

‘Citizenship is better than just a labour license’: changing meaning of citizenship in post-Soviet Tajikistan

Based on 14 months ethnographic fieldwork with migrant families in rural Tajikistan, and Russia, this paper explores the process of mass conferment of Russian citizenship on Tajik nationals from the ‘bottom-up’ perspective. Hunt for a Russian passport has become an unavoidable strategy to secure one’s ‘legality’ while remaining and working in Russia in the face of the commercialization of work permits and the politics of forced immobilization through entry bans. Used strategically, citizenship becomes synonymous with ‘legality’ and the promise of better working and living conditions. For this reason mass conferment of Russian citizenship on Tajik migrants does not point to large-scale resettlements processes. On the contrary, Russian citizenship allows migrants to maintain their transnational lifestyles and secure continuous remittances flow. However, strategic uses of Russian passport do not preclude the complexity of hopes and desires people attach to their new statuses. Current understanding of citizenship in the academic discussions about globalization, mobility and transnationality is highly influenced by normative ideas about ‘genuine links’ between people and their legal statuses based on some form of emotional affiliation. Against this backdrop, an emotional affiliation is understood as intimately linked to belonging and lies at heart of the debate about ‘strategic citizenship’. I argue that keeping divergence of legal and emotional selves at the centre of analysis such studies ignore a complex affective relationship people have with their ‘second passports’, which does not necessarily lie in the realm of belonging but is linked to their sense of self in different ways. In order to understand how citizenship takes a particular form in the life projects of Tajiks we need to consider it as an ethnographic category decoupling it from the questions of

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identity, belonging, and political agency. Labelled as 'just a paper' in many accounts about strategic citizenship, for my informants Russian passport embodies multiple contradictory things: loss and opportunity, despair and hopefulness, playfulness and seriousness, transnationality and locality, 'stuckedness' and freedom, exclusion and entitlement to inclusion, certainty and ephemerality of a good life.

Introduction

On that untypically very cold day at the beginning of February 2018, Albina returned very tired from the Russian Consulate in Khujand, her nose turned red from cold but her eyes were sparkling and she declared grinning, 'That's it! On the 22nd of February I'll become Ms Russian'. This was her final trip to deliver some lacking papers to apply for a Russian passport. She started the procedure more than a year ago, in November 2017, and after easily passing the Russian language test she was constantly set back by some unexpected circumstances – some papers were expiring, the others were not matching and she had to put a lot of effort to bring two realities, the reality of her everyday life and the documentary one, together. On that day she dropped by an intermediary 'firm' she paid for preparing the whole pack of her documents for application. It turned out that part of her documents contained different surnames because her ex-husband had been deported and had changed his name to be able to return to Russia many years ago, *'My daughter's birth certificate is for Rahimova, my divorce certificate is for Makhmudova but in reality I am Saidova! They told me they [Russian Consulate] might reject my documents for this reason. When she told me this I felt really bad. At that moment I started to think, ok now it is Friday so today I will not manage to submit. Monday, Tuesday, and Wednesday I have lessons so I will be able to come there only next Thursday. I got so scared!'* But she decided to give it a try and spent 3 hours freezing in the queue in front of the Russian Consulate, *'There were around 15 people ahead of me and*

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*they all were standing there and waiting to be let in. There was one nasty old man there who fought with the guard. He wanted to smoke which is forbidden and he also tried to jump the queue because he is old and demands respect. The guard started to yell if we behave like this they will deport us all! Everyone got scared and then they started to fight with this old man. Such a farce, Lena! I wish I had recorded it on video'. Eventually, she made it in after hours of waiting, 'There was a man, very nice and very polite. He greeted me and told me to stand under the camera and read the oath¹ loudly. I prepared and started to read with articulation', she said laughing mocking the moment she was supposed to feel awed. Albina did not remember the exact wording of the oath, 'There was something like I swear to respect Russian history and culture, obey the law... It was a tiny text. Then when I finished he told me, ok now you're a Russian citizen. Congratulations! They didn't even check my papers! I was really afraid they would check them but it was already lunchtime and they were in a rush. They just took the copies and returned the originals. Then I paid the fees for a travel passport and that's it. When I got out of there I felt so good!' Unlike for many of my migrant informants for whom getting a Russian passport suddenly became a pressing issue, being 'stuck' in Tajikistan after 7 years of work Albina was applying for Russian citizenship 'just in case' (*pust' budet*). 'My sister's husband, who works in Russia, pushed her to apply as fast as possible, and she persuaded me to apply together. She said, anyway you will go to Russia again one day. I had my savings at that time and I thought if I manage I'll get it, if I fail I fail. So I agreed, and we started to collect documents'. Since Albina had a kinship connection, her father and mother working in St. Petersburg for many years had already secured Russian passports, it made her eligible for one of 'fast track' pathways to citizenship and the whole procedure was relatively fast and easy. However, when I was leaving the field in August*

¹ Unlike in the other countries (e.g. Byrne 2014) oath reciting as a means of the state to produce itself as desirable (Fortier 2013) is a very recent development in the Russian citizenship law. It was introduced only in 2017 together with the new regulations concerning revocability of citizenship for 'failed' citizens.

