



CITSEE WORKING PAPER SERIES



Citizenship and Belonging: Literary Themes and Variations from Yugoslavia

Andrew Wachtel

Working Paper 2010/12



European Research Council



University of Edinburgh, School of Law
The Europeanisation of Citizenship in the Successor States of the Former Yugoslavia
(CITSEE)

Citizenship and Belonging: Literary Themes and Variations from Yugoslavia
Andrew Wachtel

*This paper is based on a key-note lecture given by Andrew Wachtel at the conference
“Theories and Practices of Citizenship in the New Balkans States” organised by the CITSEE
project at the School of Law of the University of Edinburgh on June 24-25, 2010*

The Europeanisation of Citizenship in the Successor States of the Former Yugoslavia
(CITSEE)
CITSEE Working Paper Series 2010/12
Edinburgh, Scotland, UK
ISSN 2046-4096

© 2010 Andrew Wachtel

This text may be downloaded only for personal research purposes.
Additional reproduction for other purposes, whether in hard copies or electronically,
requires the consent of the authors.

Requests should be addressed to citsee@ed.ac.uk

The view expressed in this publication cannot in any circumstances be regarded as
the official position of the European Union.

Published in the United Kingdom
The University of Edinburgh
School of Law
Old College, South Bridge
Edinburgh, EH8 2QL
Scotland, UK

www.law.ed.ac.uk/citsee/workingpapers

The Europeanisation of Citizenship in the Successor States of the Former Yugoslavia
is funded by an Advanced Investigator Award for basic research made to Jo Shaw by
the European Research Council and runs for five years from 1 April 2009 (ERC
230239)

For information about the Project please visit the project website at
<http://law.ed.ac.uk/citsee>

Citizenship and Belonging: Literary Themes and Variations from Yugoslavia

Andrew Wachtel,
American University of Central Asia/Northwestern University ¹

Abstract

Works of literature can be effective tools for understanding the ways in which individuals understand different concepts of citizenship. Focusing on the territories of the former Yugoslavia, this paper examines attitudes to citizenship and national belonging in works from the 19th and 20th centuries -- The Mountain Wreath (Gorski Vijenac) of Petar Petrović Njegoš, The Death of Smail-Aga Čengić (Smrt Smail-Age Čengića) by Ivan Mažuranić, The Bridge on the Drina (Na Drini ćuprija) by Ivo Andrić and The Fortress (Tvrđjava) by Meša Selimović -- to describe a picture of citizenship "from the inside out" -- that is, as experienced by and affecting the lives and thoughts of characters within these literary works. The analysis reveals a dynamic relationship between changing ideas of citizenship and the attitudes of characters, and shows that authors use the depiction of various attitudes to citizenship to explicate their own views on the proper relationship of the individual to the state.

Keywords:

citizenship, literature, identity, Ivo Andrić, Meša Selimović, Bosnia, Yugoslavia, Balkans

Introduction

How might works of literature help to illuminate issues relating to citizenship in Yugoslavia and post-Yugoslavia? At first glance it might seem rather unlikely that they could. After all, citizenship is essentially a legal concept and is concerned with the contract between a polity and its members (as defined by that polity).

From the state's point of view, it is important to identify who its citizens are, to define their collective rights and responsibilities. Indeed, as many have pointed out, the project of defining citizenry was of central concern to the modernizing state.² As such, the appropriate genre for discussing citizenship would appear to be the legal document. Literature, however, is an individualistic affair. Literary works are written by individuals, and we tend to value them (at least since romanticism, the

¹ Andrew Wachtel, President, American University of Central Asia; Bertha and Max Dressler Professor of the Humanities, Northwestern University (on leave). Email: awachtel59@gmail.com

² As James Scott puts it when discussing homogenizing tendencies of the modern state: "The simplification of measures, however depended on that other revolutionary political simplification of the modern era: the concept of a uniform homogeneous citizenship. ... The idea of equal citizenship, the abstraction of the 'unmarked' citizen, can be traced to the Enlightenment and is evident in the writings of the Encyclopedists." *Seeing Like a State* (New Haven: Yale UP, 1998), 32.

period that roughly corresponds to the introduction of modern citizenship regimes), precisely for their ability to grasp the particular. With rare exceptions, they are not conceived as mouthpieces of state policy (and when they are, the basic properties of literature make it difficult for a literary work conceived in this way to succeed). They would seem, therefore to be a poor source for examining issues of citizenship.

At the same time, citizenship can also be seen from the perspective of the citizen him or herself, from the inside out as it were. In the modern world, each of us should be a citizen of at least one state (the obvious exceptions are stateless persons and refugees, but their situation is generally considered temporary, at least theoretically).

