citizen service”) where I applied for a Danish passport, I heard that the two and a half years it took to process my application was exceptionally fast.

During my years in Denmark, the demands for obtaining citizenship have continuously tightened, reflecting the general tendency towards increasingly restrictive immigration and integration policies since the early 2000s. For instance, the introduction of citizenship ceremonies involving an obligatory handshake was marked as the 100th restriction of policies concerning immigration during the reign of the then Minister of Integration Inger Støjberg, who occupied this post from 2015 to 2019.

One might conceive of the citizenship process as a staircase with steps marked by the fulfilment of certain requirements, such as passing language

and citizenship tests and signing a pledge of loyalty to Denmark. However, I argue that it would be more adequate to conceive the citizenship process as accumulated labour. For instance, in order to pass the required language test, Danskprøve 3, most applicants will have to attend Danish classes. These were once for free; then, for a period, cost 2,000 DKK per module (around 270 euros); and at the time of writing (August 2022) are for free again for newly arrived foreigners on the condition of a 2,000 DKK deposit and within a period of up to five years after arriving in Denmark. Requirements for obtaining a permanent residence permit, which is a precondition for citizenship, include full-time employment for three and a half years within the past four years, living in Denmark for at least eight years, and no debts to the state.

These prerequisites show that applying for citizenship (at a cost of 4,000 DKK or 537 EUR processing fee-numbers from August 2022) is a highly selective process. Fulfilling these demands requires certain privileges while simultaneously moulding the applicant's conduct. For instance, employment and residence requirements presuppose access to labour market and housing that have racialized, classed and gendered reverberations. Danish proficiency, apart from requiring investment of private funds since 2018, will often be easier to achieve for applicants with an Indo-European mother tongue and/or educational proficiency, not suffering from PTSD after traumatic experiences prior to coming to Denmark and years spent in the Danish asylum system.

I have lived in Denmark since 2004, holding a permanent residence permit since 2014. Moving to Denmark just after the European Union's Eastward expansion in 2004, I became a too-young, sexualized Eastern European female love migrant of limited social value (Lapiņa, 2018, 2020b). However, even in 2004, I was a white migrant who could conditionally pass as Danish, in contrast to everyday experiences of many people of colour born in Denmark (Andreassen & Ahmed-Andresen, 2014). This positional-ity matters in the encounters with white Danes that I analyse in this chapter.

Affective figurations of white Danishness

Using autoethnography and memory work to trace how affects outline the contours of white Danishness, I aim to partake a phenomenology of the political, of borders and boundaries as they materialize in everyday life, on the body (De Genova, 2014), out of the tissue of affectively embroidered histories (Berlant, 2011). I follow the cuts, wounds and violence that constitute and flow in routine spaces of life (Povinelli et al., 2017). In the encounters that I analyse, borders and belonging are negotiated and contested through framing of Danish citizenship and Danishness as ambivalent, simultaneously desirable and unworthy goals. Instead of exploring how these bordering encounters delineate migrants' bodies, I explore how white, majoritized Danishness is enacted as a background and a normative

aspiration. Danishness becomes articulated and felt through negotiations of proximity and distance (Fortier, 2010) when my interlocutors locate themselves vis-à-vis an aspiring citizen.

While this chapter draws on and contributes to emerging studies of Nordic whiteness (Ahlstedt, 2015; Garner, 2014; Lundström & Teitelbaum, 2017; Myong & Bissenbakker, 2016; Nebeling & Bissenbakker, 2019; Svendsen, 2015), it differs from existing scholarship in its primary focus on white Danishness, rather than Danish whiteness. When white Danes react to my citizenship application, our shared yet differentiated whiteness (Lapiņa & Vertelytė, 2020) enables Danishness to come to the fore, since it comprises the most significant (fluid) marker of difference between me and my interlocutors. Being a white migrant, fluent in Danish, educated and employed in Denmark, and occasionally passing as Danish (Lapiņa, 2018), citizenship can be considered the final threshold in approximating Danishness.

