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# Citizenship and Immigration: An Empirical and Normative Analysis of the Swiss Philosophy of Integration

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**For more than a decade Switzerland has been adopting laws and policies on integration, which are subject of serious debate. Why is integration so politically contested? Because it is a multi-faceted concept and political project with multiple meanings. It does not have a fixed but a relational meaning and faces critique from subaltern and racialized social groups who call into question its assimilationist character. There is thus a need to rethink integration to reinvigorate citizenship with democratic legitimacy.**

## Messages for Decision-Makers

- **Integration has to be reconsidered as a set of resources provided to marginalized subjects to gain their political agency and to be included in the process of defining common norms.**
- **Race-conscious policies are needed to overcome the stigma and lack of political voice suffered by racial minorities.**
- **Border control policies do not affect only outsiders; they also have an impact on the citizenship regime, and create internal dynamics of exclusion.**

Immigration societies cannot function without a public philosophy of citizenship and integration. Such a public philosophy defines who is a citizen and how members of a given society are integrated, it is thus at the core of what keeps a society together. To reach social cohesion, it has to promote a shared and coherent understanding of integration and citizenship, as well as normative criteria to assess whether a multicultural society is organized in a fair democratic way. These criteria provide necessary symbolic and material resources for imagining how each member can be free and equal in society and in a polity.

## The Swiss Philosophy of Integration: Exclusions and Blind-Spots

The Swiss conventional view on citizenship and integration is based on several, often implicit, assumptions, such as: (1) democratic values are given once and for all; (2) everybody should be able to understand them and comply with them in order to accept the outcomes of the political system; (3) a democratic polity entails the immobility of individuals as the default position for accountability; (4) the perimeters of citizenship are given and fixed. Our project shows that such assumptions are not suited to foster the agency of individuals marked by various differences, such as religion, race, nationality, etc.

## A Restrictive and Assimilationist View on Citizenship

The Swiss integration policy is very much influenced by a right-wing populist view on integration, which is based on a strong distinction between nationals and foreigners and on a restrictive and assimilationist conception of citizenship. This view is particularly apparent in two policy instruments: the statistical indicators that have been developed by public authorities to measure integration and the new modalities of implementing integration in migration law, such as integration contracts.

## The Need for Race-Conscious Policies

Furthermore, the dominant Swiss philosophy of integration – driven by a taboo of race – does not sufficiently incorporate the perspectives on integration developed by minoritized individuals and groups, such as racial minorities. The silencing of this perspective, in consequence, reproduces injuries, which continue to affect subjects marked as "black" and constrain their political participation. Including these minorities' subaltern philosophies of integration offers resources to rethink the relationship between integration and race. Such a re-conception entails that the full integration of racial minorities can only occur if race is taken into account. Race-conscious policies should articulate – for a critical purpose – verbal and visual mentions of racial difference. They should work with and through the acknowledgement of past and present racial injuries. In other words, they should include a politics of memory and link this memory to present racial inequalities. Finally, they should recognize and facilitate the presence of racial minorities in public sphere and political arenas.

## The Effects of Border Control Policies on Citizenship

Finally, the dominant Swiss philosophy of integration is aligned with dominant framings of integration and admission in European policies and political theories. But contrary to them, it is observed that in order to enhance social cohesion, immigration societies require more open border policies. Given the demographic, cultural and sociological transformations brought about by immigration, such a thesis entails that a frame change in order to conceptualize societies as 'immigration societies' is needed. Therefore, it would be important not to disentangle admission and integration policies but to think them hand in hand. As otherwise, the border control operating inside results in permanent alienage of residents while also limiting the freedom of citizens. In fact, admission and integration questions overlap and create a category of aliens or non-formal citizens who are territorially included, yet only sometimes legally included, and excluded at other times. In considering that admission and integration are part of the same process, it is possible to figure out more legitimate ways to reach social cohesion through inclusive citizenship policies.

## Towards a Processual Conception of Integration

On the basis of such results, it comes out that rethinking integration is necessary to provide a more effective meaning to citizenship. The integration of the subjects marked by difference is not a matter of politeness or altruism but of democratic justice. Fostering a sound conception of democratic integration is the only effective way to protect citizenship and democracy as fundamental regulative principles in strongly diverse societies. Democratic integration is not a matter of harmony or silence, but of disagreement, voice and democratic confrontation between moral equals. We argue in favor of a political-processual conception of integration, based on an intersubjective and common re-interpretation of collective historical values and norms. Contrary to the dominant view prevailing in Switzerland, integration should not be seen as end-state reached once for all; it should be seen as a process leading to better forms of equality and inclusion of all. In other words, integration should be understood differently to ensure equal respect, decent socio-economic conditions, political agency and the opportunity to participate as equals in determining the contents of common belonging.

### Key Publications


- Baycan, Esma. "Le vote sur la naturalisation facilitée est en réalité un vote sur la nature démocratique de la Suisse." *nccr – on the move Blog*, 2017.
- Gianni, Matteo. "The Migration-Mobility Nexus: Rethinking Citizenship and Integration as Processes." In *The Multicultural Governance in a Mobile World*, edited by Anna Triandafyllidou. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2017.
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- Michel, Noémi. "Sheepology: The Postcolonial Politics of Raceless Racism in Switzerland." *Postcolonial Studies* 18, no. 4 (2016): 410–26.
- Michel, Noémi. L'Entretien Jet d'Encre #12. *On-line*, 2017.