2018 she still had not made any direct use of her brand new Russian passport.

This short vignette opens up a window on complexity of the recent process of a mass conferment of Russian citizenship on Tajik nationals I was confronted with during my fieldwork. It shows that deeply rooted in material documentary forms, acquisition of citizenship implies a certain recognized degree of performativity implicated into the citizenship ceremonies (a language test and an oath) through which the state produces both desired citizens and itself as desirable (Fortier 2013; Merolli 2016). At the same time, this performativity is downplayed by ambiguous bureaucratic practices allowing people to easily bring documentary reality in line with the material one and vice versa resulting in nonchalant attitude of both applicants and bureaucrats. It also points to the inherent uncertainty of this process imposing high demands on applicants' material, emotional and time resources but having an unpredictable outcome. As a result, different kinds of knowledge and expertise about the force of a Russian passport and the process of its acquisition merge leading to the development of economy of migratory knowledge where a particular imaginary of eligibility plays an important role. Last but not least, it indicates the emergence of so-called 'strategic citizenship', which does not diminish the complex affectively charged relationships between people and their new passports. Partly this relationship is rooted in certain geographies of mobility (real or imagined) and revolves around existential (im)mobility concerns closely tied to a potentiality of physical movement. They push people to constantly look for broader horizons under the threat of being trapped in the 'narrow sense of locality' (Chu 2010) or 'displaced in place' (Lubkemann 2008). What is not explicit in this vignette though is that the major 'push-factor' for such a development lies in the realm of recent developments of the Russian migration regime turning transnational labour migration, which had become normalized in private and public spheres of life in Tajikistan, into a costly enterprise potentially keeping a temporary resident subject to forced immobilization at any time.

Recent scholarship has identified the shift towards the growing reliance on deportation and deportability as a routine measure of immigration control (Bloch and Schuster 2005; Peutz 2006; De Genova 2007; Kanstroom 2007; Gibney 2008; Ellermann 2009; De Genova and Peutz 2010; Coutin 2015) as well as a means to exercise social control on the remaining migrant populations (Walters 2002), while reinforcing nation states' sovereignty through restoring the boundaries between 'citizens' and 'aliens' (Anderson et al. 2011). While Russian deportation regime shows many commonalities with the global migration governance trends, the particular technology of 'surreptitious deportation' (Kubal 2016), which relies on the bureaucratic practice of 'blacklisting' (Reeves 2017), seems not to have analogues. The production of deportability in contemporary Russia is mostly realised through the system of re-entry bans, which operates through the database 'State System for Electronic Migration Registration'. The database integrates information about individual migration and resident status, tax payments, criminal and administrative offences, etc. with 11 agencies having access and ability to put a name of an 'undesired subject' on it. Re-entry bans for 3, 5 or even 10 years are imposed on migrants whose names have appeared on the list because they had presumably violated immigration or administrative legislation. However, due to its open-endedness and reliance on other infrastructures and people this system has come to 'embody the uncertainties that are intrinsic to the bureaucratic form itself' (Reeves 2017: 297). Human errors, discretion, linguistic confusion, lack of cooperation between different agencies all have complicated the operation of an 'unbiased machine'. As a result, the number of banned non-citizens has skyrocketed peaking at 1,8 million in February 2016 with around 330000 citizens of Tajikistan, an overall estimated number of Tajik workers in Russia being 886679 as to the beginning of February 2017 (RBK 2017). This contributed to the production of uncertainty on a transnational scale and left the remaining migrants confused about their status. Against this backdrop, demand on a Russian passport

among Tajik citizens has dramatically increased, which produced reverberations in everyday lives of migrants and their families – the development I further explore in my paper.

Theoretical background

A number of studies have shown that the normative idea of liberal citizenship based on the principle of a ‘genuine link’ between people and their citizenship understood as both a legal status and an identity (Bauböck 2018) does not correspond to the reality of ‘fluid’ globalizing world with millions of people leading their everyday lives in transnational spaces rather than nation-state containers (Glick Schiller et al. 1995; Levitt 2001; Amelina and Faist 2012). The rise of supranational, dual, plural and external citizenship caused by liberalization of naturalization procedures and commodification of citizenship around the world has led scholars to question the bond between identity, belonging and citizenship. As a result, they introduced to the scholarly debates such concepts as ‘flexible citizenship’ (Ong 1997), ‘instrumental citizenship’ (Joppke 2018), ‘strategic citizenship’ (Harpaz and Mateos 2018), ‘citizenship of convenience’ (Spiro 2008). The distinction between ‘genuine links’ and ‘useful passports’ (Bauböck 2018) is usually made in the domain of affectivities and speaks to ‘thick’ and ‘thin’ sense of citizenship. While the former implies a form of emotional bond to a legal status of a citizen, the latter stands for a legal status ‘devoid of emotional attachment’ (Yanasmayan 2015) and points to an ‘instrumental orientation’ towards one’s citizenship (Joppke 2018).