Race and racism cannot be disentangled from European nation-building and national identities (Cretton, 2018; Lentin, 2008; Loftsdóttir & Jensen, 2012). Loftsdóttir (2013, p. 295) argues: “Within the European context, ‘whiteness’ has to be theorized as emerging from particular histories and realities, being entangled with other identifications such as national identity”. On the one hand, Danishness and whiteness are enmeshed and interwoven (Andreassen & Ahmed-Andresen, 2014). At the same time, “white identities in the Nordic countries, like those elsewhere, contain internal hierarchies and contingencies” (Lundström & Teitelbaum, 2017, p. 151). This chapter enriches existing studies by exploring how white, majoritized Danishness emerges through enactments of proximity and distance (Ahmed, 2004; Fortier, 2010), circulations of desire, guilt, irony and resentment.

In analysing these feelings, the chapter draws on scholarship on affect that views politics as a field of attachments (Ahmed, 2004, 2010; Berlant, 2011; Fortier, 2010). I examine the role of affect in production of regimes of inclusion and exclusion (Gregorio & Merolli, 2016), where ordinary affects function as the glue between bodies and discursive regimes (Schaefer, 2013). I evoke the notion “affective figurations” to refer to how Danishness emerges through the cuts and alignments and degrees of proximity and distance enacted in my empirical material. Affective figurations show how emotions are involved in the surfacing of Danishness as they circulate between bodies and signs (Ahmed, 2004). I approach white Danes’ reactions to my shifting positions in the process of becoming a citizen as sites of condensation and saturation for how Danishness is imagined, grasped and enacted.

I use the notions of happy objects (Ahmed, 2010) and cruel optimism (Berlant, 2011) to examine how, in my first vignette, citizenship emerges as a promise and an investment in Danishness, an attachment that keeps ticking, reproducing a collective body of Danishness. In this encounter, my desire for citizenship is problematized, while my interlocutor’s taken-for-granted Danishness emerges as a structuring absence (Mayer, 2005): an unmarked

location from which there is nothing to be desired and consequently, no complicity. In the second part of my analysis, I draw on a short story by Ursula Le Guin (1973) to capture how Danishness emerges as ambivalent, uncomfortable position whose privileges depend on the suffering of excluded others.

Methodological standpoint

Autobiographical styles of writing, including autoethnography and memory work, enable tapping into more intuitive ways of knowing affect in its plurality and complexity (Berlant et al., 2017, p. 15; Militz et al., 2020). Consequently, autoethnography offers a unique vantage point for investigating how systems of forces circulating within and in-between bodies interface with histories, and how discourses, such as those on Danishness, “form ligatures with pulsing flesh-and-blood creatures” (Schaefer, 2013, p. 2). This chapter draws on and contributes to the growing body of scholarship that addresses racialization, whiteness and national identities in the Nordic setting using memory work (Andreassen & Myong, 2017; Berg, 2008a; Kennedy-Macfoy & Nielsen, 2012) and autoethnography (Ahlstedt, 2015; Koobak & Thapar-Björkert, 2012; Lapiņa, 2018; Lapiņa & Vertelytė, 2020; Liinason, 2018; Mainsah & Prøitz, 2015). Both methods involve taking point of departure in the lived experiences of the researcher, using them to tap into cultural and sociopolitical processes (Berg, 2008b; Ellis, 2004; Ellis & Bochner, 1996), underlining the direct links between everyday lives, social and historical formations (Chávez, 2012).

This article combines memory work and autoethnography to tap into moments of affective saturation (Militz & Schurr, 2016) that occurred during my becoming a Danish citizen. The first vignette emerges from memory work. In 2019, as the intention to write about my citizenship process crystallized, I started writing down my memories of situations where my application had been a topic of conversation with white native Danes (Haug, 2008). The encounter with Jens quickly emerged as a key episode. On the other hand, the reactions from friends, elaborated in the second part of the analysis, occurred in early 2019 when I already had the intention to write about my process of becoming a citizen. Thus, they comprise examples of autoethnography, rather than memory work.

