

Citizenship as *social object* in the aftermath of the Yugoslav break-up

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ABSTRACT. The break-up of Yugoslavia disintegrated the Yugoslav citizenship regime, and new communities of citizens and citizenship regulations were born. Since the identitarian and lived aspects of citizenship are inseparable from its formal and legal aspects, (not) having the ‘right’ personal documents and (not) being recognized as the ‘right’ kind of citizen had profound effects on the lives of many individuals. Relying on the concept of *documentality* and stressing the feature of documents as being constitutive of social reality, this article analyses personal narratives illustrating the lived experience of citizenship transformations after the break-up of Yugoslavia.

KEYWORDS: belonging, citizenship, documentality, lived experience, post-Yugoslav space

Introduction

Citizenship regulates our legal statuses and rights, and with citizenship documents – which usually employ an array of state and/or national symbols – we prove our membership and belonging to a wider community. Furthermore, by enacting the rights and duties of citizenship, it becomes an inextricable element of our everyday experience. It is especially when it is questioned and contested that citizenship plays a significant role in how we perceive ourselves, how we appear to others and how intergroup relations are mediated. This paper analyses several personal narratives that reveal the lived experiences of the complex relationship between citizenship, identity, and belonging in the post-Yugoslav space.

Relying on and aiming to complement the growing scholarship on personhood and subjectivity in relation to state and citizenship policies, especially in the post-Yugoslav states (Jansen 2009, 2015; Hromadžić 2015; Brković 2017; Reeves 2013; Navaro-Yashin 2007), this paper employs a bottom-up approach that treats citizenship in its identity-forming and recognition-bearing social role. At the same time, by retaining a focus on the top-down effects of citizenship as a state’s formal regulator of statuses, rights and obligations of citizens, this paper equally considers and elaborates the documental, institutional aspect of citizenship – in this case, through the social ontological approach of *documentality*

(Ferraris 2013). The framework for analysis therefore combines a social ontological perspective, which sees documents as constitutive of social reality, with an ethnographic approach that stresses the lived and affective dimension of citizenship as social practice. This *narrative-based approach to the documentality* of citizenship is crafted here with the intention to show how the materiality of (citizenship) documents influences and shapes our subjectivities and personhoods, and how we experience and react to processes of material conditioning. Beyond merely merging an ontological and an ethnographic approach, this framework insists on the inseparability of the documental and the affective (as well as the state-regulated and the socially lived) in analysing the social effects of citizenship policies, especially when these effects multiply and become more complex, as is the case when citizenship regimes change. The states of the former Yugoslavia, which underwent such changes, have hence already caught the attention of citizenship scholars (see, e.g., Shaw and Štiks 2013); however, given that the existing scholarship on citizenship in post-Yugoslav states has overwhelmingly been studied from a top-down perspective, the aim of this paper is to offer a complement to existing literature and to stress how the identitarian and lived aspects of citizenship are inseparable from its formal and legal aspects.

The break-up of Yugoslavia led to the disintegration of the two-tier (federal and republican) Yugoslav citizenship regime¹ and in its place the new states' regimes were instituted. This process had an enormous impact on many lives, and, as the existing scholarship points out, some groups were especially vulnerable and disadvantaged in obtaining their statuses and rights, such as Roma and other ethnic minorities, but also groups that were formed as a result of the state break-up and ensuing war, including the so-called 'erased' (*Izbrisani*) in Slovenia or war refugees in Serbia, Croatia or Bosnia (see, e.g., Dedić et al. 2003 and Deželan 2012 on the 'erased' in Slovenia; Đorđević 2013 and Koska 2012 on citizenship and refugees; and Sardelić 2013 on Romani minorities in the post-Yugoslav space). Furthermore, this complex process of citizenship regimes' transformations affected the lives of many others, who experienced various difficulties in regulating their citizenship statuses or found themselves having the 'wrong' citizenship or living in the 'wrong' new state, or who decided to migrate and settle in what they perceived to be their kin-states.

Of course, the former Yugoslavia was not the only region impacted by profound changes to citizenship regimes that had direct effects on large groups of people who either found themselves erased from new citizenship registries or whose statuses and rights were severely diminished. The break-up of the Soviet state, for example, also cleared the way for new state-building strategies in which citizenship proved central to the design of new national polities and was used to exclude and marginalize certain ethnic groups.²

Because citizenship functions as a major state and nation regulative principle, it has overwhelmingly been studied from a top-down perspective, through implemented policies and sustaining political narratives and ideologies. In the post-Yugoslav context, citizenship has been described as a tool with which new

states in the region regulated their respective citizenship bodies: through the processes of citizens' 'inclusion (or invitation) and exclusion' (Štiks 2013), through shaping and designing new ethnic arrangements (Koska 2012; Vasiljević 2012) and through adapting constitutional frameworks to internationally imposed consociational arrangements (Sarajlić 2012; Spaskovska 2012). However, these institutional designs principally aim to manage and control the population and thus have an immediate effect on people's everyday lives. It is precisely this 'lived dimension' of citizenship that I want to focus on, by exploring the narratives of several people whose lives were shaped, in great measure, by changing citizenship regimes and the politics of nationhood and belonging.

What these stories reveal is how the exclusionary mechanisms of citizenship policies cannot be fully explained as an extension of state exclusionary politics. Apart from bearing consequences of the bureaucratization of statuses and rights in service of new nation-state building processes, these exclusions, struggles to obtain and deprivation of citizenship rights take place in a world of highly complex social relations, where citizenship functions as a link not only between an individual and a state but also between different individuals and groups of people who regard each other as co-citizens, strangers, aliens, resident holders, diaspora, co-ethnics and so on. It is on this horizontal plane that the interplay between citizenship and belonging is truly dynamic.