Our relationship to the political entity that bestows citizenship upon us is often complex. In the majority of cases, we did not ask to be citizens of the state to which we belong. And while most people do not interrogate their citizenship status (just as they do not question their relationship to most other collectives to which they belong—the nation, their religion and so forth), there are many who do come to ask why and on what grounds they are members of the unchosen collective, and sometimes they opt to imagine other ways of understanding the collective than those bestowed upon them. Insofar as literary works focus on the question of how individuals imagine their relationship to a community, be it strictly speaking political/legal, or more generally, they can provide models for attitudes toward citizenship and in this sense they could conceivably be useful and interesting for those of you who tend to focus more on a top down approach to citizenship.

I need to make one caveat in advance, however, and that is that in this paper I will not generally make a distinction between modes of belonging to defined political communities and those relating to more amorphous (and usually not legally defined) communities of identity. Because CITSEE is a project devoted to the geographical space of the former Yugoslavia, I will focus the discussion on literary works originally written in Serbo-Croatian (or, if you prefer, Bosnian/Croatian/Montenegrin/Serbian). Works from other traditions and language areas could almost certainly have been substituted. In general, I have tried to choose reasonably well-known texts and authors, as there are few things more annoying than having to read a paper that discusses literary works that no one has read or even heard of.

Community of blood vs. political community in 19th century epics

The question of defining the community to which one belongs and the clash between varying definitions that might be proposed goes back rather far in what for convenience I will call the Yugoslav tradition. It is in any case at the very center of the two most famous 19th-century literary works from the region, The Mountain

Wreath (Gorski Vijenac, 1846) of Petar Petrović Njegoš (1813-1851), and The Death of Smail-Aga Čengić (Smrt Smail-Age Čengića, 1847) by Ivan Mažuranić (1814-1890).

This is not the place for a long consideration of these two epics. Let me focus rather on some crucial details. Both epics concern conflict between two groups of South Slavs, divided by religious faith -- those who profess Islam are called Turks by the authors, but this term is to be understood as a religious affiliation, not an ethnic or linguistic marker. The conflict in The Mountain Wreath can precisely be seen as one based on different notions of national belonging or, as we might say here, citizenship. One scene in particular is worthy of our attention. The Orthodox Montenegrin clans have gathered to plan the annihilation of their Islamic kin. From their perspective, it is clear that part of the definition of belonging to polity is a proper religious affiliation. They take a narrow view of citizenship and are absolutely unwilling to accept the possibility that membership in the polity could cross religious lines. As a result, they advocate for a full cleansing of the body politic of foreign bodies and they arrogate to themselves the right to define those foreign bodies.

The Muslim Montenegrins see the world rather differently. From our contemporary perspective, they have a more inclusive and enlightened understanding of citizenship. As they say at the council called by the work's hero, Bishop Danilo, who tries in vain to prevent bloodshed between the groups (his proposed means of so doing is to convince the Muslim Montenegrins to convert to Orthodoxy):

“Iako je zemlja pouzana
dvije vjere mogu se složiti
ka u sahan što se čorbe slažu.
Mi živimo kao dosad bratski,
pa ljubovi više ne treba.”

(Though the land is small, /the two faiths can get along, /just as soups melds together in a pot. / Let's live together like brothers as we have until now; / there's no need to love each other more [than this]).³

That is, we can see the work as asking a fundamental question, is membership in the community a matter of shared political agreement regardless of ethnic/religious/racial factors, or does it require more tangible markers?

Thus, in this rather early text we can already see the basic conflict between a liberal/political and an ethnic-based version of citizenship. Ultimately, Njegoš appears to come down on the side of the latter definition of citizenship, for despite Danilo's eloquent waffling, he eventually agrees to the massacre of the Muslim Montenegrins, who are forcibly expelled from the body politic. Though such an attitude is by no stretch of the imagination liberal, it is not nearly as illiberal as some

³ Njegoš, P.P. The Mountain Wreath trans. Vasa D. Mihailovich. Irvine, CA, 1986, 34.

racist European ideologies, which held that one could not merely join the in-group through a process of conversion, for that group was constituted not as a community of belief and or cultural practice, but rather as one of blood.⁴

When we turn to the work of Mažuranić, we see a rather similar citizenship picture. As in the case of The Mountain Wreath, The Death of Smail-Aga Čengić describes conflict between two groups of South Slavs divided by religion. Smail-Aga is a local Muslim strongman, a tax farmer for the Ottoman Empire. If in The Mountain Wreath it was the Christian Montenegrins who were unable to perceive the humanity of their kinsmen, in this instance it is the rapacious Smail-Aga who fails to recognize any connection between himself and the Christian *raya*. His undoing, however, comes when he murders his own advisor, alienating the advisor's son Novica, who flees to the Montenegrin Christians and takes his revenge by leading them to the Aga's camp. Two things are of interest to us in the context of citizenship and belonging in this work. The first is the way in which national belonging is defined, and the second is the ease with which the renegade Novica is able to become a member of the clan.