This work highlights ethical dilemmas that can arise in working with autoethnography and memory work, methods where everyday experiences become empirical material for research. At the time of these encounters, I did not present myself to my interlocutors as a researcher. They were thus unaware that their statements, occurring in informal settings, might become part of research. This is particularly problematic regarding the conversation with Jens that forms a key part of my analysis. Jens' location in Danish academia, which is important for the analysis, makes it harder to fully anonymise him, although I have altered the details of our

encounter. Moreover, my analysis of the encounter can read as a critique of a Danishness that Jens performs. However, I emphasize the relationality of our encounter – how the affective figurations of Danishness enacted in our conversation are bound to my privileged position and shaped by my striving and labour. Finally, I pose that the affective ambivalence emerging in conversation with Jens illuminates important constraints in knowledge production, implicating myself as a member of an academic community that, seeking to dismantle and critically interrogate Danishness and whiteness, also comes to perpetuate it. This is why it is important for me to unpack the affects of this encounter – because I believe that they point to possible blind angles in research on Danishness and whiteness from locations privileged by these same structures.

Autoethnography and memory work enable accessing situated knowledge (Haraway, 1988) of my migrant experience on the path to becoming a citizen. The empirical material documents shifting boundary positions with respect to Danishness (Lapiņa, 2018). My location changes in the almost three years that pass between the encounters: from someone who has just applied for citizenship and whose striving can be questioned as it happens in the conversation with Jens in 2016, I become a carrier of Danish passport – in some ways, *like* and *aligned with* my interlocutors. This shift enables tracing changing affective figurations of proximity and distance, complicity, guilt and privileges of citizenship.

I do not claim that my analysis gets to the essence of Danishness, or that such an essence exists. The boundaries drawn in the encounters I analyse are not sharp-cut, but rather shifting and complex. This fluidity enables me to examine the changing intersectional relationality of differentiated whiteness, disrupting notions of Danishness as an either-or category (Lapiņa, 2018). At the same time, my informants channel collective affects and articulations, which resonate with recent research on enactments of progressive, liberal-minded Danishness and Danish whiteness (Hansen, 2021; Lapiņa, 2020a). This underlines how autoethnography and memory work, taking point of departure in specific everyday encounters, enable tapping into larger sociopolitical processes, discourses and structures of feeling (Hinton, 2014; Kirby, 1993).

A guilty club? Affective limbos of white Danishness

In this section, I trace how Danishness, signified by citizenship and modulated by whiteness, emerges in encounters between white Danes, born with citizenship, and me, a white citizenship applicant. My interlocutors have not had to prove themselves worthy or deserving of Danish citizenship, and thus it might be taken for granted. I examine how Danishness emerges when my interlocutors react to my applying for and receiving citizenship – a labour-intensive, deliberate act that I have chosen to undertake, in contrast to their being born with citizenship.

“Why on earth would you want to be a citizen in Denmark?”

It is July 2016, and I am into my third year of a three-year PhD position, partaking in a seminar at a Danish university. In the canteen during lunch, I end up sitting next to Jens, a white Danish professor.

As part of an informal conversation, I mention to Jens that I have just handed in my citizenship application after passing the citizenship test in June. Timing matters, as I will be spending the fall semester as a visiting research fellow in Canada, and time spent outside Denmark needs to be accounted for when applying.

Jens’ reaction takes me by surprise.

“Why are you applying? Why on earth would you want to be a citizen in Denmark!?”

He does not seem angry, rather provoked and struck by disbelief.

I am surprised, at a loss for words.