What these stories also help demonstrate is how this social (and subjective) aspect of citizenship is in fact sustained in its very materiality: claims to citizenship can only be satisfied through issuing a material object – a paper, card or certificate that gives one the sense of belonging or a 'seal of legality'. This interlocking of belonging and legality, of one's subjective need to be recognized and have rights met, and the material conditions granting or denying this need, is what makes citizenship a contentious and ambiguous notion. From the perspective of a global constellation of national citizenships, this insight has given rise to the theorization and critique of citizenship as 'the modern equivalent of feudal privilege – an inherited status that greatly enhances one's life chances' (Carens 1995: 230; see also Shachar 2009), and as holding a 'pivotal place in the overall segmentary architecture of the nation-state system' (Brubaker 2015: 21). How citizenship documents render human beings worthy or unworthy of certain rights (and compassion, empathy and solidarity) is becoming ever clearer today as we witness an unprecedented humanitarian crisis, in the midst of which refugees are being classified based on the nationality papers they possess as 'real refugees' or merely 'economic migrants'. All of this urges us to rethink the meaning of the basic right to have rights, in Arendtian terms.

On the level of lived experiences, where 'production of identity documents creates a separation between the legal and physical person' (Kelly 2006), we are seeing an 'affective turn' in ethnographic studies of citizenship policies, with a focus on the relationship between subjectivity, affect and state regulations. Some important research has been done by Madeleine Reeves (2013, 2015), primarily on the lived experiences of migrant workers in Central Asia

who face ‘documentary regimes’ that regulate their legal legibility, simultaneously officially and informally, and leave them vulnerable to deportation. Some recent ethnographies on the former Yugoslavia, most notably concerning Bosnia and Herzegovina, have followed this same path, exploring the personal, intersubjective and affective dimensions of state policies as they are lived in the everyday (Hromadžić 2015; Jansen 2015). Following this trend, and focusing on personal aspects of citizenship transformations that took place in the wake of the Yugoslav break-up, this paper presents several testimonies that depict individual struggles with different citizenship-related problems that arose against the backdrop of one citizenship regime’s decomposition and the institution of new regimes in its stead.

In the following text, I will first discuss citizenship as a complex encounter between legality, materiality, and subjectivity. Then, I will briefly introduce the social ontological concept of *documentality* (Ferraris 2013), which helps to further highlight the complex relationship between documents and the social world, as well as the role personal documents play in shaping our subjectivities and in profoundly integrating legal and personal dimensions of citizenship.

Finally, personal narratives, obtained through interviews I conducted between December 2013 and March 2014 in Sarajevo, Ljubljana and Belgrade are presented.³ In these unstructured interviews, I asked open-ended questions that allowed interviewees to respond freely and in depth about their experiences of citizenship. In choosing interviewees, I was principally concerned with capturing a wide range of citizenship-related predicaments faced by people after the dissolution of Yugoslavia. I was not seeking to gather representative stories of individuals belonging to groups known to have been marginalized and discriminated against in obtaining their citizenship statuses and rights (such as Roma, refugees or *the erased* in Slovenia, some of whom have already had their stories told in the existing literature), but was inclined to seek a variety of individual narratives that might offer further and new insights into the wider social importance of citizenship as a personal experience.

Citizenship between materiality and subjectivity

Whether we think of citizenship through the lens of its two major paradigms – legal (citizenship as rights) and republican (citizenship as political participation) (Pocock 1998) – or through its different national traditions (Brubaker 1992b); or the evolutionary paradigm of citizenship rights (Marshall 1998); or contemporary trends of post-nationalism, cosmopolitanism and deterritorialization (Bauböck 2010; Isin and Turner 2007; Soysal 1998); citizenship always rests on its constitutive elements: political community, membership, conditions of membership and the rights and duties of members. As Wiener (1999: 199) rightly points out, it is above all a relational concept comprised of three component parts: individual, community and the relations between them. To this, we might add another two elements: relations between citizens themselves and

relations between citizens and non-citizens. This reminds us that citizenship (or citizenship rights and duties) is always enacted and lived in a context with other people – interconnecting with other social relations – and also, that it is contained within certain boundaries, usually boundaries of a political community, which may be both external and internal.⁴

The political community in question, whether explicitly mentioned or implicitly understood in various accounts of citizenship, is most often the (nation) state. However, the renewed interest in the theorization of citizenship from the 1990s onward – when the end of the Cold War, the dissolution of socialist countries and the emergence of new entities such as the EU ‘raised anew deep questions about what binds citizens together into a shared political community’ (Beiner 1995: 1–3) – included linking citizenship to various non-state forms of membership, echoing the previous boom of identity politics and the overall cultural turn in politics (Nash 2001; Touraine 2005). Thus, we witnessed a proliferation of compounds, like ecological, sexual, biological and cultural citizenship (Dobson 1995; Richardson 2000; Rosaldo 1994; Rose and Novas 2005). Although I agree with the criticism that citizenship ‘has become less clear ... due in part to conceptual stretching brought on by the proliferation of its use and the multiplication of the perspectives of its users’ (Heisler 2005) and that we have to bear in mind it is primarily a state-related phenomenon (Oommen 1997: 223–229), I appreciate the insight brought about by the ‘cultural’ appropriation of the term, which has urged us to examine with more scrutiny the fact that, besides being a political and legal concept, citizenship is equally a *socially* and *culturally* embedded practice as well. Moreover, these elements are highly interconnected and mutually dependent: rights and formal statuses we hold are immersed in sociocultural contexts and political realities in which we live (as well as the multiple communities we belong to, *within* the state). What I want to underline in this paper is that this is equally true even for the most technical features of citizenship – the ‘papers’ we hold that identify us and enable us to cross borders.

