

Activist Citizenship in Divided Societies: Social Movements in North Macedonia

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Introduction

Citizenship in divided societies presents many questions ranging from status, to practice and the lived experience of individuals within a given state. While the issue of status, whether an individual possesses citizenship or not, is usually more straightforward, the issue of practice of citizenship presents a contentious and under-researched field in divided societies. The practice of citizenship in divided societies is oftentimes studied from a more legal viewpoint, that of the practice of human or minority rights, but not about the enactment of rights and ways of being a citizen. Herein the study of social movements in divided societies presents a way to research citizenship as practice. The case study of the recent social movements in North Macedonia, starting in 2015 with the Student Plenums, showcase how different groups in a divided society access, practice and negotiate their citizenship. Researching the Protestiram and the Colorful Revolution movement in Skopje, and the Eco Guerilla movement and the Protestiram protests in Tetovo, showcase four different ways in which mobilization is negotiated and attained in the context of divided societies. They also show how individuals of different groups negotiate their own role within them, and what it means in the larger context of the relation between a citizen and the state. Considering that social movements are an act of citizenship (Isin 2008; 2009), the figure of the activist citizen (Isin 2009) becomes an important analytical tool through which to frame the practice of citizenship in a divided context. That is because citizenship is rife with meanings of belonging and membership which go beyond status (Source) and imply ways of being which serve to exclude those who do not belong into the popular narrative of those who are representative of the nation-state. In a

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divided society these exclusions create a bitter taste for citizenship among communities which are not part of this narrative, namely members belonging to different ethnic, national, sexual, or gender groups. The concept of activist citizen puts the emphasis on the act and not on the status (Isin 2009), on the agency of the individual and the active reiteration and practice of citizenship, and as such resolves a conundrum within research in divided societies.

New citizenship paradigms in divided societies

Isin defines acts of citizenship as ‘those acts that transform forms (orientations, strategies, technologies) and modes (citizens, strangers, outsiders, aliens) of being political by bringing into being new actors as activist citizens (that is, claimants of rights) through creating or transforming sites and stretching scales.’ (Isin 2009, 383) Thus, the image of the citizen here is expansive and not tied to a particular identity, but to an action, or to a way of being within a political body. As Isin notes, “thinking about citizenship through acts means to implicitly accept that to be a citizen *is* to make claims to justice: to break habitus and act in a way that disrupts already defined orders, practices and statuses” (Isin 2009, 384). If we consider this aspect in a divided society, I believe it provides for a novel interpretation, whereby the focus is not on the contested identities but on how a citizen relates to the state and acts within it. Justice here serves as a principle, in terms of expanding rights towards a more just, equitable society. Furthermore, looking at citizenship as a practice and not as a status in divided societies allows researchers to look beyond the possession and into the quality of rights, and the level of the feeling of inclusion to a certain extent. As acts of citizenship require an active participation and debate of state affairs, it is those individuals that consider themselves subject to the state or as having a stake in the state that act on their own citizenship, and this may also include non-nationals or ‘aliens’. The concepts of “modern citizenship rights draw from the nation-state typically include civil (free speech and movement, the rule of law), political (voting, seeking electoral office) and social (welfare, unemployment insurance and health care) rights” (Isin and Turner 2002, 3). Activist citizenship, on the other hand, tries to expand these rights, and it leaves it upon the claimants to make the initiative. By studying activist citizenship in divided societies, researchers can have a more in-depth view into the practices of citizenship, who participates and how. Most importantly, it might lead to new

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approaches of how researchers study cross-cleavage identities, which does not involve policies from above, but participation from below.

The concept of activist citizenship offers a useful narrative because it combines the inclusionary practices of citizenship and social movements. It is a way of being a citizen which is ongoing and constantly re-examined. It is also a way of engaging with and enacting the role of citizenship, namely in participating and creating a relation with the state. Young argued that a “fundamental ideal of political inclusion is the participation of everyone in political decisions that affect their living conditions” (Young, 2000 cited in Rogstad and Vestel 2011, 224). Or what Habermas termed ‘co-authorship’ (ibid.). This point of co-authorship- of being and acting within a political community- is often lost when studying divided societies. Research does debate on the issue of the loyalty or belonging that non-majority groups feel towards a state, the rights that they have within a state, and their implementation. However, there is less engagement with the aspect of how they interact with the state, if at all. Furthermore, the aspect connecting practices of citizenship for all citizens is also often lacking, thus removing the opportunity to research ways in which solidarity is built and maintained in divided societies. Bloemraad strongly argues that citizenship should be analyzed through claims-making (2017), focusing particularly on immigrant communities or on refugees, which is a very valuable avenue of research considering global developments. However, the view of citizenship as claims-making is valuable also when analyzing societies more broadly, and particularly divided societies where different groups might enjoy different points of access to the ‘full benefits’ of citizenship, which would include rights, practice, and belonging.

It is a tall order, to view citizenship through this lens. Using the term of activist citizen is a good place to start. As discussed in the previous chapter, the term activist citizen places the focus into the quality of citizenship, investigating the interaction between the citizen (and non-citizen) and the state. Bloemraad argues that studying citizenship as claims-making necessitates a relational approach as claims-making is “a relational process of recognition” (Bloemraad 2017, 11) as “people or groups make claims on others, including but not limited to state officials or government institutions.” (Bloemraad 2017, 2) She argues that by “studying citizenship as claims-making, we can broaden scholarship beyond typologising citizenship – that is, enumerating how it is (or is not) made up of status, rights, participation, and identity – and move to identify the mechanisms through

which making claims on citizenship has power.” (Bloemraad 2017, 17) Although this study also typologizes citizenship as it considers participation and identity when assessing the quality of citizenship in divided societies, it seeks to do so in order to uncover ways and mechanisms in which citizenship infers power. Herein the conceptualization of what makes an activist citizen and what counts as acts of citizenship is important.