I cannot bring myself to tell Jens about my vague hope that having citizenship will make me feel safer, more like I belong, that I will feel that the life I have built for myself in Denmark stands on firmer ground. I do not quite have the words. Besides, these feelings seem illegitimate. Do I really have any justification to feel more precarious without the citizenship? Do I really believe that new legislation will be passed in the future that would negatively affect the livelihood of someone like me: a white EU citizen with a permanent residence permit, fluent in Danish, educated in Denmark and quite employable?

I say that there are multiple reasons. At the moment, Latvia and Denmark allow dual citizenship, which might change in the future. And as a citizen, I will be able to vote in Danish elections.

Jens winces as if developing a toothache. He starts speaking about voting being a parody of democracy and political engagement. He talks about the nation state’s hold on its citizens; about how awful Denmark is, about Danish colonialism. He seems to imply that I would be freer, better off, without Danish citizenship.

I am only halfway listening, trying to come up with what to say to justify myself. I think of the research grants, positions and academic memberships that are only accessible to Danish citizens. I am sure Jens would not be able to reject this pragmatic reason. But somehow I feel that bringing up these justifications would not address what is at stake for me.

I try to explain how yes, voting is mostly symbolic, but there are other forms of political participation. I say, I imagine I would feel safer in communicating my research and my opinions in general. I would be less afraid of being disqualified as someone who either does not know what they are talking about or “should just go home” if they do not like how things are done here.

“Nonsense!” Jens exclaims. He says that citizenship has nothing to do with the value of one’s knowledge. He tells me about his time as a guest professor

at an overseas university, and how relevant and valuable his knowledge and research were, despite coming from a Danish context. He mentions other international collaborations, instances when he has co-authored articles on societal processes in other European countries.

Suddenly I feel very tired, even though our conversation has been quite short. I grasp the opportunity to change the topic to my forthcoming research stay in Vancouver.

After the conversation, I wonder whether Jens would have reacted differently talking to someone who, for instance, was not white and/or had arrived in Denmark as an asylum seeker. I am also struck by how Jens presumed that citizenship would not make any practical difference for me.

How does Jens' performance vis-à-vis an aspiring citizen like me (white, Eastern-European, female, junior academic) outline Danishness? From Jens' perspective, it is as if Danish citizenship would make me complicit in (re-)producing Denmark and the violence of the Danish state. I would become more responsible for Denmark's actions. At the same time, Jens finds it naive to believe that as a citizen, I would have more influence on Danish policies or what happens in Denmark. His stance seems to be that through applying for citizenship, I reproduce Denmark as a dangerous dream, a collective fiction (Garner, 2014) that commits violent acts in the world and on its subjects. At the same time, he positions me as someone who is acting on a false promise.

In her book *The Promise of Happiness* (2010), Sara Ahmed develops the notion happy objects, illustrating how specific phenomena become infused with attribution of happiness. Happiness, and, in this case, safety and increased political participation, are believed to materialize as an effect of proximity to the happy object: citizenship. "Buying into" this path to happiness illustrates the circular logic where affective investments into objects are signs of belonging to an affective community: "We align ourselves with others by investing in the same objects as the cause of happiness" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 38). Happiness becomes a shaping force of the subject and its ways of moving in the world. The assemblage of happy objects comprises a perimeter of the "near sphere" of the self. They comprise "our likes, which might even establish what we are like" (Ahmed, 2010, p. 24). Furthermore, the promise of happiness keeps a particular *us* hanging, outstretched – in anticipation of what *will* happen (Ahmed, 2010): a collectively felt future orientation, outlining an affective community of Danishness as an ongoing aspiration.

