

Essay: Reframing Integration from the Perspective of those who Experienced Migration: An Ethnography with former Labor Migrants and Refugees from the former Socialist Federal Republic of Yugoslavia (SFRY)

by Sandra King-Savić

The following essay is an explorative text that forms a piece of a larger project I carry out at the University of St. Gallen. Under the title “Learning about Integration from those who Experienced Migration: An Emic Perspective of Mobility Based on the Perspective of Labor Migrants and Refugees from former Yugoslavia in Switzerland”, I seek to learn about migration and integration from those who practice(d) it. By exploring mobility within an aspirations-capabilities frame,¹ I aspire to build on knowledge production² so as to expand existing scholarship on the de-homogenization and de-ethnization of migrants in migration studies.³ In what follows, three vignettes will illustrate preliminary findings related to the blurred lines between artificially created migrant categories, and the migration-integration-belonging nexus.

Key words: integration, mobility, labor migration, coerced migration, forced migration, deservingness

Unpacking the Term Integration

To measure the degree of integration, the underlying typology of the population according to their migratory status was slightly adjusted: the population with a migration background includes all foreign nationals (including third-generation foreigners). It also includes naturalized Swiss nationals of the first-generation, naturalized second-generation citizens born to at least one foreign born and a Swiss born national, and naturalized Swiss nationals whose parents were born abroad.⁴

According to the federal statistics office of Switzerland, 37.5% of the total Swiss population belongs into the category of people with a ‘migration background’. It is a common trope that persons who migrated ought to integrate into the receiving society. This is no different in Switzerland where, according to the Federal Office for Statistics, Demography and Migration, “the aim of integration, (...) is the equal participation of foreigners in Swiss society”.⁵

There are four general subsections within which social scientists examine levels of integration. These include, first, integration through education and the

labor market. Educational levels are frequently analyzed as markers of stagnating integration, and/or decreasing ethnic stratification, as is the inclusion/exclusion of second-generation migrants into the labor market. A second strand of research examines integration from the perspective of housing and spatial integration. Measures of integration in view of housing are analyzed in relation to inclusion, experiences of citizenship, national belonging, access to social services, and from the perspective of multiculturalism in inclusive societies. In- and out-group behavior, such as marriage patterns among migrants, is a third approach by which researchers examine integration. Fourth, questions of race and ethnicity are often tied to the legal status of migrants, and public opposition to conferring rights. Race and ethnicity studies are an established tradition in the field of migration studies both in the American as well as the European research context.

Though there is no universally agreed upon definition of the term, a common understanding of integration might suggest a total or substantial decrease of ethnic stratification, a gradual decline of one's immigrant status, and the immigrant status of second, third, etc. generation immigrants.⁶ It is interesting to pick the terminology of this definition apart here, seeing that second, third, etc. generation immigrants are, in fact, not migrants at all. Instead, the second and third generations are discursively *created* migrants.⁷ This is especially pertinent in Switzerland, seeing that people remain in the category of migrants even in the absence of any individual experience with migration. Labeling persons with *Migrationshintergrund* (migratory background) or *Secondas* (literally translated into second generation migrant) as migrants because they were born to individuals who migrated to Switzerland is ethnocentric at best and implies that one is not only not considered Swiss even when born in Switzerland, but that one is never truly able to become Swiss. Questions regarding these labeling practices are a recurring theme in hitherto interviews and casual conversations with interlocutors. "It seems like the foreigner's gene is passed on throughout subsequent generations", one interlocutor stated.

Seeing the discursive creation of migrants in the second and subsequent generations, coupled with the dominant interest in studying the second generation,⁸ one is compelled to ask if first generation migrants, individuals who actually migrated, are not considered capable of "integrating" into the receiving state? One may classify this understanding of belonging (or not) as the purest form *jus sanguinis*, which renders integrating into any given society, and Switzerland in this case, a potentially difficult feat, though nonetheless compulsory. In view of this difficulty, one might ask what the term "integration" means to people who actually migrated from one state to another for work and / or to find safety?