Social movements and citizenship have been intertwined throughout the development of modern states (Tarrow 2011, 27). Sydney Tarrow goes as far as arguing that contentious politics “has characterized human society from whenever human society can be said to have begun.” (Tarrow 2011, 89) Contentious politics and social movements have served to expand the borders and meaning of citizenship, and many authors allude to their potential in changing the borders of citizenship (Balibar 2015; Marshall 1969; Tilly and Wood 2013). The social movements that have occurred in the past 10 years in Southeast Europe have shown a “level of civic engagement and activist citizenship [in] countries that we were told had ‘weak’ civil societies and very little civic participation” (Fagan and Sircar 2017, 1337). Protests and movements have appeared at the national and at the local levels which have created new narratives of being a citizen, seeking to re-draw conceptualization of justice, public space, and the role of the state. An additional consideration is the acknowledgement that these movements and protests have occurred in societies where the “legacies of authoritarianism, combined with the two decades of post-socialist, post-conflict development, have led to a particular depoliticization of these countries” (Fagan and Sircar 2017, p.1339). This context had imposed additional challenges of mobilization and contention which make the appearance of these movements worth studying and researching more in depth.

For this paper I utilize the definition developed by Tilly and Wood which outlines social movements as having three crucial components 1. a sustained and organized manner of claim-making on a given authority; 2. a repertoire of actions such as, but not exclusive to, public meetings, marches, pamphlets etc. and 3. a display of WUNC: worthiness, unity, numbers and commitment (Tilly and Wood 2013, 4). This definition of social movements combines the three elements and sets clearer outlines for defining social movement in contrast to other forms of contention. It also provides a framework for analyzing social movements more in depth, however,

it lacks in providing a framework for the study of social movements in divided societies. Although WUNC is a helpful tool in the assessment of social movements beyond more technical indicators, it does not help in studying social movements in divided societies, as there is no indicator whether the participation in the movement is diverse. Admittedly, the diversity of groups is not a prerequisite for social movements in any society whether it be divided or not, but for the purposes of this study it is very important, therefore a new definition or categorization is required. How can we assess if different ethnic or social groups attended and felt a shared sense of unity in the movement, and whether the movement was inclusive, in their message and actions, of such groups? In this new definition, particular to divided societies claims would matter, as that is what would define what the movements stands for and whether it is commonist in nature, meaning it is movement which “fosters momentary cross-cleavage unity on certain political issues that are of salience to all ethnic groups. [...] Rarely would they mobilize for a sustained period beyond the initial targets specified by the movement at the outset” (Nagle 2015, 48). In the selected case studies the issues range around rule of law, change of government, justice and environmental issues.

Movement/ Criteria	Claims	Timeframe and intensity	IAC	Social Movement
<i>Protestiram</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes-Partial	Yes
<i>Colorful Revolution</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes-Partial	Yes
<i>Eco Guerrilla</i>	Yes	Yes	Yes- Partial	Yes
<i>Tetova Protests</i>	Yes	No	Partial-No	No

In order to explore the build-up of the movements, I start the analysis with #Protestiram in Skopje as it is the first to be placed on a temporal plain, considering their strong association with the protests against police brutality that started in 2011 as a result of the murder of Martin Neshkovski. Then I will introduce EcoGuerilla in Tetovo, as its temporal positioning is somewhat most in congruence with Protestiram, to continue with Tetovo Protests, and to finish with the Colorful Revolution. All of the case studies occurred during a highly sensitive period, while the Colorful

Revolution happened in the midst of a deep political crisis resulting from the 10 year rule of the VMRO-DPMNE led government in North Macedonia characterized as a semi-authoritarian regime (Bieber 2020). In 2015, the leader of the opposition party, SDSM, begun releasing wire-tapped conversations of top government officials uncovering abuse of power and corruption. They also revealed that the wire-tapped conversations were a result of the illegal wire-tapping of 20,000 citizens in the country by the state's Administration for Security and Counter-intelligence (Georgievski 2015). In addition, the VMRO led rule was marked by increased ethnic tensions and nationalist rhetoric which sustained strong clientelist networks operated between the ruling partners. In brief, as Gjuzelov and Hadjievaska (2020) note, it was a government which sustained illiberal politics, by affecting the institutional and the symbolic frameworks of the state. This is the context within which all four case studies gained momentum, and which defined their methods of organization and their contentious claims in different ways. The findings of this paper are based on interviews with activists in Skopje and Tetovo as well as participant observation of the protests of Colorful Revolution and Tetovo Protests and review of their social media presence.

