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**When do I Belong?  
Transnational Migration and National Identity**

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**Abstract**

Rethinking nationalism and national identity in the framework of globalisation and transnational migration patterns, this paper tackles the complex relationship between formal definitions of integration as a two-way process and integration bills that remain embedded in centrality of national identity as constructed by national states. It is necessary to study globalisation and migration processes in conjunction with nationalism, especially in order to understand xenophobic attitudes and anti-immigrant prejudice. This paper argues for a more inclusive perspective that allows for accommodation of transnational realities of migrants. Their experiences with ethnic prejudice and discrimination speak of the need to confront the exclusionary practices of national states. Though experiencing erosion of their sovereignty that has accelerated with processes of globalisation, which diffuses participation to sub-state and international levels, national states remain in strong control over the question of “who belongs” and who is consigned to the position of “foreigner”. It is for this reason that even obtaining citizenship and thus formally becoming a “national” does not preclude one from life on the margins, forever feeling like an “outsider”. Using new empirical material, this paper theorises gaps in contemporary nationalism research by exploring transnational migrants’ perspectives of identity and belonging.

**Key words:** national identity, transnational migration, national state, politics of belonging, Slovenia

## **Introduction**

Though experiencing erosion of their sovereignty that has accelerated with processes of globalisation, which diffuses participation to sub-state and international levels, national states remain in strong control over the question of “who belongs” and who is consigned to the position of the “foreigner”.<sup>1</sup> Primarily, this relates to the national state’s categorisation into citizens and non-citizens, as the key mechanism of constructing difference between “merely” residents and “nationals”. Yet of even greater importance for the present study are the processes of national identity construction, for they reveal the commonly disregarded practices of banal nationalism (Billig, 1995), which perpetuate the inherent embeddedness of membership in the exclusionary national community, however defined. It is for this reason that frequently even obtaining citizenship and thus formally becoming a “national” does not preclude one from life on the margins, forever feeling like a “foreigner”, a “migrant”, an “outsider”. Numerous studies show that “native” populations expect “foreigners” to make a strong effort to adapt to the “host” society.<sup>2</sup> Migrants, treated as newcomers and outsiders even after prolonged periods of stay, are required to share a sense of belonging and identity, to learn the language and to respect and embrace the values of the host country, which is all considered an indicator of their will to integrate. This is at odds with official proclamations of integration as a two-way process (e.g. EC, 2003: 17). Nevertheless, even when formal aspects such as permanent residence, language acquisition, observance of local customs, and primarily citizenship, have all been “achieved”, migrants frequently continue to experience social, political and economic exclusion. This is augmented by disappointment at still being perceived as “foreigners”.

Rethinking nationalism and national identity in the framework of globalisation and transnational migration patterns, this paper tackles the complex relationship between formal definitions of integration as a two-way process involving both migrants and local communities and integration bills that remain embedded in centrality of national identity as defined by particular national states. More than ever before it is necessary to study the phenomena of globalisation and migration processes in conjunction with nationalism, especially if we are to understand xenophobic attitudes and anti-immigrant prejudice. This paper argues for a more inclusive perspective that allows for accommodation of transnational realities of migrants. Moreover, migrants’ experiences with ethnic prejudice and

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<sup>1</sup> I use the term “national state” instead of the more frequently applied “nation-state” in order to signify my concurrence with authors who point out the problematic equation between the nation and the state that remains unproblematised and is thus uncritically reproduced when using the latter term (e.g. Connor, 1994; Hutchinson, 1994; Smith, 1995; van den Berghe, 1987). For more on the contested nature of the “nation-state” and the Slovenian case, see Bajt (2005: 44-46).

