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## Who “Belongs”? Migration, Nationalism and National Identity in Slovenia

Setting nationalism and national identity in the theoretical framework of migration, the paper asserts that nation-states remain in strong control over who belongs and who is categorised as a foreigner. The nationalising effects of state policies perpetuate the embeddedness of membership in the exclusionary community of the nation rather than effectively promulgating enactments of inclusive civic state membership. Drawing on the chosen example of Slovenia as a relatively new nation-state and a recent country of immigration, the paper offers new insights into migrant experiences as illustrations of the need to relegate to the dustbin of history the existing practices of preferential treatment for members of the dominant nation. Arguing that it is essential to study migration in conjunction with nationalism, the paper urges a more inclusive theoretical perspective which would take account of migrants.

**Keywords:** nationalism, migration, nation-state, national identity, migrant integration, belonging, Slovenia.

## Kdo “pripada”? Migracije, nacionalizem in nacionalna identiteta v Sloveniji

*Članek, ki obravnava teoretični vidik nacionalizma in nacionalne identitete v okviru migracij, ugotavlja, da nacionalne države ohranjajo močan nadzor nad tem, kdo pripada in kdo je kategoriziran kot tujec. Nacionalizacijski učinki državnih politik bolj prispevajo k ohranjanju članstva v izključevalni skupnosti naroda kot k učinkovitemu udejanjanju vključevalnega članstva v državi. Članek izhaja iz izbranega primera Slovenije in prinaša nov vpogled v migrantske zgodbe kot dokaz nujnosti, da bi morali obstoječo prakso preferencialnega obravnavanja pripadnikov večinskega naroda poslati na smetišče zgodovine. Avtorica, ki opozarja, da bi morali migracije preučevati skupaj z nacionalizmom, poudarja potrebo po bolj inkluzivni teoretski perspektivi, ki bi upoštevala tudi migrante in migrantke.*

**Ključne besede:** nacionalizem, migracije, nacionalne države, nacionalna identiteta, integracija migrantov, pripadnost, Slovenija.

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## 1. Introduction

Given recent large population movements, transnational migration is said to represent the biggest challenge to the self-contained nature of the nation-state, outweighing the globalising role of international institutions (Morris 1997). Arguing that we are faced with the emergence of what he dubs the migration state, Hollifield (2004) explains this qualitatively different state form as a consequence of ever-increasing migration, particularly as far as the core industrial democracies after the Second World War are concerned. Managing transnational migration thus takes centre stage next to the traditional state's role of providing economic stability and the well-being and general security of its citizens. In addition to being bordered power-containers with monopolised means of violence (Giddens 1985), nation-states play a crucial role in defining outsiders, especially, by retaining the power over migration policies and access to citizenship.

Nation-states have indeed been experiencing an erosion of sovereignty that has accelerated with processes of globalisation and the diffusion of power at sub- and supra-state levels; they remain, however, in strong control over the question of who belongs and who is consigned to the position of the foreigner. The categorisation of members and non-members relates primarily to the nation-state's classification of citizens and non-citizens, the key mechanism for constructing difference between mere residents and fully enfranchised nationals. Even though a number of studies have critically assessed Marshall's classical work on citizenship and its failure to question the constitution of the community of reference, i.e., the nation-state (Morris 1997, Yuval-Davis 2006), the persisting prevalence of conflating the nation and the state – as epitomised in the term nation-state – leads to a frequent inability to recognise that the processes of national identity formation and exclusion are underpinned by state practices. And despite the shifting vantage point of the emerging new modalities of membership (Benhabib 2004), the world remains "divided into sharply bounded citizenries" of distinct nation-states with "intrinsically exclusive immigration and citizenship policies" (Joppke 2010, 14). This has become impossible to ignore within the framework of the EU's failed response to the so-called refugee crisis (cf. Kogovšek Šalamon & Bajt 2016).

Soysal's (1994) influential argumentation for a model of post-national membership that derives its legitimacy from universal personhood, rather than from national belonging, has highlighted the need for an updated understanding of the new era in migrant rights and claims that extend beyond the confines of the nation-state. The development of post-national citizenship involves the extension of rights to non-citizen immigrants, and this blurs the dichotomy between nationals and foreigners, and hence – even though it is true that contemporary migrations challenge the premises of the nation-state model –

Soysal, in writing (1994, 32) "All states develop a set of legal rules, discursive practices, and organizational structures that define the status of foreigners vis-à-vis the host state," neither suggests that the nation-state boundaries are fluid, nor argues for the withering away of the nation-state.