Although a number of studies dealing with transnational migration have shown that obtaining a legal status of a citizen of the receiving countries does not necessarily put an end to migrancy and, on the contrary, might facilitate intensification of transnational mobility and eventually, migrants’ return to their countries of origin (Gilbertson and Singer 2003) there

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still seems to be some assumption among those studying citizenship that changing this legal status leads to some inevitable change of emotional affiliation. I think these ideas stem from some kind of ‘citizenship traditionalism’ (Joppke 1999) of national models of citizenship when newcomers are expected to become full members of the receiving societies, naturalization being the final point marking their integration success. Thus, many scholars fall into the trap of ‘seeing like a state’ and keep normative ideas about liberal citizenship as a point of reference in their analysis. Against this backdrop, an emotional affiliation is understood as closely linked to belonging and lies at heart of the debate about strategic citizenship. Harpaz and Mateos (2018) argue that strategic citizenship is a set of ‘bottom-up’ practices resulted from the emergence of opportunities for dual nationality, on the one hand, and restrictive mobility regimes, on the other. These processes indicate commodification of citizenship and ‘tearing-away of its sentimental veil’, degree of mobility an additional passport offers to its holder becoming its key exchange value. In a similar vein, analysing conferment of Russian and Kazakhstani citizenship on Kyrgyzstani migrants, Ruget and Usmanalieva (2009) come to a conclusion they have a ‘pragmatic outlook on citizenship’ defined in terms of ‘concrete, short-term benefits’ such as having a permanent residency registration, higher income, access to better jobs and healthcare.

I argue that by keeping divergence of legal and emotional selves at the centre of analysis such studies ignore a complex affective relationship people have with their ‘second passports’, which does not though necessarily lie in the realm of belonging but is linked to their sense of self in different more subtle ways. This happens because, as a rule, these largely top-down speculations do not problematize a notion of belonging collapsing it with identity and analytically rendering it although constructed but fixed and static entity. In this respect an anthropological perspective on belonging understood not through the prism of categories and boundaries premised on ‘self-other’ dualism but in terms of connections and

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attachments (Edwards 1998; Edwards and Strathern 2000) can offer researchers some analytical purchase. Displacing the focus of analysis on relationalities allows to see that ‘belonging does not primarily refer an individual to a category confronted to another (an Other) category, but rather connects a person to other entities, human and non-human (persons, places, pasts, behaviour, etc.’ (Candea 2010: 124). Employing ideas of a French sociologist Gabriel Tarde and taking on board his distinction between ‘being’ and ‘having’ Candea makes a further analytical leap and considers belonging as a “mutual possession”, - the interrelationship of people, places, and stories into durable assemblages’, which keeps entities open-ended (Candea 2010: 127). In a similar vein, for my informants obtaining Russian citizenship being itself an outcome of certain constantly shifting relationship between the Russian state (in the face of different state agencies competing for resources, see Schenk 2018) and (im)mobile subjects, sets myriads of different threads of relationships (between people, places, documents, borders, etc.) in motion. Each of these shifting relationalities provokes certain emotional responses in people struggling to navigate and strategize a constantly changing transnational field.

The other thread of literature I consider productive to engage with is the studies of so-called ‘affective citizenship’. Appealing as it might seem to be for an anthropologist with multiple opportunities for a meticulous ethnographic analysis, such studies are, however, comprised of top-down approaches focusing on ‘governing through affect’ and production of an ‘affected citizen’ (Isin 2004; Fortier 2010; Johnson 2010). In these studies, affect is broadly understood in terms of emotions and feelings. Thus, they look at which emotions and feelings get endorsed by the state while the others get rejected. In order to engage with emotional responses caused in individuals by the set of practices aimed at getting a Russian citizenship and its material embodiment, a red passport, I would like to stress the distinction between emotions as individual and subjective and affects as relational, being borne by

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relations between people, and objects, e.g. documents (Navaro-Yashin 2007). ‘Affect’ being both a noun and a transitive verb signals actions that simultaneously affect other and oneself (Richard and Rudnyckyj 2009), which makes this category analytically productive for ‘thinking about mutual constitution of subjects and objects’ (Reeves 2015:123). Such an understanding of affect can be productive when thinking about relations between people, their legal statuses, and material forms. As Navaro-Yashin points in her study of make-believe papers, documents are never just material artefacts certified by a complex web of social relations they embody but ‘they are experienced as affectively charged phenomena when produced and transacted in specific contexts of social relations’ (Navaro-Yashin 2007: 81). In a similar way, I will consider what kinds of desires people attach to their passports and what affects emerge as they chase them.