<sup>2</sup> I wish to note that terms such as “native”, “foreigner”, “host” and “third country” are all problematic. The term “native” is naturalised and used in the policy making processes as a way of distinguishing migrant workers from domestic labour force. The term “third country nationals” signifies non-EU nationals, though not applied to citizens of the EEA (European Economic Area) countries and Switzerland. As such, “third country” is a classic “residual” category to delineate the “members” (EU/EEA and Swiss nationals) from “non-members”. It has been particularly disputed as stigmatising and offensive by the migrants, while they also problematise the term “migrant”, one of the interviewees declaring “I’m not a migrant”. The disputed nature of the terms “host” and “destination” country should also be noted, however, the syntagma “host country” is here adopted to mean the country of migrants’ current location, without its relevance for either their attempt to stay permanently (i.e. to settle, hence country of “destination”) or temporarily (i.e. “host” country). While it is not possible to address in the scope of one article the complex issue of the researchers’ contribution to the creation of categorisations, these concerns should nonetheless be noted in order to keep re-examining the terminology applied particularly when designating vulnerable social categories. It is therefore also my choice not to adopt the official term “alien” and I hence use the term “foreigner” instead, since it was also a term most often applied by the interviewees.

discrimination speak of the need to confront the exclusionary practices of national states. Though recent debates about citizenship importantly question whether its relation to the national state is still relevant, and that having a claim to citizenship may not necessarily be a requirement for belonging as a citizen, engaging with this literature is beyond the scope of this paper.<sup>3</sup> The fact is that “new modalities of membership have emerged” (Benhabib, 2004: 1), bringing about the need to rethink how membership is regulated when the national states are no longer – if they ever were – adequate systems to police entry. In the face of large population flows, transnational migration has been argued to represent the biggest challenge to the self-contained nature of the national state, outweighing the globalising role of international institutions (Morris, 1997).

Research shows that economic interests, expected to outweigh other reasons when it comes to visible gains on account of so-called labour migration’s benefits to the European Union (EU), are not the strongest predictor of policy outcomes on migration issues. As shown by Hix and Noury (2007), it is the political preferences of EU legislators that bear much more significance than either the economic preferences of national parties’ constituents or the member states’ economic interests or political preferences. Yet it is the national states and not the EU that determine their specific immigration rules and integration measures. Albeit dependent on the wider EU policy framework and guided by various obligatory compliances such as respect of human rights and observing anti-discrimination measures, the national states retain the right to define their migration and integration policies. Since the processes of transnational migration demand a continuous rethinking of concepts such as citizenship and national identity, it is imperative to also reflect upon the role of the national state and its claim to regulation of migratory flows. Arguing that we are faced with the emergence of what he dubs “the migration state”, Hollifield (2004: 885) explains this qualitatively different state form as a consequence of an ever increasing migration, particularly in terms of “immigration in the core industrial democracies” after the Second World War. Managing transnational migration flows, i.e. “regulation of international migration”, thus takes centre stage next to the traditional state’s role of provision of economic stability and well-being and general security of its citizens. In addition to being “bordered power-containers” with monopolised means of violence (Giddens, 1985), national states play a crucial role in defining outsiders by retaining the power over migration policies and access to citizenship. Rather than focusing on the question of the diminishing sovereignty of the national state in times of globalisation, this article therefore treats the national state as holding sway over the processes of national identity construction, arguing that its role of an arbiter in defining the Other remains unabated. It does so by adopting a bottom-up approach of investigating the processes of migrant integration in one particular national state: Slovenia. By explicating the numerous obstacles encountered by migrants in the host society, I problematise particularly the exclusionary practices of the national state that remain burdened by ethnicised understanding of national identity. Applying the argument of a nationalising state to Slovenia, the impact of globalisation on national identity is significant both for a reaction to the fear of the “immigrant Other”, as well as for a continuation of the processes of ethnicisation of Slovenian-ness.

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<sup>3</sup> Numerous studies have addressed this complex issue, critically assessing Marshall’s classical definition of citizenship and its failure to question the constitution of the “community of reference” – the national state (for an overview, see, for example, Morris, 1997; Pajnik, 2006; Yuval-Davis, 2006; 2007).