Prolific academic research about transnationalism has enabled the debates about migration to also tackle various challenges to migrants' transnational experiences and diasporic realities, including discussions of multiple, hybrid and postnational identities (e.g. Hedetoft & Hjort 2002, Pajnik 2011). By taking account of individual biographies of migrating populations, migrants' practices have hence emerged as a reality of multiple existences; this reality should reflect the need for migration and integration policies to address shifting identities and legitimise transnational modalities of living (Pajnik & Bajt 2012). Yet while research of this kind has significantly exemplified the emerging transnational patterns of migrants' lives, there is a continued need to address the shortcomings of contemporary migration and integration policies that still predominately focus on preserving the privileged position of the national. Theoretically rethinking nationalism and national identity in the framework of global migration, this paper thus points out the persistence of nationalising state practices and nationalist exclusion of the Other.

The article adopts a bottom-up approach to investigating how nationalism affects migrant integration in one particular nation-state: Slovenia. By exemplifying some of the numerous obstacles encountered by migrants, it questions, in particular, those exclusionary practices of the nation-state that remain burdened by an ethnicised understanding of national identity. Yet in no way should nationalist exclusion be understood as associated only with so-called ethno-cultural nations, for it permeates all nation-states. This paper thus attempts to not only critique the so-called ethno-cultural model of a select nation-state's treatment of migrants, but argues for the need to surpass the civic/ethnic divides in our understanding of the phenomena of nationalism altogether. It is thus difficult to distinguish between Western/civic and Eastern/ethnic types, and ample research confirms the complex coexistence of and permeability between civic and ethnic elements in nations and nationalisms. Contemporary theoretical debates have discarded such dualist models, focusing, rather, on the multivocality of nationalism and national identity construction as a starting point for situating the contemporary practices of nationalist exclusion. Moreover, this paper points out the complex relationship between formal definitions of integration as a two-way process involving both migrants and local communities and national policies (i.e., integration bills, citizenship, social and labour policies) that remain embedded in the implicit centrality of national identity as defined by particular nation-states. It is therefore my contention that, more than ever before, it is necessary to study migration processes in conjunction with nationalism, especially if we are to understand anti-immigrant policies and prejudice. Nation-

states – including established democracies (e.g., the United Kingdom, France, Spain) – regularise and domesticate nationalism, incorporating it into the very structures of politics (Hearn 2006); nationalism is therefore deeply embedded in contemporary state policies. State laws on immigration, naturalisation, minorities, and integration, as well as the very functioning of national institutions and policies, reveal a complex interdependence between the dominant nation and various disprivileged minorities, which are marginalised and excluded through the nationalist (and racist) logic of non-belonging. Moreover, migrants' experiences with prejudice and discrimination speak of the need to confront the exclusionary and nationalist practices of the nation-state.

It is beyond the scope of this article to explore the complex link between nationalism in terms of state policies that produce nationalising exclusionary effects and the multifarious and complex workings behind national identity construction, in terms of people's individual prejudiced attitudes towards the Other. The connection between nationalising practices of the nation-state and the everyday nationalism enacted in numerous varieties of xenophobic reactions is very apparent in migrant narratives which exemplify it. In its first part this article thus connects a conceptualisation of national identity construction as applied in nationalism studies with questions of migrant exclusion, particularly when seen through contemporary integration policies. Drawing on the chosen example of Slovenia as an example of a relatively new nation-state and a recent country of immigration, migrant narratives of experiences with prejudice and discrimination in the second part of the article qualitatively illustrate how nation-states remain in strong control over the question of who belongs and who is consigned to the status of a foreigner.

## 2. Methodology

The present analysis draws on biographical narrative interviews with migrants in Slovenia. Applying narrative interview methods (Schütze 1977, Rosenthal 1993), it draws on two data sets: interviews with 26 migrant women that were conducted between 2006 and 2007 as part of the 6FP project FeMiPol (Integration of Female Immigrants in Labour Market and Society), and 18 interviews with migrant men and women conducted in 2009 as part of the project PRIMTS (Prospects for Integration of Migrants from Third Countries and their Labour Market Situations).<sup>1</sup>

This empirical material is used to reveal gaps in contemporary nationalism and migration research by exploring the effects on migrants of the host society's exclusivist understanding of national belonging. The 44 biographical narrative interviews are with migrant men and women between 22 and 55 years of age who migrated to Slovenia from different countries in the last two decades.<sup>2</sup> It comprises respondents with very diverse socio-economic and educational back-

grounds (so-called labour or family reunification migrants, seasonal workers, asylum seekers; from highly educated to low-skilled), coming from different geopolitical contexts (from within and from outside Europe), and living and working in various social situations (from undocumented workers to professionals, as well as some unemployed). The narrators' names are not provided to ensure their anonymity.