Examining the question of "integration" from the perspective of those individuals who experienced migration might reveal novel aspects for our understanding of "integration". Are there perhaps hierarchies of perceived 'deservingness'⁹ amongst

migrants from the same sending state, and, is there a possible competition for labor and social assistance with the arrival of new migrants? In examining these aspects, I explore the overarching question of how labor migrants and refugees from the former SFRY differentiate, and / or dispute their respective integration in Switzerland.¹⁰ Examining “integration” from those who experience(d) mobility, moreover, not only illustrates how individuals who migrated understand and narrate ‘integration’, but serves as a mirror to illustrate the Swiss political and / or politicized culture to do with migration.

Artificially Created Migrant Categories: What Kind of Migrant?

An initially salient factor that contributed to the large-scale migration from the SFRY to Switzerland is labor. In the case of SFRY, the state regulated the outward labor migration of its citizens. Josip Broz Tito, late president of the SFRY, officially restricted the emigration of Yugoslav citizens until 1965. After 1965, the socialist leadership actively encouraged the emigration of its citizens to curb unemployment within state borders. It is instructive to recall that the socialist system did not allow for laid off employees.¹¹ Encouraging out-migration thus relieved the sociopolitical and economic pressure in SFRY. “My father left us to work in Germany. We stayed with our mother and our grandparents in Priština. He later moved to Switzerland”, Arjana ruminates. Arjana sits across from me in a posh restaurant of her choosing as she tells me about the day she had migrated to Switzerland from Priština, Kosovo. She is incredibly successful on the job, and soon to be married to – in her own words - a Swiss man. She was a teenager when she moved to Switzerland, learned German with a teaching aid at school, and harbors no hard feelings about those early years after emigrating. “Everyone was really nice and helpful”, she emphasizes. “Our dad usually came home for some time, about once a year, but in the early 1990s, he came to take us with him. Because of the war. ‘It is no longer safe, better to leave Kosovo’, my dad said.” Arjana left Kosovo behind in a car her dad had purchased in Switzerland. “We had to bribe a lot of people on our way through Yugoslavia, especially at all the newly established borders. I think it was because we had Swiss license plates.” Upon arriving in Switzerland, people categorized Arjana as a refugee. Her father, however, brought his family through the family reunification scheme, while Arjana perceives herself as kid of labor migrants.

Starting in 1995 – four years into the Yugoslav Succession Wars – Western and Central European states, including Switzerland, came to favor migrants from European member states.¹² Two developments thus transpired simultaneously: Switzerland increasingly sought to attract highly skilled migrants while the Yugoslav Succession Wars created large refugee treks to Western and Central Europe.¹³ Former Yugoslav citizens, especially Bosniaks¹⁴ and Kosovo-Albanians, no longer came as labor migrants, but fled Yugoslavia as refugees. Like other former

Yugoslav citizens, however, Bosniaks initially migrated to Switzerland as labor migrants before coming to Switzerland as refugees, and thus brought their families to Switzerland upon the outbreak of the Yugoslav Wars of Succession. There is thus an element of family re-unification that blurs the lines between improvement and distress migration. What we learn with the Yugoslav Migration to Switzerland is that clear-cut migratory categories do not exist. Practicing mobility, in other words, ought to be understood as an ongoing process in social as well as legal terms.

Integration: A Question of Having Time?

The number of unemployed individuals that are categorized as migrants in Switzerland, specifically persons from the former SFRY (and Turkey), is disproportionately higher when compared to the Swiss population (7.1 % compared to 2.7%).¹⁵ At the same time, foreign-born nationals and individuals born to foreigners – especially among individuals from the Western Balkans and Turkey – comprise the largest group of the ‘working poor’ in Switzerland (14.8%).¹⁶ Further tied to this phenomenon is the fact that individuals from the Western Balkans and Turkey (29%) perform the bulk of manual labor compared to individuals from Switzerland (14%) and Northern / Western Europe (6.6%).¹⁷ As a consequence, a disproportionate number of migrants from the Mediterranean, including the Western Balkans, rely on disability assistance sooner than their peers that are categorized as Swiss, and migrants from Western and Northern Europe. This phenomenon, according to interlocutors, comes as little surprise given the often-taxing physical labor foreign nationals perform.