This ‘documental’ aspect of citizenship – identification cards, passports, visas and other authorized ‘proof’ of our identity – has usually been analysed in academic writing with reference to the evolution of state authorities, mechanisms of control and registration of population, state policies, and international policies controlling population movements and migrations, etc. – in other words, from a top-down perspective (Groebner 2007; Torpey 2000).

Torpey’s (2000) important work on the history of the passport is actually the history of how the modern nation-state obtained exclusive monopoly over ‘the legitimate means of movement.’ He underscores two very important and interrelated observations: modern nation-states could not have been institutionalized without obtaining full control over the regulation of people’s movements, and this would not have been possible without the introduction of a complex system of documents. By effectively ‘embracing’ its population, the nation-state posited itself as the only legitimate authority in a position to allow or restrict the movement of individuals (Torpey 2000: 5). Control over the

movement of citizens and non-citizens alike (as well as over the distinction between the two categories) was made possible through documents, primarily passports. This regulation of movement proved to be essential for the formation of modern states; indeed, 'it contributes to constituting the very "state-ness" of states' (Torpey 2000: 6).

Torpey is right to note that 'imagining the nation' would have been a futile social and political process had it not been followed by the processes of codifications and documentations:

[S]tates' monopolization of the right to authorize and regulate movement has been intrinsic to the very construction of states ... [P]rocedures and mechanisms for identifying persons are essential to this process, and ... in order to be implemented in practice, the notion of national communities must be codified in documents rather than merely 'imagined' (Torpey 2000: 6).

He also makes a more general claim about identities and documents, stating that '[t]oo frequently in recent academic writing, identities have been discussed in purely subjective terms, without reference to the ways in which identities are anchored in law and policy ... identities must become codified and institutionalized in order to become socially significant' (Torpey 2000: 13). Perhaps we could also claim, by the same token, that institutionalization and codification of *legal* statuses (identities) and rights should not be discussed in purely *objective* terms, but should take into account the ways in which statuses and rights are anchored in subjective experiences, affects and social contexts.

This turn towards the personal and the affective in studying state and bureaucratic regulations of statuses can be found in some of the ethnographies that explore regions where citizenship and belonging are highly polarizing issues (see Reeves 2013, 2015 on Central Asia, Kelly 2006 on Israel and Palestine, Navaro-Yashin 2012 on Cyprus). One of the pioneering works in this field, concerning the region of the former Yugoslavia, is Stef Jansen's paper (2009) on the 'geopolitics of entrapment,' analysing regulations of cross-border mobility as experienced by citizens of Bosnia and Herzegovina and Serbia before the introduction of visa liberalization. Building on the idea of documents becoming part of and shaping individuals' subjectivities and affects, and looking at 'interactions between documents and persons' (Navaro-Yashin 2007: 80), Jansen addresses issues of mobility, state sovereignty and control of citizens' mobility from the perspective of the affected individuals, taking an ethnographic approach and asking how these documents are becoming part of persons and how persons are 'coming into being in particular ways through them [documents]' (Jansen 2009: 816). For instance, he shows how the collective experience of visa queues in front of EU embassies – of 'embodied togetherness through humiliation' (Jansen 2009: 818) – coupled with 'everyday engagements with geopolitical hierarchies' (Jansen 2009: 817) (living in countries aspiring for EU accession) form social relations that produce 'entrapped subjects'.

Ethnographies like this one complement the notion of citizenship, too often regarded solely as legally and politically regulative, with a subjective dimension, reminding us that policies and laws are always conditioned by and experienced through social relations. On the other hand, social relations and social institutions are at the same time preconditioned on documents (including citizenship documents), thus showing us how sociality and *documentality* are in fact inseparable.

Citizenship as *social object*

Here, I want to further reflect on citizenship through Maurizio Ferraris' (2013) work on documentality and his theory of social objects. Social objects are, according to Ferraris, made of *inscriptions*, be it on paper, on a computer or only in our heads – in a way that they are all *documented* or defined as *being documentable*. They inhabit the social world – in fact, they are so constitutive of the social world that Ferraris calls this theory of the social world *documentality*.

The ontology of social objects is made up of traces, registrations, and documents, and it manifests itself in those bits of paper or plastic that we hold onto more carefully in our wallets, and then in the mass of registrations that fill up computers, archives, cell phones, and banks (Ferraris 2013: 1).

Following from this, Ferraris equates social objects with inscribed acts, to imply that social objects (those traces, documents written on a paper or a piece of plastic) are in fact *social acts*, in the sense that they take at least two persons to exist and that they are characterized by being written (or registered) on a medium. These inscriptions constitute 'the conditions for the possibility of social objects' (Ferraris 2013: 4).

In other words, although social objects are not tangible like natural ones – because they are actually social relations – the condition for their existence is that they are registered and documented. Their documentality precedes their ideational form and conditions their very existence. Ferraris then gives examples of social objects: marriage, divorce, adoption, a prison sentence, money etc. We are accustomed to think of them as belonging to social and ideational worlds exclusively, but Ferraris argues that they would be unimaginable without being registered, confirmed on documents, archived – and I would add, even based on certain rules and regulations that would also be non-existent if not written down and documented. Though not mentioned as an example by Ferraris, there is no doubt that citizenship is one such social object, that certain acts are inscribed in it and that it owes its existence and its power to documents proving it, explaining its scope, or denying it.