This diversity of the sample reflects the official statistical trends of Slovenia's migrant composition; the narratives are therefore a unique window into individual migrant experiences. They are valuable method of exploring how contemporary migration requires reflection about concepts such as national identity, belonging and integration; these concepts extend beyond the mere legal and formally prescribed conditions of migrants' status acquisition, particularly when they are faced with rigidly ethnic conceptions of nationality.

### 3. National Identity and Migrant Integration: Who Belongs?

Several studies have shown that native populations expect migrants to make a strong effort to adapt to the host society (e.g. Ersanilli & Koopmans 2010). Migrants – who are treated as outsiders even after prolonged periods of stay, even though many become citizens – are at the same time expected to share a sense of belonging and identity, to learn the language and to respect and embrace the values of the country of stay, all of which are considered to indicate their will to integrate. This is at odds with official EU proclamations of integration as a two-way process (Pajnik 2007), and a noticeable trend has been identified in several member states in terms of adopting obligatory integration requirements such as language tests and more rigorous knowledge about the host country for migrants (e.g. Goodman 2010, cf. Joppke 2010), while the native population's willingness to accept foreigners as equals remains hesitant. Moreover, even when formal requirements such as permanent residence, language acquisition, observance of local civic customs, and the attainment of citizenship, have all been achieved, people frequently continue to experience social, political and economic exclusion on account of their migrant background. This is augmented by their disappointment at still being perceived as foreigners, which is particularly experienced by people stigmatised as non-Europeans (cf. Brezigar 2012). Current debates on integration, though claiming to reflect a fundamental conceptual shift, have not in fact succeeded in fully surpassing the older, now discredited, attempts to assimilate migrants; to ensure their supposedly disruptive Otherness is, if not eradicated, at least relegated to the private sphere.

Pronouncing the death of multiculturalism, even where no such policies ever really existed, several European states have introduced more rigid and comprehensive citizenship tests, mandatory integration courses, and more



rigorous language requirements that extend the understandably useful voluntary local language acquisition of newcomers. At the same time, liberal norms are seen as replacing the (old) boundary markers associated with nationalism. The restrictive change in naturalisation policies and the trends of re-ethnicisation of citizenship (Joppke 2010) have encouraged an increasing number of scholars to also study the workings of so-called aggressive civic integrationism (Triadafilopoulos 2011), attempting to discern paradoxes of illiberal liberalism (Orgad 2010). This offers important new insights regarding the complex relationship between migration, nationalism, identity, belonging, and liberalism, focusing on the arguably illiberal migrant integration policies of the liberal-democratic state. When, increasingly, "the ties of territory and socialization are downgraded while the ties of blood and descent are upgraded" this cannot be seen as a liberalising but as a restrictive trend (Joppke 2010, 64).

What these debates are missing, however, is the recognition of the interweaving of liberalism and nationalism. Liberal-democratic state is premised on the nationalist nation-state ideal type, in the sense that its key power mechanisms remain embedded in the ideas of **national** sovereignty and the pursuit of **national** interests. Nation-states are pervaded by nationalism, and this results in it also being deeply embedded in electoral régimes and civil societies (Hearn 2006). And while analyses of everyday nationalism in established nation-states have had a notable resonance within the field of nationalism research (e.g. Billig 1995), apart from notable exceptions (Kofman 2005, Pajnik 2007, Yuval-Davis 2006), migration research would benefit from an extended study of the implications of nationalism and national belonging for exclusionary anti-immigrant nationalist prejudice and practice. This is especially relevant for the current 2015-2016 period, when exceptional numbers of refugees have started coming to Europe, particularly via the Western Balkan route.

Defining the Other forms the core of nationalism; in all its forms nationalism is always preoccupied with boundaries and distinctions between Us (the members of the nation) and Them (the outsiders). A modern phenomenon of a fluid and dynamic nature, national identity is understood here as a collective sentiment based on the belief of belonging to a selected nation, which is considered to be distinct (Guibernau 2007). National identities, which are habitually attributed to citizens of a nation-state, are upon a closer look revealed as tending to represent attachments to **nations** (understood as sharing certain ethnic and/or cultural bonds), not **states** (as political communities of elective membership). In other words, even though humanity is a patchwork of multicultural, multilingual and multiethnic co-existence, nation-states for the most part remain secluded in ideals of monocultural national identities, constructing national myths and histories in order to demarcate separate symbolic national memberships. Rather than being grounded in the elective civic membership in a community of multiethnic and multicultural solidarity, national identity

frequently remains understood in the primordial confines of blood and belonging, and thus cannot be elective but is perceived as given, e.g., by birth.