Protestiram

Martin Neshkovski was a 22-year-old man from Skopje who was killed by a policeman at a celebratory rally on VMRO-DPMNEs win in the 2011 elections (Jakov Marusic 2011). These events unraveled around midnight on 6 June, and on the 7th of June, while there was still confusion over the events and details of the killing, individuals on Facebook started calling for protests against police brutality where hundreds of people participated (Flock 2011) and these became the protests known as “Стоп на полициската бруталност” [Stop to police brutality] which were repeated in 2012 (YouthEduForum 2012) and 2013 (Akademik 2013). Eva recalled the moment and why she decided to join those protest “I haven't had a victim or something in my family from police brutality, but the whole situation really hit me, and from every day of going to the protests I even became part of the board organizing the protests ‘Stop to police brutality.’ And that was the first thing which drew me into street activism.” These protests were mentioned by 10 other activists who I interviewed in Skopje as protests that they had attended or protests that had started their activism. These protests also had a strong social media presence, as the banner that was used for

the protests was used as a banner for photos on individual Facebook photos of activists, and as badges which mostly young people would wear. The 6th of June, became an important date for both Protestiram and for the Colorful Revolution as it marked a clear moment of awakening as well as a vindication for the death of Martin Neshkovski, which many saw as symptomatic of the regime. Reflecting on the violence of the regime, and on the Martin Neshkovski protests, Sanja said of the protests and their effect “it was shown that that is mobilizing strength of these citizen, their understanding at last, that this regime kills.”

The abuse of power of the government became evident on 5th of May of 2015, when the leader of the opposition released the 29th “bomb” which stated “Listen: A special unit operative killed Martin Neshkovski, Gruevski knew of it and hid it”(SDSMtube 2015). The wiretapped conversations involves a few conversations between high level functionaries of the government including the Minister of Internal Affairs Gordana Jankulovska and the PM Nikola Gruevksi, among others. The first call between the Minister of Internal Affairs Gordana Jankulovska and Ivo Kotevski, the PR of the same Ministry, where details are given to her about the event by the latter, where it is discussed as if nothing happened, with the minister Jankulovska claiming “today is winning” referring to the celebratory post-election mood. All subsequent conversations develop over trying to figure out what happened, showcasing the callousness of the regime with the people involved oftentimes blaming the victim as a “narkoman” [junkie] (*ibid.*) , speaking of covering it up, and the whole event is taken as “such things happen” as is hear being said by both the Minister Jankulovska and Sasho Mijalkov in conversation, where it is also clearly stated that the officer was on duty and that he had committed the crime (*ibid.*). It is listening to these conversations which added up to half an hour video, which brought many people to protest in front of the government the night of the 5th of May, after a call by Martin’s brother saying that he would be protesting at 17.00 that same day (Jordanovska 2015).

Several activists described their attendance in that protest, and in explaining it gave me a strong impression of how formative this moment had been for them. Describing that moment, Eva² talked about how she physically was one of the first to cross over the barricades in front of the government

² The names of all interviewees are code names for the purposes of maintaining their anonymity. Details on interview dates and locations can be found in the reference list.

with Martin's brother and her friends. Kire described how people gathered, and he took pictures and posted photos for people to see what was happening, observing from afar as people overcame the police barricades. Eggs were thrown on the government building, the police started getting more violent, which as Kire says, if that would not have happened "at that protest, Protestiram would not have happened if that night the police had not acted the way that it did." Mihail also credited this protest as the birth of the Protestiram movement, as he put it "the night that they played [the wiretaps] about Martin Neshkovski's murder, and on the 5th of May we came out, and that was unorganized, there was an escalation, yes. And now, in the coming days, Protestiram was formed [...] the very idea of Protestiram, first person singular, 'I protest' meant everyone could find themselves in it." Protestiram, or #protestiram, as it was always accompanied by a hashtag, which highlights the social media aspect of it, as news was being shared and plans made over Facebook using the hashtag. Over the next few days, the movement grew beyond the Martin Neshkovski case, to include other moments of injustice of the regime.

Protestiram started having daily protests at 18.00 starting at different locations, depending on the what they were protesting on a given day, which usually connected to the details which were revealed at the continuing revelations of the wiretapped conversations. Two actions stood out to the protesters, one was the action in support of the refugees, as the activists decided to march to the Gazi Baba Reception Centre where it was revealed that refugees from Syria and other places were being held in dire conditions (Протестирам 2015). For Aida and Eva this had been a significant day, and one that they both remembered fondly. Aida described the effect that this had had on the refugees, that it had meant a lot to them, and this is one reason she liked Protestiram a little more (than the Colorful Revolution) because "every day we protested on different topics and the height of their sincerity was when we protested in front of Gazi Baba [...] they did not choose their battles at all, whether they were popular or not." In addition, the Protestiram movement organized guerilla actions, most notably, they attended a theatre production of "Lisistrata" and mid play stood up with masks and posters with "Protestiram" printed on them, took pictures and left. As the activists declared for the media, this was done as a "sign of revolt to the participation of art and theatre" (A10H 2015). Notably, the Protestiram protests also sparked the organization of the 17th of May "General Protest" which was a massive protest organized by the opposition party, SDSM, in conjunction with Protestiram, NGOs, other opposition parties, including Albanian

parties, the Student Plenum, and other informal networks. The protest grew a very large crowd, and the different groups had different starting points around the city, to show that the protest was not just of one actor, ending in a big rally in front of the government building. The 17th of May protest became another benchmark event, particularly important to the opposition party in establishing their legitimacy, but also marking new coalitions between different actors.