Drawing on narratives of over 180 migrant women in 11 EU countries<sup>4</sup>, the paper focuses on 26 biographical narrative interviews with migrants in Slovenia<sup>5</sup>, which represents an example of a young national state that has become a country of immigration in recent years. The sample of 26 biographical interviews with migrant women who have migrated to Slovenia in the last 15 years comprises respondents from Croatia, Kosovo, Bosnia, Kazakhstan, Ukraine, China, Moldova, Russia, Uzbekistan, Japan, Peru, Colombia, Thailand, Lithuania, Turkey, Slovakia, and the Czech Republic. The respondents are between 22 and 48 years of age and they have diverse socio-economic and educational backgrounds, they come from different geopolitical contexts, and they live and work in various social situations. Even though the data is primarily based on biographical narrative interviews with migrant women, the gender dimension is not a specific focus of the present article, particularly because both men and women migrants experience the same formal treatment in terms of their legally stipulated rights.<sup>6</sup> Moreover, it is evident that migrants as a group face exclusion and encounter prejudice and discrimination. This new empirical material is used to theorise gaps in contemporary nationalism research by exploring transnational migrants' broader perspectives of identity and belonging as they counteract with formal and informal definitions of national affiliation. The narratives are a unique window into individual migrant experiences and as such a valuable method to point out how contemporary migratory practices require a broader understanding of concepts such as national identity, belonging and integration, which stretch beyond the mere legal and formally prescribed conditions of migrants' status acquisition, particularly when faced with rigidly ethnic conceptions of nationality.

### **Questions of National Belonging**

A notable amount of recent studies have focused on the issue of belonging by challenging the formal citizenship and shifting emphasis on citizenship as a practice (e.g. Benhabib, 2004; Soysal, 1994). Rather than engaging with these debates, I am here interested in the question of belonging as it pertains to migrants and as it plays out in highly complex processes of national identity construction. This article hence attempts to untangle the question of how the membership in the nation, this intangible thread that unites the members and separates them from non-members, is constructed through nationalising practices of the nation state. How the states prescribe the integration mechanisms and how they define immigration policies, I argue, is in fact only one of the cogs in the wheel of a complex set of interrelated processes of nationalisation of key institutions of the national state. Focusing on issues of national identity rather than citizenship, I base my argument on Yuval-Davis's cue that citizenship needs to be situated "in the wider context of contemporary politics of belonging" (2007: 561). This goes beyond citizenship and includes also identities and the emotions attached to them. Hence, this article situates the debates about transnational migration, nationalism and globalisation in assigning significance to the difference between citizenship as a formal status and belonging in terms of national identity.

This paper builds on studies that have questioned what it means to be a member of the nation by examining the requirements to become or be accepted as a citizen (e.g. Cesarani and

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<sup>4</sup> Biographical narrative interviews with migrant women were conducted in the period between Autumn 2006 and Summer 2007 as part of the 6FP project "FeMiPol" - Integration of Female Immigrants in Labour Market and Society: Policy Assessment and Policy Recommendations. For more, see <http://www.femipol.uni-frankfurt.de/>.

<sup>5</sup> In Slovenia, the FeMiPol project partner was the Peace Institute and the project leader Dr. Mojca Pajnik. For more, see <http://www.mirovni-institut.si/Projekt/Detail/en/projekt/FEMIPOL-Integration-of-Female-Immigrants-in-Labour-Market-and-Society/>.

<sup>6</sup> Though the approach of intersectionality is significant (cf. Yuval-Davis, 2007), it cannot be addressed here.

Fulbrook, 1996), as well as on the literature about the challenges posed to traditional understanding of citizenship by processes of globalisation (e.g. Hudson and Slaughter, 2007). However, since my focus is on the politics of belonging in terms of being accepted as a member of a nation by co-nationals, national identity represents a way of claiming a particular status that goes beyond the formal citizenship. In this way, national identity is regarded as having a powerful effect on people regardless of its fluidity and notwithstanding the fact that it is a polymorphous phenomenon. When confronted with national prejudice and discriminated against because of their “otherness”, the migrants have no doubt that they are excluded from the “we” of the host nation; they do not share the national identity, they are not admitted as members of the nation.