Despite the varying intensity of beliefs in sharing common descent, culture, and so on, it is precisely the ambiguity of the non-definition of nationhood that allows room for elaborations of ethnicised understandings of national identity. These are just as present, even if less pronounced, in so-called Western democracies or old countries of immigration that are supposedly based on civic membership. While one should be wary of reifying the nation-state, its inextricable historical and ideological link to modernity and the phenomenon of nationalism has often been overlooked in recent explorations of migrant integration. It is hence in the covert and illusive essential core of national identity that nationalist prejudice and exclusion are based and able to thrive, despite the rising trend of universalism in integration mechanisms and naturalisation procedures. Joppke (2010), for instance, speaks of Western states being caught in the paradox of universalism: attempting to integrate immigrants into their community, they cannot define any particulars of such a membership. Despite the universalist proclamations of allegiance to liberal-democratic values, migrant naturalisation is still presented as joining a distinct national community, and a closer look at loosely defined values and norms frequently reveals a particularistic exclusionary bias of either ethnic, cultural or even civilisational difference (e.g., in relation to Islam).

While the complex processes of forming and promulgating national identities are by no means limited to host countries, but importantly also mould the migrants' collective attachments to their primary communities, we here nevertheless focus on the nationalisation of countries of immigration. How the nation-states prescribe their naturalisation and integration mechanisms and how they define their asylum and immigration policies are only cogs in the wheel of a complex set of interrelated processes of key nationalising institutions (e.g., the educational system, the construction of national symbols, public memory and rituals). National identity thus becomes grounded in people's perceptions of what constitutes their **national culture** and in this way a supposedly unique and separate nation-ness is promulgated. National identity is here regarded, therefore, as having a powerful effect on people regardless of its fluidity and its polymorphous character. Moreover, the implicit connection between national identity and the nation-state affects even the most instrumentalist conceptions of nationhood, which means that people are influenced by nationalising policies regardless of their personal positioning. Hence, when confronted with nationalist prejudice and discriminated against because of their supposed Otherness, immigrants have no doubt that they are excluded from the We of the host nation; they are deemed not to share the national identity, they are not admitted as members of the nation. National identities therefore function as (self) categorisations of members and non-members, and they profoundly affect

the ways in which migrants may become accepted as co-nationals or remain excluded as outsiders.

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## 4. Nationalism and Migration in Slovenia

The selection of Slovenia as a case study is significant on at least three counts. Independent since 1991, it represents a paradigmatic example of what has been termed a late-comer in terms of achieving statehood. Grappling with state-building processes in parallel to the supra-national devolution of its sovereign powers to the EU, Slovenia represents an illustration of a nationalising state in times of globalisation and post-national world realities. In this, it is similar to Croatia, Slovakia and Czechia, to name just a few newly emergent post-socialist sovereign states with intensive nation-building policies. At the same time, the historical trajectory of the Slovenian national movement provides important insights into the complexity of national identity construction, comparable to Guibernau's nationalism in so-called nations without states (1999). Complete with an ethnicised conception of nationhood and its heavy reliance on language and cultural identity, the Slovenian case transcends a mere case study by reflecting the wider debates on national identity in the context of transnationalism and globalisation, which are particularly salient in today's challenges to the EU's attempts to forge a European identity. It is timely, and has been so especially since the summer of 2015, with Europe facing pronounced nationalist and racist opposition to hosting Middle Eastern and African refugees.

Official statistics show that almost 5 per cent of Slovenia's population are foreign citizens. Migration to Slovenia began in the late 1950s when it was still one of Yugoslavia's republics. Pronounced economic migration followed in the 1970s and these trends continue, since most migrants (about 90 per cent of the total foreign-born population) came from Yugoslavia's successor states. Only less than 3 per cent of all migrants are from countries outside Europe, more than half of them from Asia (China, Thailand). And though the numbers of migrants from Africa, Asia, and Latin America are very small, their numbers have increased in recent years (Pajnik & Bajt 2011). Hence, the majority of Slovenia's immigration comes from so-called third countries; EU migrants represent only 6 per cent. Many non-EU migrants lost their jobs in times of recession (especially in the period 2008-2011) and fewer than in previous years can now obtain employment, and so some have returned to their countries of birth.