The Protestiram movement also introduced a theme which would be ongoing, that of highlighting the “multi-ethnicity” of the protests – check for photos if this is correct. As Kire noted when recalling the events of the 5th of May “what was interesting was that for the first time the Macedonia, Albanian, Turkish and Serbian flags appeared here, and no one had a problem with it. So no one looks at who is who.” This practice was also evident on the 17th of May protests, which is an aspect the protest became popular for. The 17th of May protest also paid tribute to the use of different languages, particularly as representatives of the Student Plenum spoke in Macedonian and Albanian. One of the speakers, Hana, who spoke in Albanian recalled the moment “I felt like crying when I saw how many people were there and I was speaking Albanian. You know? It was hard to believe that after such a long time someone could speak in Albanian and enjoy it.” She was right to enjoy this moment, considering that it had indeed not been a usual occurrence to have both languages used, and receive the same amount of cheers. In North Macedonia such rallies are usually held by political parties, which largely cater to ethnically homogenous crowds, thus the use of bilingualism was rare, but became more frequent with the protests. The activists also translated posts into Macedonian, Albanian, and at times Turkish and Aida spoke of how her friends who were Turkish, Albanian and Bosniak would join her to the protests. Protestiram organizationally was aware of the need for inclusivity and despite ceasing protests in the first week of June, left important lessons of mobilization in an authoritarian and divided city.

EcoGuerrilla

Pollution has been a problem in North Macedonia and other countries of South-eastern European for a few years. Tetovo, has often topped the list of cities with most pollution not only in the region but in the world in the past years. In December 2013, when EcoGuerrilla activists organized their first protest, as Labinot tells it, „in our first protest we had realistically around 200-300 people,

eventhough then, you could not see anything from 2-3 meters, the visibility was very low, but at that moment people were still not perceiving pollution as a big problem”. The pollution in Tetovo had several causes, including home heating with wood, old cars in traffic, the landfill of the city, and most notably the Jugohrom factory at the outskirts of the city which operated no filters. As Labinot noted, the 2013 protests did not have many people in attendance, but it did have a few famous musicians and activists as well as a set symbolic narrative, with the posers with a yellow background and black letters that became famous as the colors of the movement. These colors were chosen because they were the posters that the Ecoguerilla activists first used for a protest against chemical weapons in front of the Albanian Embassy in Skopje, as Labinot explained, these colors represent danger, and that this would be understood in any language. The EcoGuerilla activists proceeded organizing a few protests in the next year like the 2014 protests in front of Tetovo’s landfill (Xhaferi 2014) as another important pollutant of air in the city and its surroundings. However, the mobilization of protesters gained strength in 2015, which was the result of an almost 2 year attempt by activists to raise awareness and provide information on the issue.

The EcoGuerilla³ efforts were built on the work on activists who founded the group, the activists of Mother and Child, and high school activists who were mobilized as part of the High School Students Protests which occurred during 2014. These groups did a lot of movement work before organizing protests in informing citizens of the dangers of pollution and how it affected their health. As Sara explained, they “held [the meetings] in coffee shops [...] we talked, ‘we started this way and this is how we want to continue, what do you think?’ [...] Then we started meeting with experts who had information, because it was of great importance to correctly answer their questions, to gain people’s trust.”. The activists also had a very active social media campaign, held press conferences, and distributed informational flyers, according to Labinot they had distributed “around 20,000 information sheets, and we distributed them door to door.” They also placed a billboard with words “Welcome to the most poisoned city in Europe” at the city’s entrance, as “then [Tetovo] was top 1” as Labinot recalls. The different methods of information and visibility

³ EcoGuerrilla for the purposes of this study signifies the movement, including its partners such as Mother and Child [Nëna dhe Fëmija] and the High School Student Union. As a result of the movement, the founders formed an organization of the same name, which I will refer to as OEG.

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were important to the activists, because they wanted to reach a wider audience, as Sara highlighted “our first aim was to have access to people who are not online, who don’t have Facebook, [...] because the masses would be larger that way, and we took it upon ourselves that everyone in their own collective, in their family, in different places, we would talk. But first you needed to be informed, not to say nonsense.” It was clear in my conversations with the activists that they were indeed very well informed, explaining to me data and numbers on how pollutants work, what is a PM10 particle and what is a PM 2.5 particle, which sounded to me to be like a lesson they had repeated many times before. According to Gent, this information-based approach “marked a new initiative [frymë] which started to inform people above all, and not to mobilize, but to inform them. People now were conscious of what kind of air they are breathing, and their consciousness could now told them what needed to be done.”

These methods of doing movement work before the protests or any contentious action occurred was particularly useful in the context of Tetovo, as a second city, it is oftentimes isolated to events happening in Skopje. Most of the protesters I spoke to in Tetovo complained about the *mentality*, and it was the people’s mind that needed to be changed before action could take place. In Skopje, the work of informing protesters was largely done by the wire tapped conversations which were released by the opposition, and then mobilization was organized through social media and tapping into some already existing networks of activism including the activists against police brutality, the activists of AJDE and then the activist networks of the Student Plenum and Protestiram which made the Colorful Revolution possible. This is not to say that mobilization in Skopje did not pose its challenges, the most significant of which was fear of the regime and its suppressive methods (loss of jobs, detention or jail), however the information bubble was burst by the wire tapped conversations. In Tetovo, this work had to be done by the activist groups from scratch. “Mother and Child”, which was a Facebook group for mothers to share thoughts and concerns, which started getting mobilized once air pollution became a problem for their children and their own health. EGO provided support so that Mother and Child could start organizing activities. Mother and Child was strategically used to incite emotion, this is not to say that the emotions the mothers were feeling was disingenuously portrayed, but EGO knew that Mother and Child could be more effective in conveying emotion and being heard, considering that they shared personal stories of having had abortions and other health problems due to the polluted air. As the activists tell it, the

Mother and Child became famous due to its first action of the toy exchange for children in 21 March 2015. As Drita says they organized it “on ecology day⁴, very ironic.” under the protest slogan “We exchange toys for filters” (Zylbeari 2015). Children and their mothers protested, with children bringing their toys which were to be donated to their children in the hospital. These protests followed two protests which had been held in 2015, and which kept being built up ending in large protests in the end of 2015.