Ahmed's (2010) conceptualization of happy objects, and the labour of happiness, can be juxtaposed with Lauren Berlant's notion of cruel optimism: a relation that arises "when something you desire is actually an obstacle to your flourishing. It might involve food, or a kind of love; it might be a fantasy of the good life, or a political project" (Berlant, 2011, p. 1). Rather than a singular feeling (Ahmed's happiness), Berlant's optimism denotes a "knotty tethering to objects, scenes, and modes of life that generate so

much overwhelming yet sustaining negation” (Berlant, 2011, p. 52). These attachments can emerge from trauma; but often they find their form through bodily habits produced in attempts to adjust to everyday pressures and situations of precarity. They bind bodies to fantasies of the good life – a fantasy that I find myself unable to articulate confronted by Jens’ questions.

In his critique of investing in citizenship, Jens situates himself as elevated above the affective community of Danishness. I am positioned as someone held hostage by the promises of citizenship- for me, it comprises an attachment that keeps ticking (Berlant, 2011), a space of possibility. In contrast, Jens seems free, exempted from the pull of promises, false hopes and cruel optimism. At the same time, he *is* Danish, moving in the world with the privileges that Danishness (intersecting with whiteness, male gender, professorship, etc.) affords. Thus, Jens occupies a position located simultaneously within and outside Danishness: moving with it in the world, but free from affective attachments and hence, it seems, not reproducing it, able to critique it “from the outside”. I wonder if, in our conversation, Jens is embodying the promise that I fail to articulate: that Danish citizenship, for an aspiring citizen *like* me, might bring the kind of passing and ease of movement in the world that he seems to enact.

In her article “Emptiness and Its Futures”, Dace Dzenovska (2018) analyses the emptying of Latvia, intensified after the EU enlargement in 2004 and the financial crisis of 2008. She explores how people’s decisions to leave or stay in the deindustrialized Latvian countryside are shaped by “developmental logics that arrange particular places in relation to each other within a broader frame of the good life promised by modernity” (Dzenovska, 2018, p. 25). She writes about how people who are leaving are searching for futures of stable employment and security that in many cases are no longer possible, even in Western Europe. By contrast, the people who stay live among ruins of pre-Soviet farmsteads, Soviet-era collective farms and rural homes that are not just signifiers of the past but also embody dystopian futures ingrained in the present (Dzenovska, 2018, p. 19).

While my applying for citizenship comprises a grasping towards stabilizing form (Berlant, 2011), a future that is somewhat different or improved, Jens seems to inhabit a state where there is nothing to achieve and nothing to give up. He is always already located within the good life promised by modernity, Danish landscapes where material markers of centuries of prosperity, stability and monarchy do not strike one as ruins, although he *knows* that they are. He does not have to travel anywhere or become anyone else to situate himself within “a good life” – which he can simultaneously call out as a lie when it materializes as someone else’s pursuit. Instead, going overseas as a visiting professor or collaborating with European researchers, Jens finds what he already has – “the good life” of holding relevant knowledge, of contributing with opinions that matter. This shows how, it can be unDanish to desire citizenship, unDanish to struggle navigating transnational logics of capitalism and modernity.

Perhaps this position of disinvestment is indeed the kind of Danishness that I would most desire to occupy, to be in a place where I can dismiss citizenship as unnecessary. Yet it is not available to me. Due to our whiteness and locations within Danish academia, as PhD student and professor, Jens presumes that the same modes of movement and ways of feeling are available to us. I believe that my privileges, including whiteness, fluency in Danish, and employment at a Danish university, prompt Jens' disbelief in my application for citizenship. He does not see how Danish citizenship might make a *real* difference for someone *like me*. To Jens, I am already Danish (enough), seem to always have been Danish, which is accentuated when he evokes his position as a visiting professor overseas as a parallel to my movements as a migrant in Denmark and abroad. At the same time, my Latvian citizenship is null, void of meanings and complicities. If asked, I doubt that Jens would think that Latvia was a "better" nation state than Denmark; yet it is my applying for Danish citizenship that is problematized as making me complicit in state violence. The Danishness that Jens seems to embody and that I aspire to emerges as simultaneously solid and evasive: a taken-for-granted position which at the same time seems disenchanting and unattached. In contrast, my friends' reactions to my having become citizen outline Danishness as simultaneously privileged and uncomfortable, a burden of *shared* complicity.