Ferraris insists that without documents – without registration of some kind – there would be no society at all. Society is founded on social institutions and all of them are social objects, conditioned on being registered; and that is why documents, which register social institutions and *allow them to be*, are so

central for the lives of persons and their interpersonal relations. The social world is, therefore, comprised of objects that exist only because we believe they do, and our belief is grounded in the existence of documents which purport and vouch for the existence and meaning of social objects. That goes for all social institutions and roles, and I find it definitely applicable to citizenship as well.

Ferraris claims that the view that ‘inscriptions are decisive in the construction of social reality’ (Ferraris 2013: 121) is tantamount to ‘weak textualism,’ as he calls his revision of Derrida’s famous idea; namely, he asserts that ‘there is nothing *social* outside the text’ – thus implying that inscriptions are not constitutive of *all* reality, but that they do set conditions for our *social* reality. In other words, there is no social outside documents. Our social roles, relations and identities are dependent on inscriptions; the way we ‘officially’ belong to a group, exercise our rights, feel accepted and feel part of a larger society – all the indispensable elements of citizenship – depend on our documents claiming and validating these elements.⁵ That is why Valentin Groebner (2007) is right to argue that ‘identity papers constitute our personal history; cartes d’identité are who we are’ (Groebner 2007: 7–8); without them, we feel we have lost our identity and are denied recognition.

The following personal narratives, focused on citizenship (documents) as an important factor for our social positioning and feelings of acceptance (by others and by the state), confirm the inextricably social nature of documents, but also bring forth some additional insights. First, how profoundly constitutive of social relations documents really are is revealed to us only when our position within a citizenship regime(s) becomes ambiguous; in a ‘normal state of affairs’, our legal statuses and our sense of belonging seem to be in accord, rendering the tie between citizenship and subjectivity almost invisible. It is only when our personal/emotional/practical sense of membership fails to acquire legal acknowledgement, and the statuses and rights attached to it, that we become aware of the true social dimension of citizenship. Additionally, these stories testify not only to the documental aspect of our sociality but also to the ways in which emotions, personal needs and already established social relations equally constitute citizenship, either by finding fulfilment (and legal legitimization) in it or by creating spaces of struggle for documental recognition and eventual inclusion into a community of equal citizens.

Personal narratives of citizenship and belonging after Yugoslavia

As Idro Seferi, a young journalist from Kosovo now living in Belgrade, wrote for Al Jazeera: ‘It is always better to have two passports – you can never know who will hate whom and which ruler with what right will block people and set him(her)self as the owner of their destinies.’⁶ The article, based on his personal life story, depicts, among other things, the troubles his parents had to go through to obtain a German visa in order to visit their son living in Germany. Stories like this one are everywhere to be found, and not only in

the post-Yugoslav space; stories about frustration, disbelief and a feeling of deprivation because we lack documents that render us human. We are limited and bounded by the ways others identify us, either through the pieces of paper we carry as a 'paper doppelgänger, descriptions of what we also are' (Groebner 2007: 8), or by perceiving and establishing some of our features, like language or place of origin, as the ultimate designator of our belonging. What follows is a collection of excerpts from various life stories that could be taken as testimony of how citizenship sometimes sets the conditions for our social relations and how its identitarian and belonging aspects – inseparable from the notion itself – define who we are socially.

1. Perceptions of kin societies: moving to states to which we 'belong'

Amra⁷ has a very peculiar life story. She is of Bosniak origin – her parents are originally from Sandžak – but was born and raised in Kosovo. She married a Kosovo Albanian and they lived, together with their two sons, in North Kosovo. Their life was very ordinary until the war in Kosovo began, and then they suddenly found themselves in an unfavourable position. They lived in the Serb dominated part of their city, while Amra's family lived in the southern (Albanian dominated) part. They had an Albanian family name, and her husband and sons had Albanian first names, but she and her sons spoke only Serbian, and it was the only language spoken in the family. She was a teacher in a school where the majority of students were Serbs, and her sons went to a similar school; they lived and worked among Serbs, but were considered Albanian because of their family name. Yet they could not move to the southern, Albanian dominated area of the city because they spoke only Serbian. Things went from bad to worse when Amra's oldest son began his studies in Serbia (in a town outside of Kosovo) and, during his first year, which coincided with the start of the war in Kosovo, experienced humiliation and bullying because he was a Kosovo Albanian. Threats were coming from all sides and, finding their position intolerable – as a Bosniak-Albanian family from Kosovo who spoke only Serbian – they decided to move to another country. They chose Sarajevo because Amra had some family members there, which made it feel like the closest place to home where a majority of Bosniaks lived and where they shared a spoken language (Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, or BCS).

Amra's family arrived with documents of the Republic of Serbia; the only documents she still possesses.⁸ They registered as refugees – they came shortly after the 1999 bombing – and even got permission from the UN to seek asylum in a third country based on their mixed marriage. 'An absurd thing in the first place,' Amra told me. 'We never before thought of ourselves as being a mixed couple: we were born in the same town, he mainly spoke Serbian in his household, I spoke Serbian; [and] Serbs in Kosovo saw both of us as Muslims, so we were the same to them as well ...' The family declined the offer due to Amra's husband's ill health, which further deteriorated soon afterward. Almost a year after their move to Sarajevo, Amra found herself alone with her sons, as

refugees. They could not maintain refugee status for long, and after a couple of years had to apply for temporary residence in Bosnia and Herzegovina.