December proved to be the pinnacle of the movement, as the air quality kept worsening, and people had started understanding what was causing the pollution and how damaging it can be. Based on data from 2015, in December the air quality in Tetovo in the density of PM 10 particles was categorized as either “unhealthy”, “very unhealthy” or “hazardous” for most days of the month (AQI, n.d.). The situation got to the point that mothers decided not to send their children to school. Sara portrayed the decision making “EG was organizing protests the whole time, there were people, the phase of awareness raising was done, that night [when pollution values had reached the highest recorded number] we were online the whole time... no one let their children go to school [...] so that the situation wouldn’t be abused, the mayor decided to close schools for a week. This did not irritate us, it activated us.” On 16 December 2015, the schools were closed (Selimi 2015) and activists were already protesting and organizing guerilla actions. On the 17th December, EGO and Mother and Child announced a massive protest which involved the blocking of all entry points into Tetovo. The high school students started the protests as Rilind shared with me “the high school students were brilliant, they were the first and I was partially happy, and partially worried... we had announced the protests on 17 and 18 December, they started on 15 December, and threw eggs at the municipality of Tetovo.” On the 17th as the roads were blocked, Sara and Drita recalled that this made a big difference as there were people from nearby villages who could not come to Tetovo due to the street blockades. Dren recalled that “the number got so big, that we simply covered the whole street, the main street. That was something we did not expect to happen, that so many people would show up, and we were happy they came [...] In Tetovo sometimes you could not even go outside, so we rebelled and we all came out.” The two protests indeed gathered large crowds and were visible in the media, which pushed the government to close the factory until it

⁴ In North Macedonia, ecology day is marked on 21 March which is the International Day of Forests. In the country this is usually celebrated by planting trees or cleaning school yards.

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had installed filters, which did not occur, and the factory reopened and re-closed again in different stages.

Colorful Revolution

On 12 April 2016, President Ivanov issued a pardon to all politicians implicated on the wiretapped conversations (Jakov Marusic 2016), thus pre-empting any convictions or cases by the Special Prosecutor's Office which was first established in 2015 as one of the steps towards the resolution of the political crisis (Magleshov 2020). That same night, citizens took to the streets to protest (BBC 2016) the decision. Some activists that I interviewed described the night as having started with a Facebook post by a civil society activist who declared that he would be going in front of the SPO to show support. As Eva tells it, after this call "we went in front of the SPO as a sign of support, because SPO blamed them and we should have gone to the President['s office] but I do not know why I didn't think of that." In front of the President's Office which stands on one of the main streets which goes through the centre of Skopje, the protests got violent as enraged citizens threw chairs and other objects towards the office. It must be noted that this was not the President's Vila where he stays, but his public relations office for citizens in the city. While some protestors were civil society activists, including many of the people who ended up getting arrested during the first two evenings, many were citizens who wanted to show their outrage. Eva also highlighted this, saying "at the beginning there was a great revolt of the citizens, they broke the office of the President, that was not organized, that was revolt, no one could control that." Indeed, the first few days while the protests were going on, which were also the violent days of the protests, no one seemed to be in control, and there was no official organization. It was only after the 3rd day that some things started coming into shape and the #Protestiram network was reset.

The Colorful Revolution was initially named by a journalist, Kristina Ozimec, in an article for Deutche Welle after the first week of protests (Ozimec 2016a), and as some activists noted, the name stuck since they liked it. The name was a reflection of the color-filled balloons were being thrown into governmental buildings. This became the new method of the movement, re-directing the violence of the first few days towards something that uses humor and makes fun of the system. As Tereza, who proposed the idea of using colors said of the method "it was to mark and error in

the system” The protests started being held daily from 18.00 in front of the SPO office in Skopje, from there a different route was set each day, either going first towards the government, or towards the parliament or some other ministry, including the Ministry of Culture, of Justice and of Foreign Affairs, leaving a mark wherever they went. As we would walk from ministry to ministry, the activists would stop to throw color- filled balloons into the façade of different buildings, and each time, it was like watching a football game, with crowds cheering loudly. Even police officers would follow with interest to see where the color balloons landed. Visually the movement kept protesters entertained and occupied, although having lasted more than 80 days, some protestors expressed fatigue with the methods, considering that for the most part it consisted of daily marches and the throwing of colors. Some were also bothered by the fact that it made light of the situation. However, for the most part the colors and the visual tools of the movement proved to be successful in giving it an identity, providing for visibility, and to channel anger.