Welcome to the club

On a Saturday morning in February 2019, I find a small but quite thick envelope in my postbox. It is white, with my name and address printed in capital letters. I open it to find a Danish passport. It has my name, my personal details and a photo where I smile somewhat awkwardly, my hair dishevelled. I recall how I rushed to the Citizen Service in the nearby municipal library three weeks ago to make it before closing time, almost colliding into another bike when turning around the corner of my housing block. I arrived seven minutes to 4 PM, panting and sweating, waving my slightly crumpled citizenship certificate. The brown, stocky middle-aged male employee who spoke Danish with an accent shrugged his shoulders and kindly waved me past the reception area, pointing to a machine. He barely looked at the citizenship certificate and did not ask for any additional documentation. It turned out that I was in the system. The machine found me eligible for a Danish passport; it asked for my digital identification, took my fingerprints and a photo and accepted my credit card for payment of the 600 DKK (80 EUR) fee for the passport.

I place the passport on my kitchen counter. I feel disoriented.

I take a photo of the passport and send it to a couple of friends. Andreas, a white Danish friend in his early 40s, writes back: "*Welcome to the world's most privileged and xenophobic country*" ("Velkommen til den mest privilegerede, mest ksenofobiske land i verden"). Signe, a white Danish friend

in her late 50s, writes: “*Welcome to the passport club*” (“Velkommen til pasklubben”).

I meet Anne, another white Danish friend in her 30s, a few weeks later, at my self-organized citizenship ceremony. I have asked my guests to bring objects that signify citizenship to them. Anne has brought a soft children’s toy belonging to her one-year-old child, the figure of the frog Kaj from the children’s programme “Kaj og Andrea” (Kaj and Andrea) screened on Danish national television in 1970s, with new episodes in 1999–2007. She speaks about how the toy, given to her child by her parents, signifies being Danish through generations, Danishness and citizenship rights passed on through blood. She reflects on the privileges that her child is born into, as opposed to children whose parents are not Danish citizens.

In these situations, Danishness and Danish citizenship emerge as bound to privilege, interwoven with xenophobia (Andreas), exclusivity that compares to a club membership (Signe), and materializing through intergenerationally anchored everyday acts of ownership and play (Anne). My interlocutors’ thoughts and reactions convey discomfort: there is a link between their, their children’s and now our, benefiting from the advantages of Danishness and the exclusion of others from “the club”.

In the short story “The Ones Who Walk Away from Omelas”, Ursula Le Guin (1973) describes a city where everyone is happy – truly happy. However, their happiness depends on a child being trapped in a tiny, foul broom closet: naked, constrained, covered in sores. Everyone knows that the suffering child in the broom closet is a condition of their happiness:

They know that they, like the child, are not free. They know compassion. It is the existence of the child, and their knowledge of its existence, that makes possible the nobility of their architecture, the poignancy of their music, the profundity of their architecture. It is because of the child that they are so gentle with children.

(Le Guin, 1973)

In Le Guin’s story, none of the inhabitants of the city attempt to overthrow this order of happiness. There is no social transformation. Yet, some leave Omelas, going to places that are even less fathomable than the city of happiness. Even so, they seem to know where they are going.

In the introduction to her book *Economies of Abandonment*, Elizabeth Povinelli (2011) visits the story by Le Guin to illustrate how violent entanglements of disadvantage and privilege fuel late liberalism or neoliberalism; how dispersed, naturalized suffering is part of a shared collective body, such as the welfare state. She observes that “Europe is in the bodies of the colonies as surely as the citizens of Omelas are in the body of the child in the broom closet” (Povinelli, 2011, p. 27). The bodies of suffering, excluded others are *in* the bodies of Danishness, as is apparent when my interlocutors

simultaneously evoke privileges and xenophobia, rights and deprivation, as being integral to Danishness.