As the band of Montenegrin mountaineers travels into the plains to ambush Čengić, they meet a priest who gives his blessing to their quest. He defines their relationship to their land not through any abstract principle, but rather through a shared inheritance of birth and suffering. They are banded together because "Vas je ova zemlja porodila" (This land birthed you, line 334). And the blood that accompanies birth is echoed and amplified in the lives and histories of these men:

"Djedi vaši za nj' lijevahu krvcu,
Oci vaši za nj' lijevahu krvcu,
Za nj' vi isti krvcu prolijevate

(lines 340-42: Your grandfathers shed their blood for it/Your fathers shed their blood for it/And you too will shed your blood for it).

Although in principle religion is the marker that irrevocably separates "Turks" and Slavic Christians, Mažuranić's epic reveals the shallowness of this distinction. Novica joins the band of Montenegrins through a ceremony of conversion that is about as bare bones an affair as can be imagined. After having publicly renounced his connection to "the Turks," he asks to be christened. The priest obliges with the following short speech:

"Vjeruj, sinko, u višnjego oca,
I njegova odvijeka sina,
I trećega milostiva duha:
Vjeruj vjeruj, spasit će te vjera

⁴ Technically we cannot say this conclusively because the Christian Montenegrins recognize the Muslims as their kinsmen. What they would have done with, say, Albanian speaking Muslims had they offered to convert to Orthodoxy does not come up in the text.

(lines 449-453: Believe, my son, in the father on high/And in his immortal son,/And thirdly in the salvific spirit:/Believe, believe, and belief will save you).

Thus, in this instance, citizenship (or at least incorporation by the in-group) is achieved by choice, but it is a choice which reveals the artificiality of the initial separation. For if all it takes to become a member of the community is a nod of the head, how seriously can we take this citizenship regime?

It is interesting in this context to think about the implied reader of Mažuranić's epic. Published in Croatia, for an educated Croatian audience, nevertheless the work asks the reader to identify with the Montenegrin mountaineers as a model heroic community. The Croatian reader, presumably, is supposed to think of himself as a kind of honorary citizen of this community by virtue of shared South Slavic language and Christian religion (given the relative unmarked Christianity of the priest, the doctrinal differences between Orthodoxy and Catholicism appear easy to overlook).

It is significant to be sure that both epics we have considered describe times and places when contemporary notions of citizenship were not yet in place. After all, no one in these works held any documentation attesting to his citizenship status. In a clan-based society, everyone knows everyone else, so there is no need for an elaborate document trail attesting to one's right to belong to the community.

By the late 19th-century, however, the Austro-Hungarian Empire had begun to employ modern European notions of citizenship to identify citizens, and when writers created models of political and social belonging they did so with an awareness of contemporary citizenship concepts.

Modern citizenship: equality and new divisions in Ivo Andrić's The Bridge over the Drina

The unusual structure of Ivo Andrić's (1892-1975) celebrated novel The Bridge on the Drina (Na Drini ćuprija, 1945) allows him to explore the ways in which individuals react to changing external notions of citizenship in an unusually direct way. For as opposed to the standard historical novel that focuses on a relatively brief period of time while stretching over a fairly large space, Andrić's novel is concerned with providing a portrait of a limited space (the city of Višegrad and its famous bridge) over a long time span.

At the beginning of the novel, all the inhabitants of Višegrad are subjects of the Ottoman Empire. They are divided into religious communities, but united by a feeling that external events are of little importance to them. That is, they live in their local community, paying little attention to anything that takes place in the surrounding world.

"Time passed over the bridge by years and decades. Those were the few decades about the middle of the nineteenth century in which the

Turkish Empire was consumed by a slow fever. Measured by the eyes of a contemporary, those years seemed comparatively peaceful and serene, although they had their share of anxieties and fears and knew droughts and floods and epidemics [NB, all local problems rather than political ones] and all manner of exciting events. Only all these things came in their own time, in short spasms amid long lulls.”⁵

The need to define one’s existence vis-à-vis a modern state comes when the Austrians establish a protectorate over Bosnia in 1878. Andrić includes in his novel the text of the Imperial proclamation announcing this act (including the novel idea that “all sons of this land, shall enjoy the same rights before the law”⁶) and he has it read by the character Alihodja, a Bosnian Muslim shopkeeper. As he reads them, he thinks:

“Only now, from these words, these ‘imperial words,’ was it at once clear to him that everything was ended for them, all that was his and theirs, ended in some strange fashion once and for all ... a foreign tsar had put his hand on them and a foreign faith ruled.”⁷ (122)