The questions of national belonging are inevitably connected to processes of national identity construction, which in turn require the existence of the Other against whom people can identify themselves as members of a particular nation. Even though in contemporary writings the nation is no longer regarded as an unchanging and primary social entity, every attempt to answer the question “what is the nation” is inherently dependent on the belief that nations are real entities. Instead of regarding them as such, some authors have suggested a shift in focus onto “nationness as a conceptual variable” (Brubaker, 1999: 16), while others have gone as far as to suggest that we “forget the nation” altogether (Tishkov, 2000). The predominant view being that nations are a modern phenomenon (Gellner, 1992; Hechter, 2000; Hobsbawm, 1995), the need for understanding nations as real – though not eternal – communities persists (Hroch, 2000). Even though this article is not preoccupied with the question of the nation, by rethinking national identity in the framework of transnational migration and the processes of globalisation, the nation is nevertheless treated here as a significant category in people’s perception of everyday realities. Put differently, national identity requires the existence of the nation and describes a condition in which a group of people share the same identification with specific national symbols. What is of interest here, is why and how they feel connected to each other, although they will never have the chance to actually meet all the members of their group. It is of crucial importance that members of the nation see themselves as such, their nation must be perceived as a community with a shared identity and symbols. In other words, they must define themselves as a nation. In his description of imagined community, Anderson (1991) emphasised that in every person lives an image of community and special connection with other members of her or his nation, although they will never meet.

In order to tackle the complex issue of transnational migration and the questions of belonging, as these relate to the actual situation of migrants in a host society, this paper draws on Walker Connor’s recognition of the importance of what people *believe* about the nation: “when analysing sociopolitical situations, what ultimately matters is not *what is* but *what people believe is*. And a subconscious belief in the group’s separate origin and evolution is an important ingredient of national psychology” (Connor, 1994: 93). Connor’s insightful observation helps explain the persistent “commonsense” belief in the existence of nations as communities of somehow connected (even related) individuals despite their actual heterogeneity and simultaneous existence of the multifarious social identities that surpass and bypass national affiliation. Put differently, most people seem to think of (their) ethnic group in “primordial” terms, meaning that “ethnic actors conceive membership in terms of categorical descent” (Gil-White, 1999: 814). This is not a claim that ethnic, or indeed national, groups are “*objectively* primordial”, but rather an attempt to “distinguish between what an ethnic group is to its members *psychologically*, and the objective reasons why such groups may form [...] To insist that actors perceive co-ethnics as sharing biological descent is to describe the manner in which individuals *cognize* the ethnies they participate in” (ibid.,

803). National identities function as (self)categorisations of members and non-members that profoundly affect the ways in which migrants become accepted as nationals or remain excluded as outsiders.

The selection of Slovenia as a case study is significant on at least three accounts. 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 supra-national devolution of its sovereign powers to the EU, Slovenia represents an illustration of a nationalising state (Brubaker, 1996) in times of globalisation. At the same time, the development of the Slovenian national movement provides important insights regarding the complexity of national identity construction, comparable to Guibernau’s nations without states nationalism (1999). Toppled with ethnicised conception of nationhood and its heavy reliance on language and “cultural identity”, the Slovenian case transcends a mere case study by reflecting a wider debate on national identity in the context of transnationalism and globalisation, particularly salient in today’s challenges to the EU’s attempts at forging an European identity.

In order to understand what constitutes Slovenian national identity, it is imperative to recognise the ethno-cultural elements that are present in the understanding of the Slovenian nation.<sup>7</sup> The Slovenian nationalism, as all nationalisms, is no exception in its ambiguity and can be described as not only Janus-faced but a three-headed beast: an ethno-cultural nationalism, as well as a political mobilising movement that helped materialise the sovereign Slovenian state, it is also a nationalising nationalism with exclusionary practices towards the Other. The three elements should be seen as inextricably connected, though theoretically they are usually applied in temporal analysis of the national development. In short, the emergence of Slovenian nation followed the theoretical *nation-to-state* model of nation-formation, meaning that the Slovenian nation and national identity existed before the state was created in 1991. The Slovenian national identity and cultural nationalism have therefore predated the nationalist movement and political nationalism for an independent state. Slovenian national identity can be understood as developing in opposition to foreign rule, as a way of preserving the national distinctiveness through the elevation of a separate language and culture. In this sense, the Slovenians can be understood as an example of an “ethno-linguistic” nation that based its national identity in ethnic affiliations. Lacking a state, the Slovenian national identity relied on the “ethnic” characteristics such as presumed descent ties and a shared distinct language.