In these encounters, majoritized Danishness emerges as a bitter happy object: like a luxurious robe, adorned with blood diamonds, protective and ill-fitting at the same time. On the one hand, our now shared citizenship works to assert “our” likeness and proximity (Ahmed, 2010), situating us within the same “club”. My Danish passport reinforces already-existing alignments through whiteness and other intersecting markers of privilege where “bodies come to be seen as ‘alike’ (...) as an effect of such proximities, where certain ‘things’ are already ‘in place’” (Ahmed, 2007, p. 155). On the other hand, the constitution of this “us” implies complicity in violence, it is itself a result of a series of cascading wounds (Povinelli et al., 2017). When I received the passport and subsequently the text messages from Andreas and Signe, I did feel less free. Something clicked in place, became fixated. I was held *in place*, my likeness and shared proximity (Ahmed, 2007, 2010) enforced via my Danish passport, in a way that also implied a sense of shared burden and discomfort.

Anne’s story about her child’s toy can provide a prism for revisiting how Danishness emerged in Jens’ reaction to my citizenship application. Anne speaks of Danishness, along with the rights and privileges it gives access to, as continuously unfolding, materializing through everyday habits, inherited proximities and orientations (Ahmed, 2007). Danishness resides in the body of the toy, passed on among generations. The seamless transfer and durability contribute to the simultaneous solidity and evasiveness of Danishness. The everyday knowledge of cultural practices, their largely undisrupted history, lend Danishness its circular, self-(re)generating form, in contrast to striving for a good life in superior elsewhere of Western modernity (Dzenovska, 2018) that might shape migrant orientations towards Danishness.

The affective contours of Danishness emerging in these encounters signify an affective limbo of privileged situatedness in structural inequality (Lapiņa, 2020a). Writing about cruel optimism, Berlant (2006, pp. 31–32) explores “how people learn to identify, manage, and maintain the hazy luminosity of their attachment to being *x* and having *x*, given that their attachments were promises and not possessions after all”. In the encounter with Jens, Danishness seems to be a dangerous, luminous promise for *me* as I am applying for citizenship, while being unquestioned *in his possession* and perhaps enabling the critique he presents. In the reactions from Andreas, Signe and Anne, the cruelty resides not in the fact that the possession might turn out to be an empty or unfulfillable promise – but in the wounds and cuts (Povinelli et al., 2017) engendered by its seemingly solid privileges, the exclusions that are part and parcel of the make-up of its affective community (Ahmed, 2010). The promise of Danishness emerges as an anchoring that tears apart the matter it is anchored in. It comprises an affective limbo, fuelled by guilt and discomfort.

Retracing the contours of white Danishness

In this chapter, I trace how the affective contours of Danishness and belonging in Denmark emerge in encounters between me and white Danes in my process of applying for Danish citizenship. For Andreas, Signe and Anne, Danishness seems to feel like a lavish costume made in a sweatshop in an elsewhere that is simultaneously part and parcel of its very constitution, a happiness that presupposes the suffering of others. In contrast, the Danishness articulated in the conversation with Jens emerges as a structuring absence (Mayer, 2005), simultaneously stable and evasive: seemingly able to be disillusioned and disenchanted with itself. It makes me recall the tale “The Emperor’s New Clothes” by H.C. Andersen, a canonized 19th-century Danish author known for his fairy tales, which include “The Little Mermaid” and “The Ugly Duckling”. In the story, the emperor is deceived to believe that he is wearing the most delicate, luxurious gown, while he is in fact walking naked. Everyone pretends to admire the luxurious robe until a child yells: “The emperor is naked!” The Danishness enacted in the conversation with Jens seems able to call out its own nakedness, even as it continues to carry itself as if wearing delicate robes.

