Contemporary Switzerland is experiencing a shift from the traditional accommodation of migration to “new” challenges of non-territorialized mobility and multiculturalism. Under such a shifting paradigm, political and institutional actors as well as the media are increasingly portraying diversity brought by immigration as a challenge to Swiss society. Policies and public discourses about “integration” have become sites of politicization and mobilization. Which philosophies of integration and citizenship underlie such controversies? Which normative assessment of them can be made according to democratic justice?

Research questions
Despite these societal and political developments, the analytical and normative understandings of “integration” are still quite indefinite in the academic literature. In our project we will analyze integration empirically, theoretically and normatively in order to understand the dynamics of multiculturalism, citizenship and democracy in Switzerland. For this reason, the project aims to reconstruct and assess the discursive characteristics, theoretical elements and normative implications inherent to the contemporary “public philosophy of integration” (Favell 1998) in Switzerland. Our research questions are addressed at three levels of analysis:

Empirical Level
Which main values, norms, claims and practices have discursively constituted the competing Swiss public philosophies of integration since 2000? Through which main logics of inclusion or exclusion do they operate?

Critical/Normative Level
Is the dominant Swiss public philosophy of integration suited to promote inclusion and democratic citizenship? What would be the relevant aspects of a renewed political theory of democratic integration and citizenship which could meet the new challenges of deeply diverse societies?

Epistemological/Methodological Level
How should a combination of empirical and critical/normative levels of analysis inform a contextual and critical political theory?

Approach
The project postulates that citizenship and integration are contested concepts and that they are, therefore, too controversial to allow for a unique and commonly accepted meaning. We, thus, draw upon theoretical and analytical arguments developed in contextual and critical political theory literature to grasp the contemporary Swiss philosophy of integration and its implication for social cohesion, citizenship and democracy (Favell 1998; Benhabib 2006; El-Tayeb 2011; Carens 2013). It provides three main analytical and methodological contributions:

– An empirical contribution for understanding the processes of inclusion and exclusion – for example othering, securitization and racialization – that are implied by the politics, practices and discourses on integration.
It contributes to ongoing critical and normative debates on concepts and theories — for example recognition, equality and social cohesion — related to integration and citizenship in the context of multiculturalism, migrations and mobility. By taking the Swiss norms and values as a starting point, it aims to provide a renewed content to the concept of integration conducive to the democratic inclusion of immigrants.

Providing an example of empirically informed normative research, the project will contribute to the methodological debates in political theory on the combination of empirical, critical and normative analyses.

The project formulates four provisional assumptions based on our main research questions. At the empirical level, we postulate that the dominant Swiss philosophy of integration risks to function mainly according to assimilatory logics, thus, paradoxically, leading to forms of exclusion of certain migrants or minorities from citizenship, such as for example by marking them as “undemocratic others” or as “threat for the democratic order”.

At the critical/normative level, we postulate that (i) the dominant Swiss philosophy of integration can be at odds with democratic inclusion, cohesion and full membership as required by citizenship; that (ii) some claims, practices and discourses that actualize Swiss philosophy of integration and citizenship reveal resources for an alternative democratic intersubjective conception of integration; and finally that (iii) a normative theory of democratic integration entails a new conceptual articulation between integration and social cohesion, integration and equality, as well as integration and recognition.

At the methodological level, we postulate that empirically informed normative theorizing is required to reveal a deeper understanding of diverse societies and the complexities of the logics that inform their collective arrangements.

Methodology
Oriented towards the production of a contextual and critical political theory of integration and citizenship, the project draws on discourse analysis, theoretical-political analysis, and normative-philosophical reflection. The discourse analysis is conducted on a corpus of public discourses (public statements, party programs, courts judgments, and others) considered as key components for understanding the contemporary public philosophy of integration since 2000. Adopting a critical approach of discourse analysis it will consider controversial moments, namely salient public claims made by different groups, as well as counter-claims and responses made by authorities. The selection of the controversial moments is based on the importance of the controversy, the different kinds of claims about integration, and the groups of immigrants at stake. On the basis of the empirical analysis of the controversies, we will reconstruct the main features of the public philosophy of integration underlying them. In this light, we critically assess the state’s practices, social representations and arguments related to integration. The normative reflection is elaborated in dialogue with the contemporary literature devoted to the concepts and theories of integration and democratic citizenship. Specifically in relation with the literature on social cohesion, scholars such as Seyla Benhabib have started to develop a new understanding to social cohesion, which puts emphasis on the democratic citizenship and intercultural exchange to render society socially more cohesive.

In order to deepen the normative analysis of integration, three normative/conceptual articulations will be addressed, namely social cohesion and integration, recognition and integration, and integration and equality. These specific articulations will crossfertilize each other and will contribute to the overall project aiming primarily at producing, on the one hand, a political theory of integration and citizenship and, on the other hand, a methodological knowledge on practices of contextual and critical political theory.

Publications


References