It does not take long for the new regime to make its modernizing presence felt in Višegrad. The Austrian bureaucracy took its “civilizing” mission quite seriously. As Andrić’s narrator puts it:

“The newcomers were never at peace; and they allowed no one else to live in peace. It seemed that they were resolved with their impalpable, yet ever more noticeable web of laws, regulations and orders to embrace all forms of life, men, beasts and things, and to change and alter everything, both the outward appearance of the town and the customs and habits of men from the cradle to the grave.” (135)

As it turns out, the measure that provokes a particularly bitter response in the Muslim population is precisely the one most closely connected with the creation of a modern citizenry—the census. And indeed, on the basis of the census, the occupation authorities attempt to introduce universal conscription “irrespective of faith and class,” (156) an effort which is resisted not merely by the Muslim population but also by the Serbs of Bosnia. That is to say, the plan for universal Imperial citizenship promulgated by the Emperor turns out to be unacceptable not merely to those who had been in a position of power under the Ottomans, but also among the Christian population.

⁵ Ivo Andrić, *The Bridge on the Drina*, trans. Lovett P. Edwards. New York: Macmillan, 1959, 94. Further references to this novel will be made in the main text by page number from this edition.

⁶ To be sure, the Tanzimat reforms had introduced a conception of equal citizenship in the Ottoman Empire even before 1878, but these newfangled ideas were never accepted or acted upon in distant provinces such as Bosnia.

⁷ The Austrian emperor’s avowed concern with the citizens of the country as stated in the proclamation stands in stark contrast with the words of the inscription that was placed on the bridge when it was completed in 1571. This latter one focuses not on the townspeople but on the object and its creator: “See how Mehmed Pasha, the greatest among the wise and great of his time,/Mindful of the testament of his heart, by his care and toil/Has built a bridge over the River Drina.” 68

Ultimately, however, the new imperial ways do change the perspective of the townspeople, regardless of faith. Rather than identifying themselves exclusively with the enclosed world of Višegrad, they come to see themselves as citizens of a larger world.

“Till then the townspeople had concerned themselves with what was near to them and well known, with their gains, their pastimes, and, in the main, only with questions of their family and their homes, their town or their religious community, but always directly and within definite limits, without looking much ahead or too far into the past. Now, however, more and more frequently in conversation questions arose which lay farther away, outside this narrow circle. ... Now too, external events began to find their echo in the town” (215-216).

Ultimately, however, the promise of imperial citizenship (granted after the official annexation of Bosnia-Herzegovina in 1908) is insufficient for the townspeople, and not only or even mostly for the Muslims. For the political community with which the majority of the young men wish to identify turns out to be not the citizenry of the Austro-Hungarian Empire (though they exploit their membership in its midst to further their education in such centers as Vienna and Prague) but rather that of the nation, which they imagine in quite different terms. As one of the idealistic young village men puts it:

“All the living forces of the race must be awakened and set in action. ... All the anti-national and reactionary forces which today hinder, divide and lull to sleep our national forces will be routed and trampled underfoot. All this can easily be done, for the spirit of the times in which we live is our strongest ally, for all the efforts of all the other small and oppressed nations support us. Modern nationalism will triumph over religious diversities and outmoded prejudice, will liberate our people from foreign influence and exploitation. Then will the nation state be born. Galus then described all the advantages and beauties of the new national state, which was to rally all the Southern Slavs around Serbia as a sort of Piedmont on the basis of complete national unity, religious tolerance and civil equality” (245).

The concept of citizenship that Galus is proposing is a pan-Yugoslav one.⁸ It recognizes the existence of differences between the various Yugoslav peoples, but understands the nation ultimately as a linguistic community that accepts as citizens all South Slavs regardless of religion. The model state is Germany, whose people were able to overcome differences between Catholicism and Protestantism and to

⁸ The name Andrić chooses here is noteworthy. It is markedly not Bosnian or even Slavic. Presumably, it is meant to emphasize the fact that ideas of this sort were not entirely natural to the region, but were rather imported from Europe, particularly France through the process of education abroad.

create a modern nation state on the basis of linguistic and cultural links (this was before the idea of a racially-based state emerged in Germany, of course).

What Andrić's attitude toward this model of multi-confessional citizenship is, however, is difficult to descry within the text of the novel. In his youth he had been, for a time at least, a partisan of similar ideas. However, within the text of the novel he leaves ambiguous his level of support for this new, national conception of citizenship. After all, the novel ends not with the triumph of Yugoslavism after the first World War, but rather with the death of the old conservative Muslim Alihodža during the shelling of the bridge in the first days of the war. And as we know, the bridge itself would survive the war and remain standing until today, even after the bitter acrimony that nationalist conceptions of citizenship unleashed. Furthermore, given that the novel was written in Belgrade during the fratricidal Second World War, it is likely that whatever sympathy Andrić might have had for inter-war Yugoslavism had been tempered by the disastrous collapse of that state in 1941.