Over 70 per cent of migrants are men, most of whom arrive to Slovenia for work, while women's migration is more frequently connected to family reunification provisions – a highly relevant policy area with gendered effects. This is connected to the fact that there are more male migrant workers living in Slovenia, many of whom eventually request reunification with their families. Yet even though migrant women tend to be cast as followers or “secondary



migrants”, research shows migrating women do not simply follow men, despite the fact that official statistics note their migration as predominantly that of family reunification. Both migrant men and women experience the same formal treatment in terms of their legally stipulated rights, whereas migrants as a group face exclusion and encounter prejudice and discrimination (Medvešek & Bešter 2010, Medica & Lukić 2011, Pajnik & Bajt 2011).

In spite of Slovenia’s relatively peaceful detachment from Yugoslavia and thus comparatively more subdued intolerant public discourse than what was seen in other republics, research in the early 1990s confirmed a rise of nationalism that was “associated with the intolerant views of the autochthonous population towards the immigrants from the other former Yugoslav republics” (Klinar 1992, 89-90). Apart from being a political movement that mobilised people in order to create the sovereign Slovenian state, Slovenian nationalism has therefore also included negative attitudes towards the Other, i.e., mainly members of the other Yugoslav nations living in Slovenia. The Other is therefore defined predominantly as any foreigner arriving from the south or east of Slovenia.

Slovenian nationalism, as all nationalisms, is no exception in its ambiguity and can be described as not only Janus-faced but three-headed: in addition to a) ethno-cultural nationalism and b) the political mobilising movement and ideology that helped materialise the sovereign Slovenian nation-state, it is also c) a nationalising discourse and practice of excluding the Other. These three elements of nationalism should be seen as inextricably connected, though theoretically they are usually separated and applied in a temporal analysis of nation-building. In short, the emergence of the Slovenian nation followed the theoretical **nation-to-state** model of nation-formation, meaning that the Slovenian nation and national identity existed before the sovereign nation-state was created in 1991. Slovenian national identity and cultural nationalism therefore predated the nationalist movement and the political nationalism for an independent state. The Slovenian nation had developed in opposition to foreign rule, promulgating national distinctiveness through the elevation of its separate language. In this sense, the Slovenians can be understood as an example of an ethno-linguistic nation that bases its national identity on ethno-cultural affiliations. Lacking a state, Slovenian national identity relied on ethno-cultural characteristics such as presumed descent ties and a shared distinct language.<sup>3</sup>

Hence, in nationalist terms, being a proper Slovenian means not only speaking the Slovenian language and living in Slovenia for a long time, but also being Slovenian by birth. Yet the fact that a non-native can learn the language suggests that Slovenian national identity can nevertheless be **acquired**, enabling the full inclusion of migrants. Outsiders can therefore **become** Slovenians, since the perception of what constitutes a Slovenian is also framed in civic terms (i.e., feeling Slovenian and having respect for political institutions and laws). The fact that one can learn the language and thus **acquire** membership in the nation

reflects the main ambivalence about national identity; speaking a language is a way of gaining membership in the national community through the process of learning and integration. At the same time, ample research confirms that several groups of perpetual outsiders are not accepted as members of the nation even though they live in Slovenia, speak Slovenian and have Slovenian citizenship (e.g. the Roma, Muslims).<sup>4</sup> Migrants represent one of these Significant Others, caught in between state policies and individualised life trajectories, reflecting their realities of (non)belonging: "We are only foreigners /.../" (asylum seeker, Kosovo). "You feel that people are nationalistic by blood" (refugee, Iran).

## 5. Nationalising or Excluding Migrants?

Many changes in Slovenia's migration and integration policy have been adopted to meet the EU legal framework, thus some restrictions such as requirements for residence permits, family reunification provisions, and some procedures in employment have been relaxed, yet the financial crisis has brought restrictions in the employment of foreigners (Pajnik & Bajt 2011) and lately also a significant tightening of the asylum law. Formally, integration is a constituent part of Slovenia's migration policy, basing its goals on the principles of equality, freedom and mutual cooperation, supposedly taking into account cultural plurality, and working towards the prevention of discrimination, xenophobia and racism. The Decree on the Integration of Aliens has been in effect since 2008, notably excluding foreigners who are EU nationals. Focusing only on the integration of so-called third-country nationals, it aims to enable their integration into cultural, economic and social life by learning about the Slovenian culture and history, and providing language courses. Yet, rather than "promoting an active manifestation of difference, integration is practiced as migration policy, as a rule according to which migrants have to become adapted to what is constructed as genuine Slovenianness, which is supposedly rooted in national tradition" (Pajnik 2007, 853).