Being a “proper” Slovenian means not only speaking the Slovenian language and living in Slovenia for a long time, but also to be Slovenian “by birth” (Hafner-Fink, 1997: 265). The Slovenians perceive the Slovenian nation as a real entity, a community of people who are in certain aspects similar to them, who are the “we” in opposition to “them” when social categorisation of national differences is employed. Social realities of people’s everyday lives are not preoccupied with speculations on origins of nations, yet people “know” who to categorise as members of their own nation and who to view as an outsider.<sup>8</sup> The contemporary Slovenian Other is defined predominantly as any new-comer arriving from the south or east of

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<sup>7</sup> For a detailed study of the Slovenian national movement, construction of the Slovenian national identity, and critical application of nationalism theory to the Slovenian case, see Bajt (2003).

<sup>8</sup> A significant difference is drawn between the “western” outsider (e.g. “European” meaning EU, or “American” meaning North America) and the racialised Other comprising “Non-Slovenians” and other “southerners”. This complex issue merits more attention elsewhere.

Slovenia, and transnational migrants are one of the more recent additions to the list of perpetual “foreigners” who are not perceived as “Slovenians”.

Nevertheless, the fact that one can learn the language suggests that the Slovenian national identity can be *acquired*, leaving room for integration of migrants. The “outsiders” can therefore *become* Slovenians, since the definition of a Slovenian is also drawn in civic terms.<sup>9</sup> The fact that one can learn the language and thus *acquire* membership in the nation reflects the main ambivalence about the Slovenian 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.<sup>10</sup>

## Experiences of Migrants in Slovenia

We are only *foreigners, foreigners* here ... (Valbona, 41, Kosovo)<sup>11</sup>

Official statistics show that 2.7 per cent of Slovenia’s population is foreign-born, while the data on issued residence permits and work permits point to a significantly higher share of the migrant population. Migration to Slovenia began in the late 1950s when it was still one of the Yugoslav republics. Pronounced economic migration followed in the 1970s, when the western European states that had been the primary countries of destination for Yugoslav migrants (i.e. *Gastarbeiter*) started limiting immigration. Inner migrations within Yugoslavia intensified with industrialisation and urbanisation processes, which made Slovenia a popular destination for economic migration particularly from the south-eastern regions of the federation. These trends continue as most current migrants to Slovenia come from Yugoslavia’s successor states – about 90 per cent of the total foreign born population in Slovenia are the “former Yugoslavs”.<sup>12</sup>

Research shows that the position of migrants in Slovenia is predominantly one of perpetual and multisided exclusion and discrimination (Pajnik and Bajt, forthcoming). It is problematic, of course, to view migrants as a group because of their heterogeneity – particularly on account of significant differences between their positions based on particular statuses assigned to them by various stipulations of migration policies.<sup>13</sup> Highly-skilled, well-educated migrants habitually face less restrictions in terms of entry requirements and labour market access, they supposedly find it easier to secure fair wages and regularised status with all accompanying welfare benefits. Nevertheless, interviews with migrant women reveal notable de-skilling and

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<sup>9</sup> Slovenian public opinion polls illustrate that the most prominent indicator of what constitutes a “real” Slovenian is the language since the majority of respondents in polls that span a decade-long timeframe agree that language is the most important characteristic of a “true” Slovenian. Respondents, however, also assign great significance to “feeling Slovenian” and respect for Slovenia’s political institutions and laws (Bajt, 2005).

<sup>10</sup> Most notable examples include the Roma, the erased and the Muslims (cf. Bajt, forthcoming; Zorn, 2009).

<sup>11</sup> The interviewee’s pseudonym, age and country of birth are listed in brackets. The citations of the migrants’ narratives that appear here have been translated into English, purposefully attempting to preserve the particular speech of women migrants.

<sup>12</sup> Geographical and socio-cultural proximity was also a factor in the early 1990s’ wave of “forced migration” to Slovenia from the war-torn zones of the collapsing Yugoslav state.