Citizenship, belonging and dictatorship in Meša Selimović's The Fortress

In any case, Andrić's novel does not touch upon the ways in which an individual might identify (or fail to identify with the Yugoslav state), either the inter-war Kingdom of the Serbs, Croats and Slovenes (renamed the Kingdom of Yugoslavia in 1929), or the Communist state that appeared after World War II. But we can find these issues discussed, at least obliquely in one of the great communist-era Yugoslav novels Meša Selimović's (1910-1982) The Fortress (Tvrdjava, 1970). This novel is particularly interesting because it is ostensibly set in Sarajevo at an unspecified time during the reign of Sultan Abdul Hamid I (ruled 1774-1789) but at the same time the work is a fairly transparent allegory to the situation in Yugoslavia in the 1950s and 60s. The fiction of the historical novel, however, is important, because it allows Selimović to ruminate on issues concerning the relationship between the individual and the modern state in ways that would almost certainly not have been possible had he been writing a novel set ostensibly in the present.⁹

The Fortress begins with the first-person recollections of the main hero Ahmet Šabo of his time serving in the Ottoman Army in one of the many wars against the Russian Empire (presumably in this case the actual battle discussed was the siege of Khotyn in 1769)¹⁰. However, the way in which the war is described and in particular

⁹ In his author's note written to accompany the novel, Selimović insisted that "The Fortress is every person, every society, every state, every ideology," a pronouncement that was clearly meant to deflect possible attacks on the novel as a critique of the Yugoslav state in particular. Of course, insofar as Yugoslavia was a reasonably typical modern state, Selimović's claim to universality is not wholly without foundation.

¹⁰ In the novel, the area where Šabo served is called Hoćin, which I imagine is the fortified point in today's Ukraine (called Khotyn, but in Polish Chocim, from which the Bosnian word is presumably derived), but which was part of the principality of Moldova for hundreds of years. The fortress was

the attitude of the soldiers toward the war and their country is clearly anachronistic, reflecting a 20th, rather than an 18th-century sensibility.¹¹

Regarding the issue of citizenship, Šabo begins by describing himself as a classic imperial subject who understands well his position vis-à-vis the state. Invoking his own false consciousness at the time, as well as that of the group of Sarajevans with whom he was fighting, Šabo recounts:

“And so, these some dozen men from Sarajevo, like thousands of others, were possessed by something they didn’t need, and fought for an empire, without thinking that the empire had nothing to do with them, nor they with it”¹²

The Ottoman state has, it would seem, failed to create the feeling (or the illusion) of a reciprocal relationship between itself and the individual. As long as it is clear that the description of this failed citizenship relationship has to do with the long-gone Ottoman Empire, Selimović is on safe ground. As we will see, however, the piling up of anachronisms will soon make it apparent that the issues of citizenship being considered here relate to the modern semi-totalitarian Yugoslav state rather than to the Ottoman Empire.

Alienated by the senseless violence and misery of war, Šabo returns home to discover that his entire family has died of the plague in his absence. He finds some measure of personal solace through a relationship that immediately places him in an ambiguous position in Sarajevo society—he meets, and falls in love with Tijana, a young Christian orphan girl. The entire situation is clearly anachronistic. While mixed marriages between Christians and Muslims were relatively common in post-World War II Sarajevo, in the 18th century if a Muslim man married a Christian woman she would have had to convert to Islam (nothing of the sort is mentioned in the novel), not to mention that the romantic love plot and the relationship of full equality between the partners lacks any historical verisimilitude.

The overtly political dimension of Šabo’s alienation from the state becomes apparent in a scene that takes place soon after his marriage to Tijana. He is working as a scribe in the small shop of Mula Ibrahim, who asks him to help decorate his shop in honor of the Sultan’s birthday. The scene reveals both the extent to which Šabo does not understand (or refuses to accede to) his duties as a citizen and one way in which Yugoslavia fails as a modern state.

held by the Ottomans for most of the 18th century, but was taken at least four times by Russian forces (in 1739, 1769, 1788, and 1807 before it became a part of the Russian Empire.

¹¹ It is not merely that the novel depicts the senseless cruelty of war rather than its glory and heroism. Since *War and Peace* many European novels had done this. What marks Selimović’s work as a 20th-century war novel is his graphic description of the suffering of the civilian population that happens to find itself caught in the war zone

¹² Meša Selimović, *The Fortress*. trans. E.D. Goy and Jasna Levinger.. Evanston, Northwestern University Press, 1999, 6. Further references to this novel will be made in the main text by page number of this edition.