I suggest that in order to understand how citizenship takes a particular form in the life projects of my informants we need to consider it as an ethnographic category. To unpack it I will use productive tensions between strategic and affective citizenship emerging in a particular conjuncture of routinized transnational migration in Tajikistan and recent developments of Russian migration regime, penetrating the everyday life of people and places in unexpected ways and causing affective responses. I will show that this category is informed by both strategic concerns and affectivities emerging as an outcome of complex relations and, in turn, themselves setting certain relations in motion. The nature of the migration regime in contemporary Russia coupled with a distinctive political economy of document production and housing has meant that obtaining a Russian passport is becoming an unavoidable strategy to secure one’s ‘legality’ while remaining and working in Russia. For this reason mass conferment of Russian citizenship on Tajik migrants does not point to large-scale resettlements processes. On the contrary, Russian citizenship allows migrants to maintain their transnational lifestyles and secure continuous remittances flow. Used

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strategically, citizenship gets detached from the issues of identity and political agency but becomes synonymous with the promise of a better life. To stress the dynamic and relational character of citizenship, ethnographically I will be looking at what Russian citizenship does for my informants and what they do to get it rather than what it is or meant to be. Labelled as ‘just a paper’ in many accounts about strategic citizenship, for my informants Russian passport embodies many contradictory things: loss and opportunity, despair and hopefulness, playfulness and seriousness, transnationality and locality, ‘stuckedness’ and freedom, exclusion and entitlement to inclusion, certainty and ephemerality of a good life.

***‘Man grazhdanstvo megiram’*: citizenship as an ethnographic category**

Russian migration regime differentiates between different kinds of foreigners based on their country of origin and their purpose of coming to Russia. There is the system of various statuses available for them, each of which implies certain temporality of stay in Russia and is linked to particular opportunities and limitations. The visa-free border regime makes travel to Russia relatively unproblematic for Tajiks, the real boundaries revealing themselves upon arrival. The presence on the territory of Russia must be marked by obtaining ‘propiska’ (residence registration), an obsolete Soviet time institution initially introduced to bind labour resources to place and limit rural populations’ migration to the capital and other big cities (Light 2010; Nikiforova and Brednikova 2018). Furthermore, to secure ‘legality’ at work migrants need to firstly obtain a labour license (*trudovoi patent*), which is a challenge in itself², and pay monthly fees to prolong it³. Designed as a ‘liberal’ measure to replace a rigid

² The list of necessary documents includes a health certificate based on medical check, private medical insurance, and a certificate of knowledge of Russian language, history, and law.

³ These fees vary depending on the region, e.g. in St. Petersburg it is currently 3800 roubles (\$58) and is gradually rising.

system of work permits based on quotas, patent system, apart from ‘eating away’ a big share of migrants’ income, effectively binds a migrant to a particular region and type of work. To make a patent count as ‘legal’ migrant also needs to sign a work contract, something that the majority of employers are reluctant to do to avoid taxation. On top of that, all these procedures have rather strict temporal regulations and if one failed to secure his full documentedness within 3 months (7 days for residence registration), they have to leave and stay outside Russia for 3 months. Rapid changes in migration legislation⁴ coupled with a distinctive economy of document production and housing, leave migrants to navigate their way in the legal and social environment when ‘it is often difficult for migrants, policemen, employers, and analysts alike to tell whose actions and documentary statuses are ‘legal’ and whose ‘illegal’ according to classificatory register of the state’ (Reeves 2013: 511). Inability to distinguish between formal and informal, official and unofficial translates into people experiencing a never-ending process of documenting their selves as ultimately arbitrary. Against this backdrop, obtaining Russian citizenship is considered to be the only working strategy to secure much desired ‘legality’ and reduce risks and costs of migration.

Although there is a special word for ‘citizenship’ in contemporary Tajik language, ‘*shahrvandi*’, people never use it in everyday conversations and opt for a Russian word ‘*grazhdanstvo*’. Talking about the process of its acquisition they usually say ‘*man grazhdanstvo megiram*’ which is translated as ‘I (will) take citizenship’. They can also ‘give’ or ‘pass’ (*metiyam*) it further to their children or close kin. The same applies to a Russian passport, which sometimes appears as just a ‘red passport’ in conversations. Interestingly, people never specify what citizenship or passport they are obtaining because the Russian one is a default option. It is Russia who serves as the main provider of work, remittances, goods,

⁴ During the time of my fieldwork migration regulations changed at least 3 times. For the full list of changes and ambiguity as a deliberate governing strategy see Schenk 2018.

and hope for a better future life. Thus, citizenship is imagined mainly through its materiality (passports) and functions as some valuable object, which can be taken, given, or passed.