<sup>13</sup> Different modes of entry affect the position of migrants, whose statuses are consequently defined in accordance with relevant policy provisions (e.g. labour migrant, asylum seeker, refugee, family reunion, etc.). Such categorisations have profound influence on one’s life, since different provisions are envisioned for different “foreigners” who wish to live and find employment in Slovenia.

fewer welfare benefits regardless of their status, their mode of entry and their education level or prior work experience. Moreover, many, their country of birth notwithstanding, speak of not being accepted on account of their “foreign-ness”. They experience various types of discrimination and exploitation. The migrant women in the sample describe differing examples of discrimination because of their “foreigner” status: most notably in terms of pay, longer working hours, lack of social security and healthcare, paid annual leave, and so on, but also in terms of experiencing social distance and encountering prejudice. Furthermore, the narratives show how circumstances force migrants to internalise the problematic patterns of being treated differently solely because they are migrants, and to adopt the humble and subjugated position of “this is how things are”. On the one hand, the respondents reflect on discriminatory principles they have experienced and speak for the necessity to stop discriminatory patterns preventing migrants from accessing the labour market, and perpetuating their employment in low-paid, low-skill sectors of the economy. On the other hand, they simultaneously tend to reason that their situation as migrants is as it is because they are “foreigners” and hence need to work harder and put more effort into their life endeavours in order to succeed.

Current debates on integration, though claiming to reflect a fundamental conceptual shift, in fact continue the older attempts to define assimilation.<sup>14</sup> Despite official proclamations that define integration as a two-way process, empirical evidence leaves no room for questioning the reality of the migrants bearing the burden of integration. Whether or not they “are integrated” is their own personal success or failure. Integration therefore appears more “as part of the problem in contemporary migration policy” than as a valuable solution (Pajnik, 2007: 857), particularly because the existing policies ignore the perspective of migrants. Rigid assumptions persist that it is entirely the migrant’s task to adapt to the new environment. Still, research shows not only that most migrants are in fact assimilating but also that they do not necessarily see this as problematic. 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 interviews confirm that migrants adopt the assigned role of newcomers who need to adjust to their new surroundings. The narratives expose, for example, their belief that they need to learn the language of the host state, reasoning that this is simply how things are.

At home we don’t talk in Slovenian and that is also problem. In the beginning I, all that I said was, when I went to the shop I said: “Can I have one white loaf?” That’s all. “Good morning, can I have one white loaf?” If I could take it myself I rather take it myself than ask. And I didn’t speak to nobody. [...] But I’m aware that in Slovenia the official language is Slovenian and if I come to live here, I have to adapt. It’s not that anyone force me that I must, but because of respect, or I don’t know, I cannot go to bank and say in my language, no, I cannot. Because, again, the official language is Slovenian, that’s why I think so, not because of other things. (Sandra, late 20s, Serbia)

Sandra’s narrative highlights the question of the need for migrants to learn the local language. She feels it is necessary to speak the official language and mentions respect for the host society. At the same time, she reports experiencing language barriers, describing her fear of speaking in public because she was unable to speak “properly”. Interestingly, this speaks

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<sup>14</sup> Several synonyms have been used to replace the problematic term assimilation (e.g. adaptation, acculturation, accommodation, incorporation), which can serve as useful tools in describing nuances between different cases. However, when attempting to differentiate between integration and assimilation, particularly as it pertains to contemporary migration policies, such replacement of terms can be problematic because it merely masks the actual continuation of processes that deny any agency to migrants.

against the nationalist claims about migrants as resilient to change and as threatening the “national core values” by their “foreign-ness” (i.e. different language, culture, religion, etc.). While the migrants are not accepting their position at face value without problematising the various exclusionary practices that they encounter because of their supposed Otherness, the narratives also illustrate that they are aware of the harsh reality of their subjugated position, thus their frustration is tied with resolution that they have to fulfil the demands of the host state. They resolve that “integration” is the key to achieving a better position in the host country. And since belonging and being accepted is a significant human desire, people are willing to go to great lengths to achieve it. Put differently, migrants are aware that formal membership (e.g. residence, citizenship) only brings them half way; only belonging in a sense of being considered a member of the nation bears full acceptance. Even though the migrant narratives show that full admittance often remains an unattained goal, it is crucial not to essentialise the wish for belonging to the host nation as something that is significant for all migrants. To the contrary, they may not put much thought into such questions, or may even purposefully chose to refrain from any such endeavours.