Now, well over a decade since Amra's family came to Sarajevo, she says they do not feel integrated or accepted, especially her. The barriers were many, especially because they came from Kosovo. As she explained to me, 'People here do not like us very much; they think we are intruders, that we do not really belong.' The greatest irony is that the single most significant obstacle to their integration and acceptance has again been language. Namely, they speak the *ekavica*⁹ variant of BCS and most people in Sarajevo 'recognize' their accent as coming from Belgrade! This has cemented Amra's feeling of being cut-off from all the communities to which she was supposed to belong: she is a Bosniak from Kosovo, which does not go down well with the Serb community in her birth town; she speaks only Serbian, and thus her life in Kosovo is impossible; but on top of that, she speaks *ekavica*, by which she is identified with Serbs from Serbia, which is not conducive to integration in post-war Sarajevo.

Amra's sons received Bosnian citizenship after nine years of living and studying in Sarajevo. She was denied citizenship because she could not prove she could support herself financially; in other words, because she could not find a job. She is a teacher with good qualifications, but as she explained, employers have never wanted to hire for the many open positions for teachers because of her dialect and accent. Her only citizenship document remains her Serbian passport, and yet it cannot secure her visa-free travel, because her official residence is in Kosovo.¹⁰ And though Amra received her passport via Belgrade, she has been having difficulties obtaining ID from her birth town because, she claims, Serbian authorities there are preventing Albanians (in her case, this designation might well be placed within inverted commas) from registering and receiving official documents. In her case, she says Belgrade authorities even intervened, but in vain. For that reason, she rarely travels to her hometown, despite the fact that she owns a property there and her mother still lives in the old family house.

2. Kafkaesque situations

Artan is an Albanian from Pristina, who came to Sarajevo in 2001 to finish his studies and pursue his artistic career. His decision to move came after an unexpected offer to continue his professional development at the University of Sarajevo. The main obstacle to his full integration into Bosnian society was his poor knowledge of the language; he belongs to the younger generation of Kosovars who were schooled in parallel school systems – Serbs went to official schools and learned in Serbian, and Albanian pupils studied in their own schools in Albanian. But, apart from that, living in Sarajevo, surrounded by 'artistic and cosmopolitan' friends due to his profession, he has never felt isolated or marked because of his origin. Furthermore, he sees Sarajevo as 'a part of this shared region, a part of the same story.'

But official citizenship policies do not reflect Artan's vision. Aware that Bosnia and Herzegovina does not recognize Kosovo as a sovereign state, and thus recognizes none of Kosovo's documents, I asked him about his status in Sarajevo and the personal documents with which he travels and lives. The tale of his pursuit of Bosnian citizenship includes many Kafkaesque details.

When Artan first arrived in Sarajevo, he did it with then-valid documents for Kosovars, administered by the United Nations Interim Administration Mission in Kosovo (UNMIK).¹¹ With those documents, he studied, declared temporary residence, travelled back home and was finally even employed shortly after graduation. But when Kosovo declared independence, UNMIK documents were no longer valid, and Artan quickly obtained his Kosovo passport. But Bosnia's lack of recognition of Kosovo (and thus his documents) put him in a problematic position, leaving him with none of the documents needed to prolong his working visa, or to travel from Sarajevo and back. He decided to get a Serbian passport: as a Kosovo citizen, he was entitled to it, and the bonus was that it would be a valid, recognized document in Bosnia proper. What's more, he decided to declare his address in Belgrade, not Pristina, so he could obtain a visa-free passport – something of great importance to him, as he has to travel frequently in Europe due to his profession.¹² The process went smoothly: he declared his residence in Belgrade, got Serbian citizenship and regulated his position in Sarajevo.

But the real problems started when he decided to apply for Bosnian citizenship. At that time, he had already been living in Sarajevo for several years, had finished his studies there, was employed, and lived with his Sarajevo partner. The first two times he applied as 'a person of cultural importance for the country' and got rejected. The third time, he had fulfilled all the formal conditions of having lived there long enough with properly prolonged working visas and residence permits. Another of the conditions he had to fulfil – a typical one in the citizenship application process – was to procure official confirmation that he had not been convicted of any crimes and that he was not subject to any criminal charges. He obtained this confirmation from the Ministry of Interior in Belgrade, the place of his Serbian residence. But the policy in Bosnia stipulated that the confirmation had to be issued from the place designated as the applicant's birth town in his valid Bosnian working visa – in Artan's case, Pristina. That put Artan in an almost impossible situation: he could have gone to Pristina and asked for the confirmation, but it would have been issued as an official document of Kosovo, which Bosnian authorities would not recognise. He turned to the Serbian authorities, who directed him to Niš – a town where Pristina residents' documents were held after 1999. But the Home Office in Niš told him they were unable to issue him this confirmation since the Serbian police had no presence or influence on Kosovo territory (as of implementation of the Kumanovo agreement, which concluded the Kosovo war in 1999) and, therefore, could not make any guarantees for Kosovo residents. In the end, the only document Artan could obtain from Serbia was the confirmation from Belgrade that he had never been convicted and that he was not under any

criminal investigation. To that was later added – after Artan explained his predicament to officials in Serbia – the statement that this document should be considered as valid for the whole territory of the Republic of Serbia.