Although many of my informants were not aware of all subtleties of the process of becoming a Russian citizen, they navigated in the complicated system of statuses⁵ through the materiality of papers. Intrinsic materiality of these statuses sometimes led to confusion when people could not quite distinguish between a residence permit and a passport because they both looked like a small book. However, people knew for sure what threads of social relations are set in motion by attempts to acquire any of these statuses. Thus, they knew that fictive marriage results in a ‘blue passport’⁶ (permanent residence permit) within a year while finding a kin connection could guide you to the ‘red passport’ directly sometimes even without need to go to Russia⁷. They also knew they could bargain more effectively with border guards in the region having a ‘red passport’ in their pocket but the ‘blue’ one did not give such an opportunity. They also knew having a ‘red passport’ would increase their

⁵ According to the standard procedure the migrant has to pass through the number of statuses before she is considered eligible to apply for citizenship. The first step on a bumpy road to citizenship is a temporary residence permit (*‘razresheniye na vremennoye prozhivaniye’* or simply RVP) which is valid for 3 years and allows one to stay on the territory of the Russian Federation without need to pay for a labour patent every month and to have a permanent residence registration. However, tangibly reducing expenses on one’s ‘legality’ this status does not make a migrant non-deportable. TRP can be revoked based on the vast list of minor (absence on the territory of the Russian Federation for more than 180 days a year, working in another region than issued the document, failure to submit annual notification to confirm the status, which comes with an income confirmation, two or more administrative violations a year) and major (criminal offense, taking part in terrorist activities, etc.) violations. After TRP had been revoked a migrant is considered to have violated the residence rules and becomes subject to forced removal and imposition of an entry ban for 5 years.

⁶ ‘Blue passport’ is the material manifestation of the next status – a permanent residence permit (*‘vid na zhitelstvo’* or VNZH). It potentially provides a foreign citizen with the whole set of rights full citizens enjoy, apart from eligibility for public office and a right to vote at the federal level but does not impose certain obligations such as conscription. It is valid for 5 years and opens up a path to full citizenship but can be prolonged each 5 years unlimited number of times if one has no intention to become a Russian citizen. However, it is also revocable on the same basis as TRP.

⁷ According to the standard procedure one has to de facto live and work in Russia for years before being able to get a passport. However, the majority of Tajiks obtain a Russian passport via ‘fast track’ procedure. There is a vast list of eligibility for it: having a spouse or a parent, who are citizens of Russia, being born on the territory of Russia and previously having USSR citizenship, being acknowledged as a ‘native speaker’ of Russian, taking part in a voluntary resettlement programme for compatriots (*‘sootchestvenniki’*), having a business on the territory of Russia, investing in Russian economy, being a ‘highly qualified specialist’ working in the country. Some of these criteria make one eligible to apply in Russian Consulates abroad.

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attractiveness on the local marital market and would become an asset in pre-marital negotiations (cf. Rakhmonova-Schwarz 2012 on Kyrgyzstani case).

Emphasis on action (in Russian *'delat' grazhdanstvo*, *to make citizenship*) implies one has to exercise agency throughout the gruelling application process: finding information, looking for kin connections, contacting intermediaries, finding money, doing paperwork, taking language exams, finding ways to correct bureaucrats' mistakes, etc. Indeed, the main feature of the process of moving towards a red passport through the system of different statuses is intrinsic indeterminacy. Although it is imagined as a unidirectional process of changing a temporary resident status to a permanent one, which is materialized in a particular sequence of documents one has to obtain, its high demand on material resources, emotional and time investments from applicants coupled with precarity of migrant labour and contingencies of migrant life constantly set many people back for years.

Loss and opportunity

One day I was sitting in a company of female kin getting ready to welcome guests for some event in the course of the lavish wedding celebration. We were peeling carrots for palov in the warm living room and, as it was habitual, talking about the burden of Tajik traditions. I inquired who lent money for Nodira's wedding. It turned out to be her mother's brother working in Russia for many years. He promised a big amount of money half a year ago when they were 'giving away' their elder daughter but failed to keep his promise as he decided to pay for his labour patent for the whole year instead of delivering monthly payments. This turned our conversation to the challenges of contemporary migrants' life in Russia in comparison to the recent past and Nodira's grandmother sighed, *'Puli Rossiya ado shusos'* (*Russian money is coming to a close*).

During my fieldwork I heard a lot of similar accounts driven by a poignant feeling of shrinking opportunities for work in Russia. Tightening migration rules made temporary move to Russia a costly enterprise. Paired with a practice of ‘surreptitious deportations’ it caused the feeling in my informants and their families that ‘Russia is getting closed’ and is no longer an option for those seeking to quickly earn significant amount of money to be spent on pressing life cycle projects. The 2018 FIFA World Cup in Russia that summer added to migrants’ concerns and feeling of drastically draining opportunities. While simplifying entry for football fans, Russian state introduced a stricter regime of registration: having limited the timeframe for a just arrived person to three days⁸. Moreover, the police have intensified routine practice of document checks and there were a lot of rumours in the community about mass deportations before the championship. In summer, the Tajik Ministry of Labour, Migration, and Employment recommended Tajik nationals to ‘refrain’ from trips to certain Russian cities⁹. Indeed, many preferred to wait it out back home and return to Russia in autumn. This fuelled public fears about mass return of labour migrants, which some experts discursively link to the prospects of growing social tension, risk of radicalization, and violent extremism (IOM 2016). As one of my informants, a former labour migrant, put it, *‘The state is so corrupt! If Russia closes its doors for us we will all bite each other to death here!’* At the same time, people expressed fragile hope that *‘Russia will not leave us’* appealing to the common imperial and Soviet past as well as labour shortage and declining population in contemporary Russia.