We Yugoslavs, but also foreigners in general...don't have enough time. The mother usually works fulltime, the husband works on construction sites, he is always tired. He even works on Saturdays. He works all the time, so, there is no time to do anything with the kids. And now I say: this system (here) is not compatible (for us). Not only for us, but also the Spaniards, the Portuguese...

Like Arjana's father, Vladan, the above gentleman had initially migrated to Switzerland as a labor migrant. Since he migrated to Switzerland in the 1980s, Vladan advises former Yugoslavs and migrants from the third migratory movement from the Western Balkans on all matters related to filling-out taxes, citizenship requirements, and other administrative queries.

The question of time, so poignantly articulated above, serves as a frequent topic interviewees touch upon in casual conversations and hitherto interviews. Time, in other words, becomes a social capital that a share of this population is / was lacking. As it were, one might ascribe the ‘structuring structure’ described in the above quote as pertinent for second generation migrants.¹⁸ Framing this lack of time in terms of insufficient quality-time spent on, for instance, homework, regularly shared meals, time to learn about, and pass this knowledge about the

political and social system of the receiving state on to the 'second generation', one might indeed understand the emphasis on studying the offspring of migrants. Yet, the above informant points toward the lack of time as a consequence. As such, he places the cause squarely on the structural conditions, in this case the time spent at work. Instead of focusing on education and upward social mobility as indicators by which to measure the successful or lacking achievement to 'integrate', one might analyze time, and the related working conditions as an additional factor when examining the migration-integration-belonging nexus. An important and related line of inquiry, based on the above preliminary findings, is thus how affected individuals cope with the dual existential insecurity and the (potentially resulting) cognitive dissonance regarding their possibilities in the Swiss labor market, but also in Switzerland in general.

The Western Balkans: 'Can you Move There'?

My son wants to move to Split, Croatia. He plans on moving there together with his wife. Her parents are from there, but she has never lived there. What do you think, is it a good idea for them to move there? Is it even possible, and will those people there accept my son and his wife?

It is Wednesday, February the fifth 2020, and we are organizing a workshop on doing research on and from the perspective of the Western Balkans.¹⁹ As part of the three-day workshop, my colleagues and I screened the biopic *Hotel Yugoslavia*,²⁰ a biographical documentary shot by Nicolas Wagnière in which he illuminates the SFRY by way of an amalgam of personal memories, interviews, and documentary records. "How much of the Yugoslav history is mine?", asks Wagnière at some point during the biopic. Wagnière's considerations about the vanished state provide the documentary with a personal touch that accompanies the audience during the film and illustrates the deep connection between the former Yugoslavia and Switzerland. To date, some 300,000 people from the Western Balkans live in Switzerland, which renders this group nearly the largest migrant group in Switzerland.²¹ Wagnière, son of a Swiss and a former Yugoslavian citizen, portrays a piece of Yugoslavian and Swiss contemporary social history.

A Q&A session followed the screening of the picture, and one of the questions was the one asked by the elderly Swiss gentleman. His enquiry illustrates the extent of the common history that connects Switzerland with SFRY. People from the Western Balkans did not simply migrate to Switzerland to work, or to flee the Wars of Yugoslav Succession. That is, people who migrated did not live isolated lives upon migrating to Switzerland. Instead, they worked with Swiss people in the hotel and service industry, as dentists, laborers on construction sites, and sometimes, as did the son of the above gentleman or Nicolas Wagnières' parents, they intermarried. And yet, this *Wahlverwandtschaft*, as Thomas Bürgisser calls

it, is also fraught with tension – a fact, too, illustrated by the above question: “Is it possible for them to move there? Is it a good idea?” Moving to the Western Balkans, following the logic of the query, is questionable at worst and adventurous at best. Moving from Switzerland to the Western Balkans, in other words, defies logic seeing that people from the Western Balkans migrate to Switzerland, not the other way around. There is a hierarchization of place in this perception, one that also crops up in relation to people who migrated to Switzerland from the Western Balkans. As the elderly gentleman asked his question, people around him expressed their outrage and discontent, others left the premises in protest. The above perception of the Western Balkans, to be sure, is that of an individual. Yet, such perceptions become a matter of public debate as seen with the various referenda on citizenship in Switzerland.²²