Having exhausted all possibilities and having taken the only action possible in the situation, Artan returned to Sarajevo only to discover that his documents would still not suffice, and that, as the regulations clearly stated, confirmation from his birth town was needed. His dire situation was ultimately resolved in the way so many unsolvable situations end when bureaucratic requirements hit the wall (and if the applicant is lucky) – his case was pushed forward by the discretionary power of an administrator.

Artan now has both Bosnian and Serbian passports. He is thankful that he can travel often to Kosovo because his family is unable to visit him, since they possess only documents of a state Bosnia does not recognize. Policies and administration have turned Kosovo and Bosnia into two separate worlds, functioning on seemingly incommensurable principles. But this runs contrary to plain geography and, more importantly, mobility and the ties people maintain. Artan concludes his story, saying: ‘I feel like a citizen of Bosnia, meaning I want to participate in its social life, want to contribute to a better life here. But I also want to do that in Kosovo. I live in Bosnia, but I feel as though I belong to both societies. These are all small worlds, even small markets if you want to think of it in that way; we have to think bigger than our small states we live in.’

3. The arbitrariness of belonging: between personal and official imaginaries of citizenship

Marija is 88 years old and has been living in Belgrade ever since the Second World War ended, but for the past couple of years has been struggling – with no results – to obtain Croatian citizenship. She told me her story with great emotion. Marija was born in a small village near the famous national park, *Plitvička jezera* (Plitvice Lakes), in what was then the Kingdom of Yugoslavia and what is now the Republic of Croatia. All her family members were Serbs from Croatia. When she was 15 years old and the war had just begun, she witnessed Ustasha¹³ soldiers murder her mother and siblings; she managed to escape and soon afterward joined the Partisan movement. As a young communist cadre, she was sent immediately after the war to Belgrade, where she married and continued her life. Still, she regularly visited her birthplace – the site of her family house and family land – up until the start of the wars of the 1990s. When the war in Croatia ended (in 1995), Marija decided to check her status in the now independent Croatia, to secure her family possessions and property, and sell them or give them as inheritance to her children and grandchildren. But she was very unpleasantly surprised when her citizenship request was denied. She kept on insisting on her right to Croatian citizenship and regularly visited the Croatian embassy in Belgrade; but the answer was always negative.

According to current laws on citizenship in Croatia, applicants' claims for citizenship based on previously existing ties with Croatia must be substantiated with a document proving that the applicant had indeed been considered a Croatian citizen at any time in the past. Usually, confirmations from the birth registry or citizenship registry are required. The problem for Marija is that such registries for the Republic of Croatia did not exist before the Second World War, that is, during the period of a unitary Yugoslav Kingdom, when there was no Republic of Croatia. Current Croatian laws do not recognize previously existing ties with the *territory* of Croatia as a legitimate basis for granting someone Croatian citizenship. Because Marija moved to Belgrade and lived there from the establishment of the new Socialist Yugoslavia after WWII, she was registered in the Serbian citizenship registry and had only Serbian republican citizenship.

However, this is very hard to explain to Marija, who, due to her old age and emotional attachment to the place of her childhood and family origin, cannot fully grasp any argument denying her what she understands to be her inalienable right. 'There I have a house, I have land, what can I do with it as a foreigner? I was born there, suffered there immensely, and the only right thing would be to let me have that place again and offer it to my grandchildren as a piece of my memory and life.'

Her story, which is essentially a story of conflicting views between the personal and state-legal definition of a 'genuine link' between an individual and a state, could be compared with another story, which took a completely different turn but shares the same theme of having/losing/finding this genuine link (again with the Republic of Croatia).

Ana is from Belgrade but has been living in the UK for the past ten years, where she arrived with a Serbian passport. Ana has a very complicated relationship with Serbia, where certain political and personal feuds almost led to her losing her citizenship. The details of her story are not significant in this context; what is important is that she was unable to renew her Serbian passport (due to an ongoing judicial dispute in a Serbian court), which left her in the UK without a valid passport, the right to travel, or proof of nationality, and thus with no right to find a job or secure other basic rights. In desperation, Ana turned to an option which did not look promising at first, but was worth trying: she remembered that while she was still living in Belgrade and preparing to get married, she actually held Croatian republican citizenship, even though she had been born and had lived all her life, together with her family, in Belgrade.¹⁴ The reason for this was a practice from the 1960s and early 1970s of registering newborn babies in the republican citizenship registers of their fathers. Ana's father was indeed born in Croatia and had Croatian republican citizenship, which she was given upon her birth. Ana was advised that finding solid proof that she once held Croatian republican citizenship could secure her case. She first contacted the Croatian municipality her father was from, but they told her that all the documents from their register had been destroyed during the 1991–1995 war in Croatia.

Ana then applied for Croatian citizenship with her marriage documents from Serbia, which stated that she had previously held Croatian republican citizenship. The Croatian Ministry of the Interior needed to know on what basis the authorities of the Republic of Serbia had considered her a Croatian citizen. Unfortunately, the document she was married with – the only one she ever had proving she was registered in a municipality in Croatia – was, to her misfortune, quite problematic. Namely, it was issued during the war in Croatia, when the municipality her father was from, and where she was registered upon her birth, was under the control of Serb rebel forces and their quasi-state, the Republic of Serbian Krajina. Her citizenship certificate was an official document of that short-lived entity, unrecognized by Croatia, and as such would be completely useless, even counterproductive for her case. The lawyers told her she only had one option left. The Yugoslav practice of registering children with their fathers' citizenship had depended, if the family lived in a republic other than the one of the father's citizenship, on the family choosing which citizenship to confer on their child; and sometimes, the family's consent would be given on a special, signed form. If Ana could find that document, she would have proof that she had been registered as a Croatian citizen.

