



Kamal Sadiq. *Paper Citizens: How Illegal Immigrants Acquire Citizenship in Developing Countries.* Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008. 296 S. ISBN 978-0-19-970780-5.

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K. Sadiq: Paper Citizens

The concept of citizenship is evolving alongside global, international, and regional transfigurations; the emergence of new states and contested spaces, and the constant possibility for new transnational and migratory patterns. Over the past decades, citizenship studies have duly reflected these occurrences with scholarship on the subject extending beyond citizenship as social equity, civic virtue and political participation, or legal status. Since the 1990s there has been a proliferation of studies debating citizenship as nationality, problematizing the influence of international human rights regimes (particularly the juxtaposition between personhood and political membership in a community) and globalization; as well as the conceptualization of citizenship as a marker of identity. Rainer Baubock, *Studying Citizenship Constellations*, in: *Journal of Ethnic and Migration Studies* 36 (2010) 5, pp. 847-859, here pp. 847-859. A somewhat under-theorized area however, remains a bottom-up research on citizenship in relation to migration – an understanding of the lived experiences of migrants and their capacity to act as agents, of the choices they make in relation to international, state, and local environment; and of their facility to navigate through political regimes and citizenship options.

Sadiq's *Paper Citizens* intervenes in the field of citizenship studies with a focus precisely on migrants' personal and collective agency and their attempts to gain political membership and social rights outside legally designed frameworks. This bottom-up exploration allows Sadiq to forward a simple yet powerful argument: citizenship is "expressed through documents,"

yet the documents-generation-process is not necessarily within the monopoly of the state. Because counterfeited documents allow people (illegal immigrants) to claim citizenship rights and participate in a community of their choice, they directly challenge notions of rights-exclusivity and state-sovereignty. Sadiq's bottom-up conceptualization thus presents a tale with a twist: whereas the traditional, statist model assumes that citizenship comes first, and rights second, *Paper Citizens* demonstrates how people – by using (illegal) documentary products – engage in some of the citizenship rights prior to and without being granted citizenship from the state (pp. 15-16). Furthermore, citizenship viewed as a top-down construction (including state, legal, or human rights perspective) implies that persons engage as rights-claimants and seek to enact status, rights, and privileges according to existing legal stipulations or conventions. *Paper Citizens* shows that people can subvert such ordering and access rights through alternative, extra-legal channels.

Sadiq calls this phenomenon "documentary citizenship;" he confines it to the developing world and defines it as "the process by which illegal immigrants gain citizenship through the acquisition of fraudulent documents" (p. 102). With this concept, Sadiq wants to: i) emphasize the primary role that documents play in acquiring citizenship; ii) de-link questions of territorial presence and access to rights from legal norms and state-imposed mechanisms of monitoring, control, categorization and identification; and iii) conceptualize a form of rights-claim from below that unravels states' capacity

for monitoring and control. Ultimately, through documentary citizenship Sadiq tries to illustrate that state membership is blurred; the causal relation between status and benefit is sometimes reversed; and documents, not states, can create citizens. He similarly argues that this upside-down view of citizenship is far more representative of the political conditions in a significant part of the world, developing countries in particular (p. 27).

To sustain his claims, Sadiq documents the path of illegal immigrants to citizenship in India, Pakistan, and Malaysia; and examines twenty-years-worth of government documents, census data, public records, and newspaper articles. His research also draws on interviews and participant observation (pp. 8-26; 139-169). Sadiq's protagonists are rickshaw pullers from Bangladesh casting swing votes in Indian elections; and Indonesians and Filipinos who acquire documents and overtake local communities in Malaysia. Coincidentally, neither of these can be classified 'illegal' or 'undocumented' because they are in possession of platitude of documents establishing a legal, albeit counterfeited or invented, identity. Sadiq insists that whereas they are indistinguishable at the level of the state, due to their documents; illegal immigrants remain foreigners in local communities where the level of acceptance goes beyond proof of documentation.