Nevertheless, in the course of our family discussions based on meticulous calculations of risks and profits, everyone seemed to have agreed, *‘You can’t do anything in Russia*

⁸ Gulina 2018, ‘Laws of the Game in the Field of the Law’, <https://ru.boell.org/en/2018/07/11/laws-game-field-law>

⁹ Migrantam rekomenduyut ne ezdit’ v Rossiyu v period CHM po futbolu (It is recommended for migrants not to go to Russia during the World Football Championship), <https://migrant.news.tj/post/2116>

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without citizenship these days'. This split migrants into two categories, those who seized an opportunity to get a Russian passport on time and those who failed to do so. Therefore, hunt for a Russian passport appeared to be the major concern for the community. The majority of my interlocutors stressed they or their kin either aimed or were already on their way to Russian citizenship. Sometimes the scope of this collective craving for *grazhdanstvo* reminded me a moral panic – even some fights in front of the Russian Consulate in Khujand were reported. At the same time, possession of a Russian passport could not be left unnoticed in the village and sometimes caused moral commentary on social justice and deservingness. Even schoolchildren perfectly knew who was lucky enough to be a Russian citizen among their classmates meaning they had higher chances for further education abroad and therefore, better life prospects. Chasing this obscure object of desire, people employed their Soviet past privileges, Russian language proficiency, kinship connections, or high qualification to be eligible for one of the pathways to citizenship.

Thus, a Russian passport simultaneously embodies affects of loss and procurance of opportunity for viable livelihood. Experiencing loss is triggered by dramatically shrinking opportunities for work in Russia and affectively charged state of deportability rendering migrants' futures revocable (Reeves 2015). Individual fears of stagnation, forced emplacement, lack of connectivity, cessation of transnational lifestyles indicating the loss of the main livelihood strategy are joined by public fears of loss of social cohesion and peace in Tajikistan as a result of Russia's closure. At the same time, having a Russian passport apart from acting as an 'insurance policy' gives hope for a better future with more options to strategize. It is these affects that stand behind the mass conferment of Russian citizenship on Tajiks. In this sense Russian passport does not signify belonging to some political or territorial entity for my informants but it embodies their desire to secure a certain a set of opportunities they might lose if they do not possess this document.

‘One passport per family is enough’: citizenship as a family livelihood strategy

One day we were discussing the economy of fictive marriages with my host family. I was interested in its bureaucratic side, i.e. how eligibility is produced for a Tajik spouse a migrant has to divorce, in order to get married to a Russian ‘just for the documents’. At some point in the middle of my speculations, Anvar stopped me and said people do not really think in such long-term categories because *‘one passport per family is enough’*. While Russian state considers migrants as individual temporary and ultimately disposable ‘homo laborans’ and limits possible options for legally legible presence of migrants’ families on the territory of the Russian Federation (Nikiforova and Brednikova 2018), migration has long become the main livelihood strategy for transnational households in Tajikistan. It has involved various constellations of family members emplaced either ‘in migration’ or back ‘home’ changing over time (Abashin 2015) and contributing to changing understanding of kinship, family (Aitieva 2015), and community (Urinboyev 2018). Labour migration is highly embedded in family cycles and involves constant passages between temporality and permanence, uncertainty and stability, mobility and sedentariness. Its ultimate goal is set at each stage and is replaced or pushed back by new emerging goals, the collective decision of who stays and who goes being negotiated every time (Abashin 2015: 128).

Family members typically replace each other in Russia, e.g. the eldest son replaces his retired father taking over the responsibility to provide for the whole extended family. Strategies of wealth accumulation for the key family projects as house construction, life-cycle rituals (Reeves 2012; Ilkhamov 2013; Rubinov 2016), purchase of prestigious items, and paying for children’s education often require some collectivist rationality of joint effort and pouring money into ‘one pot’. Repressive Russian migration policies seem to be stimulating

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more people in Tajikistan to get involved into temporary work in Russia replacing those deported or joining migrants to supplement dropping income of those who have been already working there. Scholars point to the rise of family migration from Central Asian countries (Nikiforova and Brednikova 2018) and feminization of migration (Khusenova 2013; Kholmatova 2018) in recent years. Studies have shown migrants keep maintaining their transnational lifestyles and ethos of return even after they had adjusted their de facto status of long-term residents of Russia to the legal one of a citizen (Ruguet and Usmanalieva 2009, Rakhmonova-Schwarz 2012, Aitieva 2015). Although Tajik villages are full of luxurious empty houses, the persistent absence of the whole family does not put an end to multiple affectively charged relationships with their place of origin. In the following vignette I will show the complexity of family strategizing driven by various concerns, which rarely get enough attention in migration literature but are of highest importance for migrants themselves. I will also show the pervasiveness of contingency in migrants' lives and how, as a result, getting a Russian passport becomes a family strategy to grapple with it but is itself highly dependent on multiple contingencies.