The acquisition of citizenship continues to be perceived by migrants as the most potent measure of integration (Pajnik & Bajt 2013). As far as granting citizenship is concerned, Slovenia prioritises the so-called *jus sanguinis* principle of an existing blood relationship with a citizen (i.e. citizenship based on ancestry), also including the *jus domicili* principle that pertains to rights based on residence (Deželan 2012). Naturalisation rules are among the most stringent in the EU (cf. Austria, Italy, Lithuania, Spain, Cyprus), requiring that a person lives in Slovenia for ten years, of which the final five years prior to the application have to be continuous, and requiring the person to renounce their previous citizenship. People of Slovenian descent, however, are entitled to facilitated, i.e. accelerated naturalisation procedures, and habitually enjoy dual nationality.

Research shows that the position of migrants in Slovenia is frequently one of perpetual and many-sided exclusion and discrimination (Medvešek & Bešter 2010, Medica & Lukić 2011, Pajnik & Bajt 2011). It is incorrect, of course, to view migrants as a single group because of their heterogeneity, particularly given their significant differences based on the specific statuses assigned to them by various policy stipulations. Highly-skilled, well-educated migrants habitually face fewer restrictions in terms of entry requirements and labour market access, and they supposedly find it easier to secure fair wages and regularised status with welfare benefits. Nevertheless, migrants' daily realities reveal notable loss of skills and fewer welfare benefits regardless of their status, their mode of entry and their educational level or prior work experience. In addition, their country of birth notwithstanding, many speak of not being accepted on account of their foreign-ness, and also experience discrimination and exploitation. Prejudice is particularly salient when tied with discrimination:

[At a job interview] they said: 'Go on, tell us something about yourself!' I started with: 'I'm so-and-so-many years old, I come from Bosnia.' They: 'Stop!' I: 'Why stop?' And the man said: 'Let her speak, look how well she speaks French.' She said: 'No, she comes from Bosnia, she has nothing to say.' I said: 'But why?' She said: 'Well, because we do not take Bosnians.' /.../ When I went to see a doctor /.../ I didn't speak Slovenian because I just arrived, so I started in Bosnian: 'I apologise for disturbing you, but I have one big request, I just arrived here.' She shut the door in my face and said: 'Don't come here again until you learn Slovenian!' I went home and cried like mad (unemployed lawyer, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

"I've had bad experiences at border crossings /.../ In those moments at the border I felt like a second class citizen. The feeling's really bad" (construction worker, Bosnia and Herzegovina).

The exclusionary effects of state policies that prefer nationals are visible in migrant narratives about the inability to access the labour market on equal grounds, receiving lower pay and fewer benefits, or even no salary at all:

I wasn't getting paid, you know, I worked as a volunteer. I thought 'So be it'. Because, as foreigners, we work just as much as everybody else. There were 14 of us who did not come from EU member states who started the internship and didn't get salary, but worked all the same (unemployed medical doctor, Macedonia).

My co-workers were all stiff, they looked at us like, how can I say, like we're Gypsies. [And after all the work] it's always just the two of us cleaning at night as well. Every day like that, I think it's unfair (cook, Bosnia-Herzegovina).

"You're a foreigner, they won't let you in just like that, that is how it is /.../ You're here but you're not inside, you're outside. They'll talk to you, but you're outside and that's all" (teaching aide, Russia).

The narratives show how circumstances force the migrants to internalise the troublesome patterns of being treated differently – either by people or by state policies – solely because they are regarded as foreigners. Hence, they adopt the inferior and subjugated position of accepting the *status quo*. Despite official proclamations that define integration as a two-way process, empirical evidence highlights the reality whereby the migrants bear the burden of adaptation in order to become integrated. In the final analysis, whether or not they are integrated is their own personal success or failure. The nation-state washes its proverbial hands by proclamations of multicultural education and various manifestations of intercultural dialogue. Yet national identity construction and its everyday enactments through structural/systemic nationalising (and racist) policies remain understudied and their immanent relation to upsurges of xenophobia, chauvinism and racism predominantly disregarded. Integration therefore appears more “as part of the problem in contemporary migration policy” (Pajnik 2007, 857) than as a valuable solution, particularly because the existing policies ignore the perspective of migrants. Rigid assumptions persist that it is entirely the migrant’s task to adapt.

Nevertheless, research shows not only that most migrants are in fact assimilating, and also that they do not necessarily see this as a problem. The fact that they adapt to their new environments and become increasingly embedded in the society of their residence, however, does not mean that they accept all aspects of their host state, but that they neither wish to nor actually live in isolation (Kivisto 2003). The migrant narratives confirm that they adopt the assigned role of newcomers who need to adjust to their surroundings, exposing practical reasoning: “I’m aware that in Slovenia the official language is Slovenian and if I came to live here, I have to adapt” (kitchen aide, Serbia).