The interaction with Jens highlights how my application for citizenship can constitute an (un)Danish act. While it is Danish because it reinforces an affective community where Danishness is a marker of belonging and a happy object (Ahmed, 2010), at the same time it emerges as unDanish to harbour attachments and strive towards Danishness. From this perspective, Danishness can only be owned, not achieved. Jens’ anger at the violent state and me as enacting myself as its extension enacts a Danishness outside complicity. In this case, it is Danish to resent and reject Danishness, while at the same time being located within it.

These paradoxes of affective constitution of Danishness are important to consider, concerning knowledge production on Nordic identities and whiteness, from locations that are, in different ways, *within* Nordicness, whiteness and institutions embedded in these structures, such as universities. They pose questions as to how one’s critiques of these structures and affects might perpetuate them while seeking to dismantle them. In our conversation, Jens’ critique of Danish citizenship paradoxically materializes as a superior Danishness unattainable to me or other (perhaps white and privileged) migrants who actively pursue citizenship. Our whiteness and locations within Danish academia make Jens presume that I am already able to move in ways that, from my position, are moulded by Danishness.

The encounters highlight how Danishness and whiteness, while being differentiated and malleable, can operate as ongoing aspirations, proximities that never *quite* add up. I have always been white: even when I passed as an Eastern European migrant in Denmark, I had the possibility to approximate white Danishness (Lapiņa, 2018). This shows the difficulty of disentangling “the historical and contemporary interconnection between Nordicness and whiteness” (Lundström & Teitelbaum, 2017, p. 156). While

Danishness emerges as distinct from whiteness in the encounters I analyse, it materializes through our racialized and classed, relationally constituted positionalities. I am already aligned with my interlocutors' white Danishness via my whiteness and my abilities to move in Denmark. My having met and befriended them, seeming *like* them, result from years of accumulated labour, involving many of the performance criteria formally evaluated in citizenship applications: education, employment, and Danish language skills. These circumstances enable Jens to presume that citizenship does not matter for me, and Signe to welcome me to the passport club. In many ways, I am *already like them*. And yet, the very labour invested in achieving this proximity sets me apart and can potentially be never-ending, a continuous quest to belong, which, as Jens so aptly points out, reproduces structures I would rather be part of dismantling.

The affective figurations of white Danishness comprise “sites of convergence for the social” (Berlant, 2011). They delineate who can become what kind of Dane, and how Danishness materializes as a marker of an affective community – an exuberant attachment that keeps ticking (Berlant, 2011, p. 23), but that upon its attainment deflates like a balloon, into an affective limbo populated by guilt, ambivalence and awareness of own privileges. Anne’s child’s toy and my new Danish passport are ambivalent, sticky objects. Their stickiness (Ahmed, 2004) resides not only in affective investments in them as happy objects (Ahmed, 2010) but also in the cuts (Povinelli et al., 2017) that they make apparent: the have-nots; the child in the broom closet. It is a stickiness that illustrates an aspiration never quite to be fulfilled and yet clicking in place, comprising an affective limbo.

These affective figurations of Danishness speak to Dzenovska’s (2018) research on emigration from Latvia’s deindustrialized countryside, where people move in search of “historically shaped and at the same time profoundly postsocialist spatial imaginaries (and material realities), which posit ‘the West’ as the measure of past, present, and future and as a desirable location” (Dzenovska, 2018, p. 25). Danishness represents a situatedness within “a good life” where cruelty seems relegated to elsewhere in its effects, while at the same time comprising the backbone of the social body. Moreover, the affective limbo of Danishness, materializing as an absence from striving, as already having arrived, in the conversation with Jens, seems to conflate past, present, and future. White, privileged Danishness presents itself as a location somehow untouched by the rubble of history (Benjamin, 1970) and simultaneously at the heart of its generation – with nowhere to escape from and nowhere to arrive to.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank the editors and the other authors of this volume for their time and valuable comments on earlier drafts of this chapter. I am also deeply grateful to my interlocutors for sharing their thoughts and feelings with me.

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