On the occasion of the Sultan's birthday, Mula Ibrahim adorns his shop with "a crescent moon, stars, and paper chains out of colored paper." In addition, "we stuck a picture of the sultan Abdul Hamid with the words 'May God grant you long life,' together with a picture of a *janissary* unit departing joyfully to war, under which we wrote, 'Allah has given us an unconquerable army'" (26).

Again, the actions described are flamboyantly anachronistic. Images of Ottoman sultans would not have been displayed in late 18th-century Sarajevo shop windows. Images of Tito, however, along with stars and paeans to the unconquerable Yugoslav army were a stock in trade of Communist era Yugoslavia.¹³ Of course, the very existence of a cult of the charismatic leader was also a symbol of the extent to which Yugoslavia was not in fact a truly modern democratic state.

Šabo, who has just finished writing a petition for some villagers whose relatives were arbitrarily murdered by the state authorities, is simply unable to reconcile what he knows about the injustices of his society with the symbolism of the happy hierarchy of which he is supposed to be a part.

"It was pathetic, it was funny, it was ugly. It would have been no surprise had I wept or ground my teeth. Instead I laughed, both at my friend's enthusiasm and my own disgust" (26).

A scene which occurs a bit later in the novel serves once again to bring the issue of citizenship to the fore, this time in a tragicomic vein. Šabo is talking with another war veteran, Ferid, who recounts that he had been captured in fighting and had spent nine years in Austrian prisons. Given his long disappearance, he had been declared dead and his wife had remarried. Upon his return, the bureaucratic state is unable to readmit him to membership in the polity, for the new husband "claimed the following: It's true the man's alive; that the lands were his, there's no question. But had it not been for the *kadi's* death certificate, in the writing of which he's had no part, he wouldn't have married the man's wife ... Was it his fault that the man had remained alive when the *kadi* had proclaimed him dead?"¹⁴ (59-60)

As the novel proceeds, it divides into two parallel, but related stories. At the center of one is Šabo, who is dismissed from his job as the result of some incautious drunken words spoken at a party for war veterans. Having offended the authorities, he is unable to find work of any kind. That is, he has become a sort of double of the old veteran—he is alive and in the midst of the polity, yet all who have employment to offer look past him as if he were dead. The other plot strand concerns the arrest

¹³ The willingness of ordinary citizens to place a picture of communist leaders in their shop windows would, a bit later, be seen by Vaclav Havel as the ultimate symbol of the dishonest and dishonorable pact between the Communists and the people in East European societies (see his celebrated essay "The Power of the Powerless").

¹⁴ Stories, usually incorporating elements of the grotesque, based around the inability of the modern bureaucratic state to deal with those who have, in a variety of ways, "returned from the dead" are quite common in the literature of Eastern Europe. Perhaps the most elaborate example is Iuri Tynianov's "Lieutenant Kizhe."

and rescue of a firebrand young revolutionary named Ramiz, whose willingness to speak out publicly for social justice and political transformation earns him Šabo's admiration.

At the center of both these story lines is the narrator Šabo. As is also the case with Selimović's even more celebrated novel Death and the Dervish, The Fortress is generally understood to be an existential novel. And indeed a good portion of the novel is taken up by Šabo's ruminations on the nature of good and evil.¹⁵ At the same time, however, the novel can be read as an extended meditation on the nature of the modern quasi-totalitarian state and the possible relations of the individual to that state.

One extreme of these relations is represented by Mula Ibrahim, Šabo's former employer. A traumatized former war veteran, he is terrified of those in power, recognizing their ability and willingness to step on any little men who might get in their way. He understands his obligations as a citizen to be obedience to the demands of those in power, and accepts the reality of the hierarchical state and his own role in it. He sees himself as powerless, obligated to the state but expecting little or nothing from it in return. As he tells Šabo at one point:

"The sultan is an almost supernatural concept that unites our many aspirations. He is the absolute who holds us together, like the force of gravity. Without him we'd fly off in all directions like a stone from a catapult." (44).

Given that these lines were written more than a decade before the death of Tito, we must give Selimović credit for political perspicacity, if nothing else.

At the other extreme is Ramiz. Like Mula Ibrahim, he expects nothing from the state, but he refuses to accept his position of powerlessness vis-à-vis state power. He preaches a kind of revolutionary populism, and his opinions about those in power, as filtered through Šabo's retelling, sound surprisingly close to the thoughts of Milovan Djilas in The New Class.