Surprisingly enough, Ana's parents in Belgrade managed to find the document she needed in the Archive of the Republic of Serbia. It was a simple form on which her parents gave consent for their child to be entered in the Croatian registry of citizens. This document alone – and a skilful lawyer – finally resolved Ana's practical statelessness. She received Croatian citizenship and a Croatian passport, and to her great relief, was able to move on with her life in the UK.

In their quests for citizenship, both Marija and Ana were motivated by an urgent personal need – albeit of different origins – and both cases were resolved in relation to the existence of a 'genuine link' or a lack thereof. But they also clearly show the discrepancy between the personal and the legal-procedural definitions of the genuine link with a community. Belonging to a political community involves different levels of imaginaries, some being rooted in personal experiences and others in the state legislature, and they do not necessarily overlap. This leaves the relation between the identitarian and the formal-legal aspect of citizenship always open and susceptible to different interpretation.

But the question of belonging does not concern only the individual who 'wants to belong' on the one hand, and the state which 'confirms' this belonging on the other. Our *belongingness* is always mediated, shaped by, sometimes defined, and judged by the others with whom we are supposed to *belong together*. This becomes even more obvious and decisive in times when the 'rules of belonging' are being redefined, and 'degrees of belonging' begin to define one person's place in a social universe. The following story illustrates one such situation.

4. Belonging in the eyes of others

Amra's story (above) has already pointed to the absurd importance of external (quasi) markers of belonging and identity. Her language, or rather the

dialect in which she speaks, has led many to make incorrect assumptions about her background and ethno-national identity. She told me how, at one point, she had been trying to speak *ijekavica* with a Bosnian accent, but the attempt only resulted in her breakdown, leading her to seek psychological counselling. She was told that learning an altogether new language would actually be a much easier task than learning to speak her own in a different manner, especially at her age.

I heard another similar story about the struggle of ‘overcoming’ one’s accent and dialect in order to be accepted from a woman who came to Serbia in 1991 as a refugee from Croatia. She escaped with her three-year-old daughter to the safety of her husband’s family, who lived in a small town in southern Serbia. Although she found herself among her in-laws and their neighbours, whom she knew from prior visits (as the family paid regular visits to the town before the war), given the new context – war in Croatia – and the fact that she came from a mixed family of a Croatian mother and a Serb father, everyone around her expressed their anger and frustration over the fact that she ‘still spoke Croatian’. They expected her to ‘adapt’ and to raise her daughter speaking Serbian, that is, *ekavica*. ‘To them, I was no longer the person whom they knew from before, when we used to come every summer and spend wonderful times together. It was as though I became someone else, someone hostile, not deserving of sympathy and understanding.’

This motif of ‘features-of-belonging assessment’ and consequential ‘categorization’ was painfully experienced by many during the wars in Yugoslavia, especially by those who could not be easily ‘counted in’ in new dominant communities of belonging and who, additionally, found themselves in the middle of the armed conflict. The following story is greatly illustrative of this predicament and the consequences it had on personal lives.

Goran was born and lived in Croatia and was of mixed parentage, his mother an ethnic Croat and his father an ethnic Serb. When the first conflicts of 1991 began in Croatia, the family was instructed to move; they were all in danger, especially Goran’s father. The family relocated to live with relatives in a part of Croatia dominated by Serbs. Again, warnings came, this time because of Goran’s Croatian mother, and so the family decided to move again, this time to Serbia, where Goran’s aunt lived. But not long after they arrived in Serbia, their presence was denounced by neighbours, who told the police that ‘Ustasha extremists’ had moved in next door. The police came and took special interest in Goran, who was in his mid-thirties at the time, questioning him the whole night and threatening that they would send him to the front line in Croatia. Realizing that his background (and his suitable age for army recruitment) meant he was not safe in Croatia or in Belgrade, Goran decided to move yet again, to live with other relatives who lived in a major town in Bosnia and Herzegovina (which was still peaceful at the time).

Unfortunately, this was only a couple months before war broke out in Bosnia, too. Afraid to leave for either Serbia or Croatia, and then later, unable to leave due to the war, Goran stayed in Bosnia. However, even there, in a city

under Bosniak control, his mixed Serb and Croat origins put him in a disadvantaged position. It was *documents* that began to play some part in his ‘categorization’ and, luckily for him, in a positive way. First, he escaped recruitment in Bosnia by showing his Croatian birth certificate, and later, when he finally managed to escape Bosnia, he was granted Bosnian refugee status in another country, based on his Bosnian ID, which he had managed to secure during his first months of residence there.

Goran’s case shows the fragility of our social relations and of our embeddedness in communities we (think we) belong to. Our belongingness is mediated by our family circumstances, the political context, actors we encounter, and finally, but not least importantly, by the documents that, at a given or crucial moment, we have or do not have.

Conclusion: documentality and belonging

The stories I have presented here are but a small fraction of the stories of those who lived through the break-up of Yugoslavia, personally experiencing what it means to officially belong to a community, to have the ‘right to have rights,’ to have valid documents, or to be denied of all of these. When citizenship regimes change and we get caught up in their transition or are forced to transit from one regime to another, we truly live citizenship in all its meanings: we begin to epitomize our documents’ values and relevance, we hit the walls surrounding our communities of belonging, our social ties and identities are put into question, and most of all, it becomes clear how all these issues are interconnected and mutually dependent. Moreover, these examples are not captured by any single argument; if anything, they open up questions and new ways of understanding the link between the legal, the political, the social, and the personal aspects of citizenship.