I met Sanobar, a tall thin Uzbek woman with always-tired beautiful eyes, in the course of my previous research on migrants' children back in summer 2014. At that time, she was in her early 40s and has been working in Russia for almost 10 years together with her husband, Maksud, and her adolescent sons, Mannon, and Makhrum, who was planning to join the military in Tajikistan soon¹⁰. Her underage children, Mavlud and Raikhon were circulating between their aunts' households changing homes and schools. Later on, upon graduation

¹⁰ Two-year conscription in Tajikistan is another 'push-factor' for young men. Bad conditions and 'dedovshina' endangering young men's lives make it a highly undesirable option for families. Young men generally prefer to 'wait out' conscription times in Russia. Therefore, migration flows get structured in certain ways, and it becomes a hard task to find any young men in local villages in autumn and spring while summer and winter periods are marked with many weddings and house construction activities. Local government trying to attract young men promised to distribute plots of land upon their return from the army but as far as I know never kept this promise.

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from high school Mavlud joined his parents and brothers in Russia. Together with her family Sarvinoz worked as a street cleaner having occasionally some supplementary income from unofficial side jobs. She also collaborated with migrants' rights' defenders in St. Petersburg to help her compatriots fix variety of document issues, claim their unpaid wages, and sometimes just provided newcomers with a place to stay. All in all, she seemed to be an active, respectable and well-situated person in the migrant community.

I followed Sarvinoz and her husband to Tajikistan in the summer 2014 to find out they had made very little progress despite many years of work in Russia – a small two-bedroom house ideally accommodating only one nuclear family unit¹¹ and a 'Nexia' car Maksud insisted to buy to keep up with his classmates made up all their possessions. Later on, narrating her life history Sarvinoz explained they were constantly set back by a family conflict, in-laws demanding more money and cheating them in the house construction process. Although the present was not very cheerful, Sarvinoz was exhausted and was suffering from regular migraines, which she ascribed to her 'nerves being tired' (*'moi nervi ustali'*), the imaginary future was a way brighter, and I remember how fascinated I was by her planning activities. Every early morning, sitting outside their modest house and drinking green tea Sarvinoz mentioned yet another plan they aimed to fulfil soon: another effort and they will marry off their two sons, together on the same day; another two years of work and they will build two more rooms and rebuild an old kitchen; another year and she will return and stay home eventually to take well-deserved rest, her daughter-in-law doing all the household work. Although temporal horizon was changing every day, her plans were generally very detailed and anchored in material reality. She fantasized about current fashions

¹¹ A traditional Tajik house (hovli) is comprised of a number of residential and agricultural buildings arranged around the courtyard, usually inhabited by several generations or/and nuclear family units.

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in migrant houses construction, new opportunities to create ‘*sharoit*’ (living conditions), and possible venues for her sons’ weddings.

However, rapid changes in Russian migration regulations jeopardized Sarvinoz’s return plans: from 2015 on she had to bear dramatically increased costs of labour patents for five people, which annihilated their common efforts to accumulate and resulted in constant deterring of their plans. Every time I called her she promised to invite me to her sons’ weddings ‘next summer’. She felt a lot of pressure because traditionally Tajiks marry their children off according to seniority. Her youngest daughter was approaching her marital age and they had not married off elder sons yet. Finally, when they managed to finish the main construction works and get ready to welcome a bride at home, Mannon, a would-be groom, fell in love with an elder divorced migrant woman in Russia, rebelled, and left his parents in deep frustration. Perceiving their son’s detour as temporary they were planning to organize one wedding in January and another one in August 2018 but had to postpone their plans again due to more urgent need to ‘make documents’ (‘*sdelat’ dokumenti*’). As Sarvinoz complained in our telephone conversation, *‘I need to make documents again, this is 72 thousand (1115\$)! It’s such a shame you’re not here. We would have made ‘fiktivniy brak’ (fictive marriage): Maksud would get married to you and I’d get it through him in a couple of years. We also need to find some girl to ‘make ZAGS’ (sdelat’ ZAGS)¹² with for Mavlud. It would make it so much easier! Now I pay 15 thousand (230\$) for patents every month, 16 (250\$) – for rent, and we cannot put anything aside! I wish I hadn’t listened to my husband’s brother! We had an opportunity back in 2012 but he insisted we didn’t get divorced. Such a fool! Now there’s*

¹² ZAGS is an abbreviation from Russian ‘Zapis’ actov grazhdanskogo sostoyaniya’ or registration office where people register their marital status, newly born children, etc. Appealing to fictive marriage as one of possible ways of gaining eligibility for ‘fast track’ citizenship procedure my informants often used ‘ZAGS kardam’ which literally means ‘I made ZAGS’.

one old woman ('babushka') but Maksud is afraid because she's 70. What if they understand?'