"He said ... that there were three great passions: alcohol, gambling, and power. People could be cured of the first two, but of the third never. Power was the worst vice. For its sake, people killed, people perished ... There was no such thing as honest and wise government, for the lust for power was limitless. ... No one in power was wise, for

¹⁵ Indeed, those commentators who recognized that the relationship of the individual to the state was important in the novel tended to see this discussion as merely a subset of the overall existential impulse in the novel. Thus, for example, Janez Rotar wrote: "Naročito dimenzija čitavog odnosa između automnog čovjeka i društva je dimenzija koju čini odnos između dobra i zla, između predanosti i nasilja, sile i protusile." (Especially the dimension of the general relationship between an autonomous person and society is the dimension formed by the relationship between good and evil, between commitment and violence and between power and counter-power) "Misaoni i narativni slojevi u strukturi Selimovićeve "Tvrđave," Kritičari o Meši Selimoviću. Ed. Razija Lagumdžija. Sarajevo, 1973, 212.

the wise quickly lost their reason, and no one was tolerant, for they hated change. They immediately created eternal laws, eternal principles, an eternal order, and by likening their power to God thus affirmed their might" (149).¹⁶

The cure Ramiz proposes is, however, flawed from its inception, for he never explains how the brand of naïve populist anarchism he advocates could break the cycle of power he perceives.

A number of other characters and scenes round out Selimović's portrait of the possible relationships of individuals to the modern state. Prominent among them is the police official Serdar-Avdaga. Avdaga, like Mula Ibrahim, is absolutely unwavering in his support of the existing state apparatus. Unlike Mula Ibrahim, however, Avdaga works within the system and indeed is an important cog in its operations. Although he does not benefit enormously from the existing order of things, he doggedly pursues all who have the temerity to advocate any change to it. It is he who insists that Ramiz is a dangerous enemy of the state. And, after the rescue of Ramiz from the fortress (the ultimate symbol of state power in the novel) he doggedly attempts to unravel the conspiracy that freed him.

As Ahmet sums him up:

"He didn't hate those he pursued, nor had he any clear idea where their guilt lay ... He was a fanatical believer in law and order, whose sense he never questioned. ... He knew not what he served, but he served it well. He knew not why he punished, but he punished severely. Maybe he'd grown accustomed to one law, but he'd have scarcely noticed had it been replaced by another. He was born long ago, aeons ago, and would be born again in every time. He was eternal. And his passion, through the centuries, was ever the same: to hunt down the disobedient, and if those disobedient came to power, to pursue the new disobedient" (353, 359).

Avdaga, then, is an example of the pure bureaucratic mind, attached to the *Rechsstaat* for its own sake.

One feature of the modern semi-totalitarian state which Selimović explores in The Fortress is the way in which the citizenry, always fearful of denunciation and

¹⁶Compare with Djilas: "Contemporary Communism is that type of totalitarianism which consists of three basic factors for controlling the people. The first is power; the second, ownership; the third ideology. ... When one examines and weighs these three factors, power is the one which has played and still continues to play the most important role in the development of Communism. ... It can be said: power, either physical, intellectual, or economic, plays a role in every struggle, even in every social human action. There is some truth in this. It can also be said: in every policy, power, or the struggle to acquire and keep it, is the basic problem and aim. There is some truth in this also. But contemporary Communism is not only such a power; it is something more. It is a power of a particular type. A power which unites within itself the control of ideas, authority, and ownership, a power which has become an end in itself." Milovan Djilas, The New Class. London: Thames & Hudson, 1957, 166-67.

therefore of a fall into non-personhood, band together to attack individuals who are deemed to have transgressed the norms of political behavior (and thereby protect themselves from accusation). In a long chapter, Šabo describes a town meeting at which a variety of people are encouraged to denounce Ramiz, in advance of his arrest. Again, from a historical standpoint the meeting is a pure anachronism. It has nothing to do with 18th-century Sarajevo, but is rather a reflection of the brand of public denunciation, which came to be a specialty of communist states (but which can also be found in democratic states at times of crisis).

“Ilijaz-effendi said that he felt regret and shame that we gave so much freedom to those who did not deserve it. ... *Himzi-effendi*, the *naib*, saw the aim of the meeting as the necessary intensification of the struggle against the enemy ... And Ramiz was not the only one. It was easy to deal with him. There were hundreds of young Ramizes, one had to say this, who were constantly sabotaging us, thwarting us in our efforts to carry out the sacred task, to strengthen the faith and the empire. And this at a time when the enemies on our frontiers were keeping a firm watch on us and were awaiting a chance to attack us. ... They then began to compete in their severity, in the rigor of their comments, in their attacks on various culprits, of whom there seemed to be ever more. No one wished to be outdone, and not lagging behind required yet greater severity and determination” (207-08)

Outside the normal power structures of the novel is the pair comprising the rich merchant Šehaga Sočo and his right-hand man, Osman Vuk. Šehaga is sufficiently wealthy to subvert state structures whenever he wishes to do so. Thus, although technically a citizen of the state and required to function under its laws, he is able to behave as if he is a citizen of his own state within a state. As the leader of this state, he chooses to concoct a plot to free Ramiz from the fortress to which he has been confined after his arrest for subversion. He does this not because he believes in what Ramiz stands for, but rather to spite the powers that be and to demonstrate to himself that he can live outside of their structures. Nominally a citizen of his country, he considers the place and its inhabitants to be beneath his dignity. In response to Mula Ibrahim’s assertion that Bosnia is no different from any other country, Shehaga counters:

“Neither is this country like others nor are its people. The country’s wretched. Haven’t you noticed the names of our villages? Tell them, Osman!’ ‘Luckless, Mudville, Blackwater, Burnt Ash, Thornystake, Hunger, Fuckham, Wolf, Wolf-valley, Wolfsden, Thorny, Hopeless, Stink, Snake-hole, Misery...” (35).