Significantly, narratives like the one above speak against the nationalist claims about migrants as resilient to change and as threatening the alleged national core values by their foreign-ness (i.e. different language, culture, religion, etc.). While migrants do not accept their position at face value without having difficulties with the various exclusionary practices that they encounter because of their supposed Otherness, their narratives at the same time illustrate that they are aware of the harsh reality of their subjugated position; thus their frustration is more often than not tied with a resolve that they have to fulfil the demands of the host state. This goes beyond merely abiding by the formal requirements, since many also point out the more loosely defined aspects of belonging. They quickly pick up on the importance of certain national identity markers, which may or may not resonate in official state policies, such as requirements for naturalisation (e.g., language proficiency). And since being accepted is a significant human desire, people are willing to go to great lengths to achieve recognition and approval. Put differently, migrants are aware that formal membership (e.g., permanent residence, citizenship) only brings them half way; only belonging in a sense of

being considered a member of the nation, one of Us, carries full acceptance. Yet, even though research shows that full admittance often remains an unattained goal, it is crucial not to consider that the wish to belong to the host nation is something that is essential and significant for all.

Whereas language (in)proficiency, or speaking with a foreign accent, serves as boundary marker that separates foreigners from native Slovenian speakers, racist reactions are also not uncommon. Migrant women from Latin America, for instance, experience being Other due to their physical appearance (i.e. their darker skin complexion):

Now when I'm a citizen it's easier, but even though I'm a citizen I'm always a foreigner! I'm still a foreigner, because people see me on the street and: 'Sure, that woman is a foreigner,' they never will think I'm Slovenian (cashier, South America)<sup>5</sup>.

Moreover, several female interviewees shared the experience of being subjected to unwanted male advances, and of gendered prejudice with respect to foreign women being present in society. Particularly those migrant women who work in bars and nightclubs are stigmatised due to popular associations of this type of work with prostitution. In addition, stereotypes of women coming from certain countries, particularly the former Soviet republics, are highly sexualised (cf. Cukut 2009):

It's very hard to get an apartment, especially for foreign women from Eastern Europe /.../ because many women sadly come to sell themselves, so a bad name sticks to other women from these countries. And because I also come from Eastern Europe, from Russia, I also encounter such obstacles (freelancer, Russia).

I met my husband in Ukraine and came to Slovenia with him /.../ When we came to Ljubljana to submit papers for marriage, the woman there asked him: 'Why did you bring her from Ukraine? Don't you have enough of our own?!' (unemployed, Ukraine).

Recent explorations of nationalism no longer neglect the question of gender, thus offering valuable insight in terms of gendered and sexualised constructions of nationhood (e.g. Yuval-Davis 1997). The excerpt above speaks of gender discrimination and specific stereotypes related to Eastern European women, while exemplifying sexual and regional stereotypes about Ukrainian women as loose. Similarly, a woman from Bosnia spoke of racial prejudice that she encountered when looking for a place to live and landlords denying her tenancy simply because of her ascribed ethnicity. Designating her as Bosniak meant stigmatised linking with a presumed Muslim religion and stereotypical assumptions that she would have many children and numerous relatives living with her.



Migrants as a rule experience stigmatisation because of being foreigners, and most of the interviewees noted that on some level they will always feel out of place and not entirely accepted due to their assigned Otherness and assumed difference. The xenophobia, racism and nationalist prejudice reflected in their narratives are dealt with in different ways. It may make migrants angry and appalled at such reactions, which may result in them becoming more stubborn in resisting prejudice. One migrant, for instance, refused to change her last name in order to conceal her ethnic affiliation in the hope of better employability. Yet, strategies of coping with exclusion, while empowering migrants, at the same time reveal just how resilient to change prejudice is. The above-mentioned example clearly reveals how disappointed one is at still being perceived as a foreigner. Even though formal aspects such as language proficiency, residence permit, Slovenian family life and, most of all, citizenship have all been achieved, the migrant cited above still experiences continuing social, economic and symbolic exclusion. Her co-nationals are just not willing to accept her as their equal, let alone a **real** Slovenian. For this reason, another woman notes that changing her last name would never really help her to pass (Goffman 1963) as a Slovenian, because something, particularly her accent, would always give her away; thus she would only be lying to herself.