Other than the colors being thrown towards building or statues of the Skopje 2014 project, the activists would also draw on the streets, carry whistles, and draw cartoons of the then-Prime Minister Gruevski as a penguin which the protestors would spray paint on the streets. All of these steps, the colors, the spray painting, the marching, were attempts to leave a mark on the city for both claiming it, but also claiming the public space more generally, this included the media silence. It would be hard to ignore the movement or that it existed, if people would see colors, or cartoons on their way to work on a daily basis. For all of the government’s attempts to clean the buildings and the squares, it was a tall order. On 5th of May, the anniversary of Protestiram and of the first time that the public heard the wiretapped conversations about Martin Neshkovski’s murder, the activists painted the main square, consisting of small white tiles, in a deep red color, while also writing “ubijci” [muderers]. The color red was still visible over the next few days as I walked through the square, although the government had tried to clean it. They also put chemicals into the fountain of Alexander the Great in the main square, so that it would create foam. The painting became a task which protestors were eager to participate in, as I often witnessed how they would ask for the famous “Hooligans” to hand them over a balloon or a brush so they could either throw or paint the streets. The “Hooligans” were a group of activists who were initially usually masked, and wearing face paint, but everyone knew who they were, they were in a way the administrators of the creative methods of the movement, and within the daily protests they were treated like

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celebrities, as were many activists who had been imprisoned during the first few days of protests. Many people chose to throw the colors masks, some thus hiding their identity, which showed that there was still fear of the regime.

The Colorful Revolution initially came out with eight demands to be fulfilled by the government which are listed below in a poster that was developed by the movement in English, Macedonian, Albanian, and Romani language (Револуција 2016с). On 6 of June 2016, after more than a month of protests, the President issued a statement revoking the blanket pardon (DW 2016) shortly before the protests of that day, which marked a great victory for the movement, but might also have been an attempt to lessen the following of the movements and domestic and international pressure. That day the activists started a countdown of the movement where they set a deadline of 18 June 2016 for the ten demands to be met stating “We withdraw the red line! From Monday, we start counting! The crisis has lasted long enough! On Monday, the citizens will tell them how to overcome this crisis! They will stop seeing us at six o’clock, and start seeing us every day – getting stronger. From June the 6th, nothing will be the same!” (META 2016) On 18 June, considering that these demands were not met, the activists announced a big protest on the 20th of June in support of the SPO and its constitutionality, with the headline “Citizens are coming after justice.” To announce the protest the activists blocked one of the main streets in the center of Skopje which leads from the office of the SPO towards the government, turned on flash lights and smoke and made a video



**WE DETERMINED-
LY CONTINUE
WITH PROTESTS
AND DEMAND:**

- 1** THE DECISION GRANTING BLANKET PARDON to all persons that are under investigation and are facing criminal charges by the Special Prosecution Office (SPO) TO BE IMMEDIATELY WITHDRAWN;
- 2** George Ivanov to immediately submit IRREVOCABLE RESIGNATION from the office President of the Republic of Macedonia;
- 3** The Constitutional Court to deliver its opinion and decision upon the petition challenging SPO's CONSTITUTIONALITY;
- 4** SPECIAL JUDICIAL UNIT TO BE ESTABLISHED WITHIN THE CRIMINAL COURT, residing in the cases falling under SPO's jurisdiction;
- 5** THE DECISION ON HOLDING PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS ON 5TH JUNE TO BE IMMEDIATELY WITHDRAWN;
- 6** INDEPENDENT REPRESENTATIVES OF THE CIVIL SOCIETY TO BE STATUTORILY INCLUDED IN THE PROCESS FOR CRISIS RESOLUTION;
- 7** The process for crisis resolution to TAKE PLACE ON THE TERRITORY OF THE REPUBLIC OF MACEDONIA;
- 8** TRANSITIONAL GOVERNMENT to be established and tasked with complete implementation of the URGENT REFORM PRIORITIES ENLISTED IN THE PRIEBE REPORT.

Until these demands are met, our political fight remains on the streets.
NO JUSTICE, NO PEACE!
#Протестирам #Protestoj



calling people to action (III. Револуција 2016) The protest on the 20th was perhaps the most massive protest of the movement, I met people who had come from different cities expressly for this protest. There was an air of anticipation as to what would happen, considering that the activists had made repeated claims that a red line had been drawn, and that they would reclaim justice. On this day colors were being thrown with hoses and not just balloons, and the windows of institutions were broken. By the time we got to the Parliament building, which was the final stop of the march, there was an air of anticipation as to what would happen. There were people saying that the protesters would be storming the Parliament, and there was a certain calm before the storm. Instead, the protesters directed their energies towards the statue of Prometheus in front of the Parliament (Ozimec 2016b), and they tried to tear it down, but were stopped by a large number of police that were present and chasing the protesters away. After this protest, the movement continued being active on social media and asking to be included in the debates on solving the political crisis, and there were a few sporadic protests during July, in support of students and SPO, and a larger protest in support of the SPO on 26 September (III. Револуција 2016a). One of the speakers at the 20th June protest, Vladimir Kunoski, who had been in detention for 50 days and released recently, summed up something that many of the activists who I interviewed also felt. He said that he saw the protests as a “historical moments in which the citizens are united for the formation of a new civic, democratic and social state” (SDK 2016).