Aiming at prevention of discrimination, provisions of Slovenia’s *Aliens Act* stipulate that “national and other authorities, organizations, and associations shall ensure protection against any type of discrimination against aliens based on racial, religious, national, ethnic, or other types of difference.” Although the *Employment Relations Act*, which is the main act regulating work and employment in Slovenia, directly forbids any kind of discrimination based on personal grounds, including sex, nationality or ethnicity, research shows the lack of implementation in practice. Migrants complain that administrative units are “unfriendly to foreigners”; they feel alone particularly when searching for a job, noting that they are treated differently as “foreigners”. As an example, Ada, who came to Slovenia over a decade ago with a UN convoy evacuated from Sarajevo during the siege, reports constant discriminatory practices due to her ethnicity, some tied also to her gender. She speaks of the prejudice that she encountered when looking for a place to live and landlords refused to accept her as a tenant because she is Bosnian. Automatically linking her ethnicity with Muslim religion, the landlords assumed she would have many children and numerous relatives who would all come to stay. Problems related to accessing social benefits, welfare provisions, even healthcare explicated in the narratives are intertwined with issues of migrants’ language proficiency and general stereotypes about “foreigners”, as illustrated in Ada’s experience of coming to a health centre in order to get insulin for her diabetes:

When I went to **doctor**, she wrote prescription for insulin, for that which I’ll need and I was – don’t know – one week in Slovenia and I didn’t speak Slovenian **of course**. Because I just arrived, so I started in Bosnian: “I apologise for disturbing but I have one big request. I just arrive here”. She shut the door in front of my face and said: “**Don’t come here again until you learn Slovene.**” I came home and **cried like mad**. (Ada, 39, Bosnia-Herzegovina)

According to the *Citizenship Act of the Republic of Slovenia*, “foreigners” have the right to obtain Slovenian citizenship via naturalisation after ten years of residing legally in the country. Migrants decide to apply for citizenship particularly if they have been living in Slovenia for a longer time and plan to stay. Those applying have to fulfil additional conditions, such as suitable housing, financial resources, health insurance, etc. In practice, the fact that migrants have to provide evidence of permanent employment manifests itself as the main obstacle preventing them from obtaining citizenship.

### ***Nationalised or Excluded “Foreigner”: Nationalistic Prejudice and Discrimination***

Whereas language proficiency or speaking with a foreign accent serves as an invisible “border guard” that separates “foreigners” from native Slovenian speakers, intolerant reactions based purely on visible difference are also noted in the interviews. Two migrant women in the sample who are from Latin America speak about experiences with xenophobia and racism due to their physical difference (i.e. darker skin complexion). Moreover, several interviewees share the experience of being subjected to unwanted male advances and more general prejudice present in the society about “foreign women” who work in bars and nightclubs, or the stereotypes of women coming from certain particularly stigmatised countries. Particularly migrant women from the former Soviet republics are highly sexualised (Cukut, 2008; Pajnik, 2003).

Only a few years back it was very hard to get apartment, especially for foreign women from East Europe, maybe because of some bad name, such things as happen in Slovenia and also sometimes in South Europe, in more developed countries, because many women sadly come to sell themselves in these countries from East Europe, so that bad name sticks to other women from these countries. And because I come from East Europe too, from Russia, um, I also bump to such obstacles. (Vera, 29, Russia)

Vera speaks of specific stereotypes related to Eastern European women, adding that they affect all women from this region, even preventing them from finding a place to live, since landlords would often deny them tenancy. Stereotypes and prejudice are particularly problematic when they tie in with discrimination. For example, Ada experienced openly discriminatory treatment at one of her numerous (unsuccessful) job interviews:

So they say: “Go on, tell us something about you!” I started: “I’m old so and so many years, blabla, I come from Bosnia.” They say: “**Stop!**” I say: “**Why stop?**” It was man and woman. And 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.” I said, holy moly, that was *straight to your face*. (Ada, 39, Bosnia-Herzegovina)

The women in the sample have usually experienced stigmatisation because of being “foreigners,” and most of them note that on some level they will always feel out of place and not entirely accepted because of their assigned Otherness and difference.