Despite her close engagement with migrants' documents Sarvinoz has never been concerned with applying for a Russian passport herself before new migration regulations came into force and restructured their family budget cutting opportunities for accumulation. In this sense, obtaining Russian citizenship can be conceived of as a purely strategic enterprise. Since for Sarvinoz it is a family strategy to maintain the same level of income to accumulate wealth in a short-term perspective it is insignificant what family member will eventually obtain it first. In this respect, 'one passport per family' is indeed enough as firstly it reduces costs and risks of labour migration and secondly entitles other kin to apply if needed. Short-term perspective implies certain rationality and dictates a very pragmatic outlook on citizenship. It is not only a matter of becoming a Russian citizen but getting a red passport 'here and now' for as Maksud put it, '*How on earth do I know where I will be in 3 years?'* and then listed the crucial family projects yet to be fulfilled.

At the same time, Sarvinoz's desire to obtain a Russian passport is obviously driven by an affect of loss caused by Russian migration policies. But this is not just a loss of work, money, or physical mobility; it is in a way a loss of 'existential mobility' (Hage 2005), a feeling that one is progressing in her life by getting closer to a desired future. For Sarvinoz this future is imagined as a respectful return to Tajikistan and getting a status of a proper gendered person in the community, which Russian citizenship can paradoxically facilitate. The feeling of lack of progress and 'stuckedness' (Hage 2009) is a result of Sarvinoz's being caught up in constantly shifting relationalities – changing migration rules and regulations, jeopardizing her stay in Russia are mapped onto multiple acts of balancing her position within family and community hierarchies and renegotiating temporal horizons of their migration and return. Against this backdrop, she believes that getting a Russian passport

would help her to navigate this transnational field of uncertainty and retain the feeling of ‘moving well enough’ (Jansen 2014).

Conclusion

The rise of transnational mobility coupled with inequality of its distribution around the globe embodied in violent enforcement of restrictive mobility regimes leaves many people with a few opportunities to enhance their life chances. Obtaining a second passport in many contexts becomes some kind of ‘insurance policy’ against emplacement in contexts with scarce resources. Pointing to the deformation of the main idea behind liberal citizenship linking individual to a political community through some emotional affiliation, political scientists have coined new terms ‘strategic citizenship’ or ‘instrumental citizenship’. These terms index divergence of legal and emotional selves, a situation when people relate to their new legal statuses in terms of pragmatic short-term benefits rather than identify with the respective communities. To my mind, by stressing lack of belonging of new citizens such accounts overlook complex affective relations people can have with their ‘second passports’, which do not necessarily lie in the realm of belonging to a certain political community. They emerge as an outcome of ‘mutual possession’ of people, places, and objects. In this respect, I believe an anthropological perspective can enrich these approaches by engaging with qualitative empirical data and look what people reckon on citizenship and what threads of social relations get embodied in a passport.

In my analysis based on an extensive ethnographic fieldwork in Tajikistan and Russia I tried to use the productive tensions between ‘strategic’ and ‘affective’ citizenship to engage with the idea of citizenship as an ethnographic category. By showing what Russian citizenship does for people and what they do to get it I looked at how citizenship get shaped

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by a particular conjuncture of normalized transnational migration in Tajikistan and recent developments of Russian migration regime. Russia's inconsistent migration policy resulted in a strong desire to obtain Russian citizenship to secure one's stay and work on the territory of Russia, which resonates in everyday life of a distant village in Tajikistan setting in motion one connections and cutting the others. While there are many similarities between Euro-American and Russian migration regimes, extreme instability of migration norms, documents, networks, and people seem to be a distinct feature constituting the reality of migrants' life in an affectively charged condition of deportability in Russia. Against this backdrop, a Russian passport embodies non-deportability and getting it becomes a strategy to grapple with legal indeterminacy by securing much desired 'legality'. However, as migration is enmeshed in transnational family cycles a mere fact of possession of a Russian passport does not reveal much about current person's mobility practices and future plans. Rather than anchoring migrants in Russian cities it becomes yet another strategy to maintain transnational lifestyles and contribute to persisting family commitments and obligations.

Strategic as it might seem to be, Russian citizenship is a highly affective matter for my informants. These affects, however, are not properties inherent to individuals or objects but emerge as an outcome of complex constantly shifting relations between people, places, migration regimes, documents, and money. As a result, Russian passport embodies loss and opportunity, 'stuckness' and movement, uncertainty and a promise of stability, materiality and ephemerality of a good life. Such an approach to citizenship allows to keep in place both strategic aspects of citizenship by looking at its concrete benefits for people and its affective dimension, which meet in a specific form citizenship takes on in a particular context of highly normalized transnational migration.

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