Tetovo Protests

The first protest in Tetovo that I attended was organized by Tetovo Protests in early May. I attended the second protest, the first one had been well attended and had made the national news and captured the public attention. It started off promisingly on the first protest, as Kire noted “the first protest was quite successful with a serious organic ethnic mix of people, you could see the lack of experience, lack of coordination and lack of organization of the protest”. Despite this, the protests continued and when I arrived in the centre of Tetovo, I looked for the activists from EcoGuerilla, as they offered to keep me company and march together. As soon as I arrived, I noticed their long faces, they were not very satisfied with how things were looking. After the protest I sat down with Arifon and Driton to “digest” what they thought had gone wrong. The march had been incident free, we had marched from the municipality to the office of the president in Tetovo. The crowds

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were not as large as I had expected considering the protests of a week ago, and Driton and Ariton confirmed this, they said there had been “four times more people, there were Albanians and we chanted in Albanian, at the front there were slogans in Albanian and Macedonian, and there were banners in Albanian, about 10 banners, there were also other differences, so last week there were public personnas, there were professors, artists, now they were not there [...] it was a bit multicultural, now it failed completely. Next week it will fail worse.” They were highlighting the presence of banners and slogans in Albanian because on that day, we showed up to a protest that was “flooded” by Macedonian flags, which was not an occurrence I had seen in any of the protests I had followed. There had been flags, always, but not more than a few scattered around, or the infamous tying up of different national flags to mark the joint community. On this day in Tetovo, protesters had shown with around 20-30 flags it seemed, and in the small street, they looked like they were more. When I asked Marko about this he did not see an issue with it, he said this was the state flag, and did not see why it would be a problem.

This was not the only issue that Tetovo Protests faced, as Kire had noted there was a lack of organization experience among the group. Although the organization committee behind the protest combined different organizations from the city, including EGO, LGBT organizations and SDSM youth, the organization did not run smoothly. Firstly, in terms of message, while the protests were a branch of the Colorful Revolution, their visual and narrative story were a mix of the Colorful Revolution and Protestiram. While with both movements, justice was the common thread, and the slogan “Nema Pravda, Nema Mir” or “No justice, no peace” was appropriated by both movements, Tetovo Protests borrowed different slogans inconsistently, struggling to create a coherent narrative. Ariton remarked on this, complaining that Tetovo Protestiram had copied the protests in Skopje, noting that “when you copy you fail, because you change the place, you need to create something new.” The Tetovo Protests activists even sought help from Skopje activists, hoping that they could bring the successful formula to Tetovo, but this did not occur. In addition, the group had a lower transparency and openness in terms of who organized them and why. The activists of EGO and Mother and Child often emphasized how important it had been for them to be open and transparent to gain the trust of people, and according to them Tetovo Protests had not done so. Sara, who also joined the protests, said “the trust was missing, we did not know the protesters, I went out but I did not know who is organizing them. It is different when you go out in the field

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and let people know you [...] and know that you are truly sincere.” For the context of Tetovo, having a view into who is an organizer consistently showed as an important aspect among activists, thus not investing in building that aspect, did not help the Tetovo Protests movement.

Tetovo Protests also faced an external pressure which could partially explain the more closed organization and its difficulty in mobilizing citizens. Dren, who helped them organize noted that “many people who did not protest, did not do so for political reasons, for party reasons, because the party was not letting them.” He also shared how he thought that the pro-government media had tried to “stop the protests in every way” which he believed led people to see the protest as a failure. At the same time, on one occasion, as Dren recalled, there was a counter protest by VMRO activists which had not been previously announced and the organizers had to come up with different routes for the protest, so that they would not come in contact and create a conflict. Within this context, the Tetovo Protests held protests for around a month before sizzling out. I attended three protests and each time there were less and less people, and many of the activists from EGO had already given up to attending the protests.

Activist citizenship in North Macedonia

The three social movements and the protest group in Skopje and Tetovo used different methods of organization and mobilization and had varying degrees of success in terms of attaining their goals. Most importantly, they were successful in creating new narratives of what it means to be a citizen in North Macedonia. Considering that the country gained independence from Yugoslavia in 1991 and state building and citizenship regimes were established following a top down approach, this can be argued to be the first inclusive citizen led attempt to define what the state means and what being a citizen within it means. These movements occurred in a highly volatile context where the authoritarian and nationalist tendencies of the governing regime which determined the mobilization of the movements. While all of the movements and the protest group had an anti-government rhetoric, the closer the critique was to power, the higher the suppression and the risk, which contributed to the Tetovo Protests movement to function within a more limited state, while the Colorful Revolution and Protestiram used creative methods of contention to make their mark in the city and increase their presence.

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However, another important aspect was the component of IAC, namely, Inclusivity, Adaptability and Cross-group mobilization. It was essential that movements adapt quickly within the context both in terms of responding to the tactics of the regime, but also in terms of responding to the diverse groups they were mobilizing. Protestiram ensured adaptability through their openness to citizens with a less hierarchical approach, but they also were more reluctant to adapt when it came to their coalition formation, wanting to keep the party mobilization and the citizen mobilization separate, which led to the end of their protests, however they still remained a strong mobilizing network in their latent phase (Melucci 1996). The Colorful Revolution also had high adaptability as it catered toward different groups and to keep them mobilized it needed to provide space for each of them. EcoGuerilla had a controlled adaptability, meaning while they adapted to the context they had very clear lines of their goals and what they represented, and they did not switch narratives for mobilization, instead they made sure that there was information available to draw people to their cause. This also ensured that the movement does not get hijacked, or have the perception of being hijacked, which in the context of Tetovo proved to be very important. This was the lesson which Tetovo Protests did not learn, not adapting in their methods despite constrictions, thus also losing their inclusivity and cross-group mobilization. The other three movements had varying degrees of inclusivity determined by their adaptability- meaning how quickly they could recognize the citizens that they were increasingly representing and the claims that they were making. While all movements mobilized cross-group they all faced challenges, and whether they increased or maintained the cross-group mobilization depended on how inclusive and adaptable they are. This meant that EcoGuerilla needed to address the landfills which were considered an important pollutant to the Macedonian citizens in Tetovo, Protestiram was multi-lingual in its communication, and attempted to be inclusive of different parts of the city, while with the Colorful Revolution you could see a daily learning of methods to reach out to different groups.