A successful merchant, Šehaga appears to consider himself a citizen of the world, equally at home in Venice, it would seem, as in Sarajevo.

It would appear, however, that cosmopolitanism and universal citizenship is not the answer, at least from the perspective of this novel. Having arrived in Venice, Šehaga falls ill. As he lies dying, Šehaga asks Vuk to speak to him in his own tongue and Vuk responds by “slowly pronouncing his well-known litany comprised of the names of Bosnian villages, but not cheerfully and sarcastically, as he usually did, making fun of our poverty, but softly and absentmindedly, as though performing an arduous task ... Luckless, Blackwater, Mudville, Thornystake, Burnt Ash, Hunger, Wolfsden, Thorny, Misery, Snake-hole ...” (391). According to Šabo’s interpretation, on his deathbed Šehaga has come to recognize that one cannot be a citizen of the world. In the end, one must belong to a society, which is, for better or worse, a linguistic and cultural community, as well as a political entity.

“A need for the warmth of home had arisen in Šehaga, here in a foreign land, before the final alienation that inevitably awaited him at any moment” (39).

And what of our hero Ahmet Šabo? As we have seen, the novel begins with his alienation from the imperial state in whose armies he has been fighting. A scribe and a poet, he is clearly the author’s alter ego and we could thus expect that his search for a community to which he could belong would stand at the center of the novel. Certainly, as we have already outlined, a good deal of the novel is taken up by his analysis of various unsuccessful models of possible relationships between the individual and the modern state. But does he propose a model of his own? Unable to find work, and seemingly in a hopeless conflict with the world around him, Šabo asks himself:

“Was any link possible between a man and the world, other than through necessity? I didn’t choose what I had. Indeed, I didn’t choose anything, not birth, family, name, town, nationality; it was all imposed on me. Still stranger was that I turned this necessity into love. For something had to be mine, for all else was alien, and I’d adopted the street, the town, the country, the sky above, which I’d looked at since childhood, out of fear of emptiness, of not belonging to the world” (142-43).

That is, unlike all the other characters in the novel, Šabo ultimately chooses to embrace his flawed community even as he recognizes its flaws. He is not a revolutionary like Ramiz, though he sympathizes with Ramiz’s passionate desire to make things better. He will not remove himself from the body politic as do Šehaga and Osman Vuk, though he sometimes wishes he possessed their independent streak. Yet at the same time he will not work for a state that he sees to be corrupt.

In a sense, he has returned to the state of mind in which the characters in The Bridge on the Drina existed before the advent of the modern state. He is concerned with his own garden, his family, and his personal world, though he recognizes that these things exist within a larger whole that is Bosnia. Is this approach to citizenship achievable in the modern world? The last lines of the novel leave it all completely

ambiguous. Šabo watches a new generation of young men going off to war and asks himself:

“And would my children tread the same miserable path when they grew up? Would they live as stupidly as their fathers did? In all probability they would, but I refused to believe it. I refused to believe, but I couldn’t free myself from apprehension” (400).

Šabo’s desire, for himself and his progeny seems to be to live in a “normal” liberal state which does not place extraordinary demands on its citizens, allows them the space to live and think as they wish, and in return asks them to contribute in their own modest ways to its further development. In 1970, it was not unreasonable to think that Yugoslavia was on its way to becoming such a state. The excesses of the early communist years were a thing of the past, censorship was at a low ebb, nationalism was seemingly in check, the economy was expanding, and writers like Selimović were for the most part free to produce meditations on the immediate past and present without fear of harassment as long as they hid them in plain view under a fig leaf of anachronistic history. Within a few years, however, this would all change, and the worst fears of Šabo, and likely his creator, would be realized.

To be sure, in a paper like this it would be impossible to give a comprehensive view of the full variety of attitudes to Yugoslav citizenship from the inside out over the *longue durée* of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. Nevertheless, I hope that the analysis has demonstrated that such a project would be feasible, and that the examples presented here can supplement the legal and social science analyses being done so brilliantly by the CITSEE team.

Bishkek, Kyrgyzstan/Evanston, Illinois



ISSN 2046-4096