The book is structured in two parts – a theoretical formulation, and empirical evidence of what Sadiq claims is 'wide-spread documentary citizenship.' The theoretical formulation covers the concept and mechanisms which make 'documentary' a distinct category of citizenship. Sadiq conceptualizes documentary citizenship as contingent upon, and part of, a triad that also necessitates the existence of both 'immigrant networks' and 'blurred membership' (p. 102; p. 111). Immigrant networks function on several levels: they facilitate the transfer of people across sovereign borders, provide access to communities, and enable acquisition of proper documentation. According to Sadiq, these networks operate within, yet independently of, nation-states and are organized around primordial kinship ties, ethnic and religious similarities. Actors within these networks assume multiple identities which allow them to manipulate and instrumentalize the existing institutional arrangements and thus provide illegal immigrants with assistance ranging from facilitation of entry, accommodations, access to documents, voting registration, and even bus ride to the voting booth (pp. 25, 58-59, 139-169). In Sadiq's conceptualization, these networks originate in 'the web of interrelationships arising from historical migrations across state

boundaries' – preexisting ethnic networks filtered into the state' (p. 59).

While immigrant networks capitalize on weak institutions, blurred membership is a direct result of poor institutional infrastructure, particularly as it relates to membership and territorial belonging. In one form, blurred membership applies to persons who are territorial residents of a state, but have not acquired a citizenship status due to some combination of personal, cultural, economic, and administrative hurdles (p. 72). This is typically the case of dislocated groups, marginalized minorities, children unregistered at birth (pp. 75-80). Three characteristics of blurred membership are that it is not state-granted, it arises from community kinship networks; and it is only legible locally, becoming irrelevant as physical and cultural distances increase (p. 72). The other form of blurred membership represents the various forms of real or fake documentation. The premise is that illegal immigrants capitalize on the fact that many locals do not have proper documentation and decreased rigor of document surveillance (pp. 72-85).

The combination of immigrant networks and blurred membership facilitate the transfer and acquisition of documents for illegal migrants and open the path to documentary citizenship. Here Sadiq tries to underscore another characteristic of documentary citizenship – while it allows for instant access to rights, privileges, and opportunity, this type of citizenship foregoes a requirement of duties and responsibilities, affiliation and belonging to a state.

Part II, comprises Sadiq's attempt at supplying empirical evidence of documentary citizenship, i.e. the practices of this type of citizenship. This is epitomized in the illegal immigrants' ability to partake in the political affairs of a country – vote, run for public office – while (supposedly) retaining their prior sense of nationality and belonging (chapter 5). Sadiq also seeks to substantiate the claim for undermined state sovereignty by relating documentary citizenship to criminal transnational networks and terrorist organizations (chapter 6).

Moving beyond the framework of developing countries, Sadiq further theorizes the consequences of documentary citizenship for global security (chapter 7). Documentary citizenship is central for facilitation of terrorism and increased inability of nation-states worldwide to control and monitor movement of terrorists while securing rights and privileges for members of the community. If the function of citizenship is to identify and order individual subjects so that they can be ruled by the state (p.

9), documentary citizenship from below shows that this is an impossibility: "The bounded nature of citizenship, where the nation-state was a container for all rights, has eroded because of its dependence on documents. Citizenship is no longer a secure political realm; documentary citizenship presents a serious problem for our understanding of the composition of states" (p. 198).

Sadiq's theoretical formulation of documentary citizenship captures many aspects of the unsettled relation between states and migrant groups. It speaks well to the need to understand various mechanisms of citizenship and the ability of migrants to act as primary agents acquiring status rather than as mere recipients of rights. Nevertheless, a number of claims in the book remain under-theorized, and presented with little supporting evidence. Below, I highlight a few.

First, citizenship practices, irrespective of whether defined from above or below, go beyond voting and find numerous means of expression. Engin F. Isin; Greg M. Nielsen (eds.) *Acts of Citizenship*, New York 2008, pp. 1-3, 15-43; Andreas Kalyvas, *An Anomaly? Some Reflections on the Greek December 2008*, in: *Constellations*, 17 (2010) 2, pp. 358-360. Yet, Sadiq fails to engage with or elaborate on citizenship practices that support a distinctive claim for a documentary citizenship. Thus, neither the theory nor the empirical evidence presented in *Paper Citizens* sufficiently further the claim for the exclusive primacy of documents in establishing citizenship. Although the observations on illegal immigrants' ability to vote and partake in the political affairs of a foreign country are invaluable, Sadiq does not elaborate on the extent to which illegal immigrants become incorporated by the state once they have adopted a specific identity. For example, there is no mention of whether illegal immigrants attempt to integrate in their host communities, pay taxes, send their children to local schools, service the communities they chose to inhabit, etc. Furthermore, the evidence that Sadiq presents "census data, interviews, participant observation" speaks to the potential to instrumentalize citizenship for terrorist purposes, rather than to the actual evidence of this being the predominant case.