Now when I am citizen it’s easier, but no, although I’m citizen, **I’m always stranger!** I’m still stranger, because people watch me on the street and sure, that woman is stranger, they never will think I’m Slovenian ((laughs)). (Katarina, 44, South America)

They at the Employment Agency said it, too, because I went for interviews I don’t know how many times [...] “**Why doesn’t anyone take you?**” Yes, I’d like to know, too. Because nobody tells, only “YOU’VE NOT BEEN SELECTED.” I understand that, too. Says, “But why, how?” She said: “YOU KNOW WHAT, WHY DON’T YOU CHANGE YOUR SURNAME? YOU’LL NEVER GET JOB WITH THAT SURNAME.” [...] I said: “I won’t, *out of spite*.” And even if I changed it. If my second name, I don’t know, was some Slovene second name, it’d be clear from how I speak, so it’s useless. I lie to myself, not to others. (Ada, 39, Bosnia-Herzegovina)

Katarina’s and Ada’s pronunciations show how this has affected them: Katarina enunciates the sentence about still feeling a “foreigner” despite her Slovenian citizenship and adopting the “Slovenian way of life”, whereas Ada raises her voice when she recounts her experience at the Employment Agency. The xenophobia and social distance reflected in the migrants’ narratives are dealt with in different ways. It may make migrants angry and appalled at such reactions, which may make them more stubborn in resisting such prejudice. Ada’s case, for

instance, illustrates how she refused the proposal to change her last name in order to conceal her ethnic affiliation in the hope of better employability – in spite of her employment counsellor's advice to do so. Yet, strategies of coping with prejudice, while empowering migrants, at the same time reveal just how resilient to change prejudice can really be. Katarina is clearly disappointed at still being perceived as a “foreigner”. Even though the formal aspects such as the language test, residence permit, “Slovenian family life” and, most of all, the citizenship have all been “achieved”, she still experiences social and economic exclusion. The xenophobic portion of the local population is just not willing to “accept” her as their equal and as a “real” Slovenian. For this reason Ada notes that changing her last name would never really help her to “pass” as a Slovenian, because something, particularly her accent when speaking Slovenian, would always “give her away”; thus she would actually be only lying to herself.

## Conclusion

The last two centuries have seen the rise in predominance and ongoing persistence of the national state, indebted to the two hundred years-long state-building process of Western Europe (McCrone, 1998). The modern national state owes its current predominance to the historical fact that its Western European antecedents were militarily and economically so successful that they served as an example which others followed. The role of the modern national state is far from irrelevant, and even globalisation theorists remain ambivalent about the effects of globalisation on national sovereignty. The fact that national states represent a globally applied organising type for political units, while only a small part of the world managed to evade the national organising principle, could be seen as a sign of globalisation processes. While the national states have lost significant share of their influence in terms of political sovereignty and economic power, they continue to hold sway over politics of belonging. By guarding the right to define citizens and thus exclude “foreigners”, the national state has a monopoly of defining “membership within the societal community” (Kivisto, 2003: 21).

This article used the migrants' narratives about their feelings of exclusion from the “community” of the nation, which confirms that national states continue to play a profound role in defining the symbolic boundaries of belonging. Despite the fact that migrants inevitably adjust to their new environment, the inherent requirement of the host states for them to do so needs to be problematised. Rather than focusing on the integration processes through the prism of legal stipulations and formal requirements that are by definition always restrictive for migrants, this article proposed that new approaches to migration and integration policies should be built on assumptions that globalisation processes, though transforming national states, have not brought the end of national identities and exclusionary politics of belonging. The key issue therefore lies in understanding the nationalising practices of national states as these continue to define membership in terms of belonging to the *nation* rather than the political community of the *state*. Migration and integration policies are hence defined through the prism of national identity, while the politics of belonging leaves very little or no room for the agency of migrants.

Unless these problematic practices of national states are confronted, no amount of well-meaning international declarations will yield results. Put differently, it is impossible to understand transnational migration and politics of belonging without exploration of nationalism. As for a “solution” to the nagging question of when do migrants cease being

perceived as outsiders and become accepted as members of the nation, the answer is elusive as always when attempting to explain emotional attachments with rational tools of institutionalised membership. And as long as the nation and the state are inextricably intertwined in the emotional idea of the national self, divisions between members and non-members seem to be here to stay.

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