## 6. Conclusion: When do Migrants Belong?

While nation-states have lost a significant share of their influence in terms of political sovereignty and economic power, they continue to hold sway over the politics of belonging. By guarding the right to define citizens and thus exclude foreigners, the nation-state has a monopoly of defining "membership within the societal community" (Kivisto 2003, 21). Moreover, a more repressive immigration régime has prevailed in recent years, with reinforced formal demands and obligations also for long-term residents, not only naturalised citizens. The nation-state has thus "reasserted its position through the development of managed migration systems, the retreat from multiculturalism and the revival of neo-assimilationist agendas" (Kofman 2005, 454). Drawing on migrant narratives about their feelings of exclusion from the community of the host nation in Slovenia, I have argued that nation-states continue to play a profound role in defining the symbolic boundaries of belonging; and, through complex interlinking of nationalising state policies and practices with national identity construction processes, the Other is thus perpetually excluded from the national We.

Modern liberal democracies are characterised by a belief in their own democracy and justice, which are assumed to be provided with the implementation of the principle of equality before the law and competition-based market economy. These are universal, non-discriminatory and inclusive principles that

nonetheless normalise the key mechanism of sustaining these communities: differentiation and exclusion. In the legal sense of citizenship status, the nation-state determines the limits of the citizen-foreigner dyad. In the context of market economy, the labour market selects and discards useless individuals, while national economies, despite processes of global convergence, remain robust enough to protect the interests of the dominant nation. In this context, the Others are relegated to only limited participation in, or complete exclusion from, society. Laws on immigration, citizenship, minorities, integration, education, health and social protection, as well as the functioning of national institutions and policies in general, reveal the complexity of the relationship between the dominant nation and unprivileged minorities whose systemic inequality is justified and reinforced by the nationalist/racist ideology of ethno-cultural non-belonging.

Theoretically rethinking nationalism and national identity in the framework of global migration, this paper has pointed out the persistence of nationalising state practices and nationalist exclusion of the Other. Even though it has focused on the chosen case-study of Slovenia and is situated in experiences of migrant men and women with Slovenian nationalism and nationalising policies, transnationally relevant conclusions can nevertheless be drawn: namely, it is not only in the Slovenian case that national identity frequently remains understood in the primordial confines of blood and belonging rather than being grounded in elective civic membership in a community of multiethnic and multicultural solidarity. Despite the fact that migrants inevitably adapt to their new environment, the inherent requirement of the host states for them to do so should be questioned. Whereas a portion of the population may always ascribe to nationalistic and racist Othering and support the exclusion of outsiders (however defined), nationalising policies and state practices that effectively award preferential treatment to members of the dominant nation should be relegated to the dustbin of history. This is especially important because exclusionary nationalism and racism are frequently not recognised in policies. Moreover, nation-states have a overall need to develop more inclusive mechanisms that will factually enact a two-way mode of integrative ideal, whereby both migrants and nationals contribute to open communal relations, and this is assisted by official policy.

This article proposes that new approaches to migration, integration and nationalism should be built on assumptions that globalisation processes, though transforming nation-states, have not brought an end to national identities and the exclusionary politics of belonging. The key challenge therefore lies in surpassing the nationalising practices of the nation-state as these continue to define membership in terms of belonging to the **nation** rather than the civic/political community of the **state**, the polity. Migration régimes and integration policies are hence still defined through the prism of national identity, albeit increasingly expressed in universalist terms, while the nationalising politics of

belonging leaves very little or no room for the agency of migrants (Pajnik 2007). Unless these harmful practices of nation-states are confronted, no amount of well-meaning international declarations will yield results.

## Notes

- <sup>1</sup> See Kontos (2009) for the final report of the research project Integration of Female Immigrants in Labour Market and Society; See Prospects for Integration of Migrants from "Third Countries" and Their Labour Market Situations: Towards Policies and Action (2010) in the list of references for more information about this project.
- <sup>2</sup> It should be noted here that not all the interviewees exemplified the topic of national belonging.
- <sup>3</sup> Unlike the Croatian, Bosniak and Serbian national identity that are also heavily immersed in religion (Catholic, Muslim and Orthodox) as an identity marker, Slovenia's neighbouring countries are all predominantly Catholic.
- <sup>4</sup> See, for instance, Intolerance Monitor Reports, available at [http://www.mirovni-institut.si/Publikacija/All/en/knjizna\\_zbirka/Monitor-nestrpnosti-Mediawatch](http://www.mirovni-institut.si/Publikacija/All/en/knjizna_zbirka/Monitor-nestrpnosti-Mediawatch).
- <sup>5</sup> Country of origin hidden to ensure anonymity.

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