The inclusivity, adaptability and cross-group framework is also useful in terms of investigating citizenship in the context of a divided society. When Tereza was referring to what the movements have meant for the country, she noted:

“So what has happened, happened in fact, and people, no matter how they may want to interpret it, still let them interpret it. I think this is a situation in which Macedonia has not been before, even

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though it has gone through a conflict, even though it has gone through many protests, although it has gone through nonsense like Filip Petrovski – ‘for the Albanians gas chambers’ in front of the assembly⁵ - although many such turbulent periods have passed, some factual idea, some ideology, conditionally speaking, it is not an ideology, it is strong a word to say ideology, but some basis upon which people think of some kind of equality, of justice, of righteousness, now they can feel it. So justice is no longer a theoretical term”

Many of the activists expressed this idea that something new was formed, that now they knew how to seek justice and what a just state should look like. When I asked them if they would still use protest as a corrector of abuse of power, all of them stating that they would. Eva shared the sentiment when she noted that “we succeeded in awaking a citizenry, which hopes that things can change.” Isin theorizes acts of citizenship as ruptures (2009, 379) and the movements very much represented ruptures in a divisive and authoritarian system. Agon, who called the movements historic more than once said to me “in my life, I have never seen a more sincere rapprochement between Macedonian and Albanians” he went on to describe a “strata of people that has never existed before” who according to him had a sense that resistance would succeed “either together or it could not, and for me as Agon, this is an incredibly great step, you know?” Participants in the movements as well as supporters among the analysts and journalists further tried to strength this point, as people would appear with flags tied together including the Macedonia, Albanian, often Roma, and the Serbian flag, to symbolize that people from different groups participated in these protests and they represented different groups as well. While there were differences between the symbolic and the actual representation of different ethnic groups, and limits to the conceptualization of justice and a fair society, which at times failed to represent those who were most marginal within society. Among the activists who I interviewed, belonging to different ethnic, gender, religious and sexual groups, whether they were pleased with the narrative of the protests or not, there was a strong sense of their role as citizens, the way they could practice citizenship and what that meant. The most stark limitation to this was among some Albanian activists in Tetovo when reflecting on the larger movements, and that they did not see how them

⁵ Referring to the university protests of 1997 against the introduction of the Albanian language within the University of Ss. Cyril and Methodius. Filip Petroski was one of the leaders of those protests and strike.

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as representative, however their own participation in the protests in Tetovo had already created in them different convictions of the state and their relationship to it.

Lastly, these movements built on each other, they created modes of practicing and being a citizen, one would not have existed without the other, and a long winded road towards building a narrative of activism in North Macedonia, as Kire recalled “if it had not been for the Stop police brutality, there would not be a Colorful Revolution, we are talking about a range of 6-7 years.” The movements also actively invoked citizenship, using the term “citizenry” and “citizens” in speeches and posts, furthermore the Protestiram introduced the individual activist, or the idea that anyone could protest and be active in different ways, by making their hashtag of #Iprotest, first person singular, which was often cited by my interlocutors as a verse in tandem. With their forms of acting beyond the conventional modes of citizenship and creating new definitions and practices the movements constituted acts of citizenship which gave rise to activist citizens, who have created

Admittedly, one cannot measure the practice of citizenship, so I relied on the narratives of the activists how they framed the issues, how informed they were, and how they reflected on their own activism, and a common thread among them was that they were very informed and critical of political and societal developments, were very clear in identifying problems in society, and reflected deeply on the effect that their activism had on them and society. Protesting daily and mobilizing had an tremendous toll on the activists, from weight and hair loss, detention in jail, and loss of friends, but it also created spaces for meeting new people and creating new networks, especially across groups which had not been present before. Isin notes that “thinking of citizenship through acts means to implicitly accept that to be a citizen *is* to make claims to justice: to break habitus and act in a way that disrupts already defined orders, practices and statuses” (Isin 2009, 384). By this account, the activists I interviewed were performing acts of citizenship and built themselves as activist citizens. In the interviews, they reflected on their new conceptions of being activists, and equated citizenship with being responsible to society, to having rights and to having the responsibility to react to injustice, as Aida noted, wherever and whoever it might affect.

Conclusion

The three movements and the protest group in North Macedonia, along with other protests that occurred between 2014-2016 in various cities in the country represented a powerful wave of contention which served to create new narratives of citizenship and of the state. Studying these movements through the effect that they have in a divided society, and how this context also affects them, offers important considerations on their mobilizing power through the lens of the added category of inclusivity, adaptability and cross-group participation. While the movements had their limits and their shortcomings, they were able to create a space for innovative and creative expressions and practices of citizenship in two different cities. The activists who organized and participated in these protests were building new conceptions of their own roles and of the role of the state and how these two relate. Lastly, the movements were crucial in giving rise to the activist citizen within the context of North Macedonia, and establishing for the first time since the countries independence a citizen led narrative of what it means to be a citizen.

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