Second, and related "even if illegally acquired and originally false" once established, an identity arguably automatically falls within the prerogative of the state. Thus, although Sadiq speaks of a challenge to the state, it remains unclear how those who become part of the state can in fact challenge it "once inside, irrespective of their identity, they are incorporated and dependent on the state. Adam McKeown, *Melancholy Order*. Asian Mi-

gration and the Globalization of

Borders, New York 2008, pp. 10-12. Related to this point is also Sadiq's rigid boundary between state and society. He claims that whereas citizenship from above is regulated and monitored by the state; membership from below is a direct societal reaction underscoring a subversion of the means of monitoring, regulation, and entitlements (p. 109). In other words, Sadiq claims that there is a reversal of the means-ends paradigm: it is no longer states that can utilize documents to control citizens, monitor territories, and selectively allocate rights; rather, it is people, who traverse territories, partake in economic and social interactions and influence state politics. Yet, according to his own theory, documentary citizenship is largely contingent upon involvement of elements of the state: migrants enter the territory with the help of border (state) officials and receive their documentation via members of the (state) bureaucracy; similarly, the local establishment and political parties instrumentalize migrants.

Another problematic theme in the book is the claim that illegal immigrants threaten the livelihood and identity of existing communities. This is in fact no different than similar claims throughout the world (particularly in Europe) and is neither unique to developing countries nor to holders of counterfeited documents. Along the same lines, it is somewhat unclear why Sadiq restricts his analysis to developing countries: documents' counterfeiting as well as multiple pathways to citizenship are prevalent in many developed countries as well. Coincidentally, the question of security and sovereignty is far more serious in cases where terrorists obtain documents through legal channels (as was recently the case with Faisal Shahzad Also known as the Times Square Bomber, the Pakistani-born Faisal Shahzad had obtained US citizenship some years prior to attempting to detonate a bomb at Times Square in 2010. See for example <http://atwar.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/05/06/a-closer-look-at-the-times-square-bomb-suspect/>; accessed 12/19/10) and not through special networks and kinship ties. The former arguably presents a distinct challenge to the state's ability to control those who access citizenship.

Another problematic aspect of the book relates to the study of migrants themselves. Although seeking to employ a bottom-up approach, Sadiq never provides a human face to the story of why people migrate "their agency, if at all discussed, is limited to counterfeiting documents. The push and pull factors of migration are primarily presented in relation to migration and ethnic

networks as historical occurrence predating the nation-state. The latter is in itself questionable with many scholars now contesting the degree to which pre-1950 migration routes and kinship ties allow present-day migrants to both trespass borders and gain access to local communities. Jeffrey Herbst, for example, points to the prevalence of long-term refugee camps as most notable indication of ruptured primordial associations and migrants' inability to settle in new areas even in the event of prior/pre-colonial tribal and ethnic linkages. Jeffrey Herbst, *States and Power in Africa: comparative lessons in authority and control*, Princeton 2000, pp. 227-248. Along the same lines, Sadiq fails to provide substantial evidence of the workings of the networks in the empirical portion of the book. It is similarly unclear to what

extent these networks are based on a clear set of primordial distinctions or are simply instrumentalized by political entrepreneurs.

Paper Citizens is an important reminder that the mechanisms of citizenship â particularly as utilized by individuals and political entrepreneurs â are ever evolving and necessitate continued investigation. Going beyond political and social rights, the book also allows us to question the extent to which citizenship should be contingent upon documentation and identification. Perhaps more important, and going back to a Solonian understanding of citizenship (Kalyvas 2010, op cit), a membership in a political community needs to be predicated on a person's active engagement in its political and social affairs, and not on her access to documents.

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