Still, I would like to emphasize one theme that kept emerging from the personal narratives of interviewees, and that is the question of belonging (as well as *proof* of it, both official and unofficial). The reason for paying some attention to this subject is that scholarly writing does not often problematize the slippery notion of belonging with reference to citizenship, just as citizenship is rarely reflected upon with regard to the *experiences* of belonging (how belonging is actually played out in people’s lives).

There is an instability of belonging. It seems as if it relies on changing and unstable criteria; and different instances can guarantee it – be it the state, other co-citizens, or political circumstances. Sometimes, we need ‘official’ proof of belonging to be accepted by others (in the form of a personal citizenship document); sometimes when we are deprived of it, we lose all communal ties and, indeed, we stop belonging, as if all our previous social relations depended on our documents without our realizing it.

There is also a discrepancy between the personal and state-official definitions of a genuine link with a community. Belonging thus involves different

levels of imaginaries – personal, contingent, administrative and politically defined. They do not necessarily overlap, thus creating ‘gaps’ in belonging, fractures between the emotional and the official or the ‘certified’. Belonging is always (like citizenship) both a personal, individual experience and a socially or politically regulated status – approved or denied.

Finally, when observing this nexus between belonging and citizenship, as it appears in personal testimonies where boundaries between the documental and the social seem to be blurred, previously established ideas about the interconnectedness of the personal and the subjective on the one hand, and the legal and the political on the other, become even clearer. The documentality of citizenship does not belong solely to the objective world of regulations, policies or state mechanisms of control and management; it is very much lived and dependent on the social relations in which it is immersed. Nonetheless, our social roles and positions, places we hold in our community of belonging – great parts of our subjective identities – are not only ideational in their nature, but very much dependent on documents and registrations that trace our existence in the social worlds we inhabit.

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Notes

1 Here, I am borrowing the term from Shaw and Štiks (2012: 311): ‘By “citizenship regime” we generally mean the citizenship laws, regulations and administrative practices regarding the citizenship status of individuals but, in addition to that, it also refers to existing mechanisms of political participation. More precisely, a citizenship regime is based on a given country’s citizenship legislation defining the body of citizens (i.e. who is entitled to citizenship and all duties and rights attached to that status), on administrative policies in dealing with citizenship matters and the status of individuals, and, finally, on the official or non-official dynamic of political inclusion and exclusion.’

2 This was most striking in the case of the Baltic states, where new citizenship policies affected very large ethnic Russian populations (Brubaker 1992a).

3 I conducted twelve interviews in total, and while all of them informed my arguments, this paper brings detailed account of five personal stories. The interviews were conducted in Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian (B/C/S) language.

4 Even when citizenship policies extend to encompass ‘co-ethnics’ in other polities (Brubaker 1996), when we can speak of ‘overlapping’ polities and ‘constellations’ of citizenships (Bauböck 2010), the boundaries are still implied and they separate citizens from non-citizens.

5 This remains true even when the documents we possess are fraudulent. Regardless of the possibilities of false compliance with procedures, or even possession of false documents, their value as the ‘vouchers of legality’ does not diminish; in fact, it constitutes the very reason false documents

exist and why people sometimes try hard to obtain them. Especially in some regions or in certain historical contexts, possession of certain documents may significantly increase social and economic advantage. Some of the ethnographies cited herein specifically deal with this issue, and again with how this 'indeterminacy' of documents affects personal anxieties, producing at the same time 'legibility and illegibility, stability and instability, coherence and incoherence' (Kelly 2006). I am grateful to an anonymous reviewer for pointing this out to me.

6 Idro Seferi, 'Vize za svadbe i sahrane' [Visas for weddings and funerals] *Al Jazeera Balkans*, 18 December 2013, <http://balkans.aljazeera.net/blog/vize-za-svadbe-i-sahrane> last accessed on 10 April 2014.

7 All names have been altered.

8 At the time of their arrival to Bosnia, they held passports of the Federal Republic of Yugoslavia, a country that later changed its name to The State Union of Serbia and Montenegro (though the passport remained the same). After the dissolution of the Union in 2006, the family obtained passports of the Republic of Serbia, but without biometric data, as they were Kosovo residents.

9 BCS, or Bosnian/Croatian/Serbian, are considered to be one and the same language, with various dialects similar enough to pose no obstacle to understanding for people from Bosnia, Croatia, Serbia and Montenegro. The most observable differences are between *ekavica*. Typical for most parts of Serbia, and *ijekavica*, spoken in Croatia, Bosnia and Montenegro.

10 Kosovo residents were not included in the Schengen visa liberalization regime applied to Serbia in December 2009.

11 After the bombing on 10 June 1999, Kosovo was put under direct international administration in accordance with UN Resolution 1244. Officially, Kosovo residents remained Yugoslav citizens, but UNMIK created a separate Central Civil Register of Kosovo that regulated residency status and issued travel documents to Kosovo residents.

12 Another reason was that, had he applied for his Serbian passport with his Pristina address, he would have had to go to the Serbian town of Niš to gather his documents. This is because, after the war in Kosovo, Serbian officials moved all the personal data of residents from Kosovo to different municipalities in Serbia.

13 Croatian fascists from World War Two.

14 In spite of that, when she first applied for a passport in Serbia (quite late in her life), she had to complete a separate procedure and was eventually entered into the registry of Serbian citizens and became a Serbian citizen.

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