Concluding Remarks

The term integration itself is rather frowned upon. Individuals of the so-called second and subsequent generations often ask the question why such research is relevant, seeing that many of these individuals don't perceive themselves as migrants. Examining the practices and experiences of and with integration from the perspective of those who experienced migration serves therefore as an invitation to rethink discursively created categories of migrants. One might reconsider the dominant labeling practices that brand individuals as migrants, even in the absence of any individual experience with migration, as second-, third-, etc.-migrants. A further incentive is the possibility to rethink the four dominant streams of research to include time and working conditions when considering the migration-integration-belonging nexus. Lastly, the socio-political construction of the foreigner during recurring election cycles, including subtle hierarchization of place practices, might serve as a mirror for the Swiss political and / or politicized culture to do with migration. Examining integration from the perspective of those who experienced it might therefore offer novel insights by which we might reconfigure the 'integration' paradigm.

About the author

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Endnotes

- 1 Hein de Haas (2021), “A theory of migration: the aspirations-capabilities framework”, *Comparative Migration Studies* 9:8
- 2 See, for instance: Willem Schinkel (2018), “Against ‘immigrant integration’: for an end to neocolonial knowledge production”, *Comparative Migration Studies* 6:31; Leila Hadj Abdou (2019), Immigrant integration: the governance of ethno-cultural differences, *Comparative Migration Studies* 7:15; Janine Dahinden and Bridget Anderson (2021), “Exploring New Avenues for Knowledge Production in Migration Research: A Debate Between Bridget Anderson and Janine Dahinden Pre and After the Burst of the Pandemic”, *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 47:1
- 3 Janine Dahinden, Janine (2012), “Transnational Belonging, Non-ethnic Forms of Identification and Diverse Mobilities: Rethinking Migrant Integration?”, Messer, Michi, Renée Schroeder and Ruth Wodak (ed.); Janine Dahinden (2008), *Migration: Interdisciplinary Perspectives*. Wien: Springer; “Deconstructing mythological foundations of ethnic identities and ethnic group formation: Albanian- speaking and new Armenian immigrants in Switzerland” in *Ethnic and Migration Studies*; Boris Previšić Boris (2017), “Zugehörigkeit in Zeiten nationalistischer Strömungen. Die Herkunft entpolitisieren!”, *Terra Cognita, Schweizer Zeitschrift zu Integration und Migration*
- 4 Integration, accessed February 17, 2020 at <https://www.bfs.admin.ch>
- 5 Integration, accessed February 17, 2020 at <https://www.bfs.admin.ch>
- 6 Heckmann, Friedrich (1996), *Freizügigkeit in Europa: Migrations- und Europapolitische Aspekte des Schengen Vertrages*, Institut und der Universität Bamberg
- 7 For an analysis on the discursive approach to appropriation and essentialization about and amongst second-generation migrants, please see: Susanne Wessendorf (2008), “Culturalist discourses on inclusion and exclusion: the Swiss citizenship debate” in *Social Anthropology*.
- 8 A cursory metasearch with the subject terms “second generation immigrants” in scientific data bases retrieves 23,216 entries, and 4,117 in combination with the search term “integration”; A search with the subject terms “first generation immigrants” returns 14,554 results, or 1,616 when paired with the term “integration”
- 9 “Deservingness” as defined by Elsa Mescoli and Jean Michel Lafleur, “Creating Undocumented EU Migrants through Welfare: A Conceptualization of Undeserving and Precarious Citizenship”, *Sociology* (2018) 52:3
- 10 This explorative essay is part of a three-year project that is financed by the University of St. Gallen (2019 - 2022). The views are exclusively mine, and do not necessarily reflect those of the University
- 11 Горана Крстић и Божо Стојановић, анализа формалног и неформалног трзиста рада у Србији, у прилози за јавну расправу о Институционалним реформама у Србији, Божо Стојановић и др Београд: Центар за либерално-Демократске Студије (2002): 31-33.
- 12 Nada Boškovska (2019), “Von der kulturellen Nähe zur Einstufung in den ‘dritten Kreis’” in *Terra Cognita, Schweizer Zeitschrift zur Integration und Migration*: 110; Sandro Favre, Rafael Lalive, Josef Zweimüller, “Verdrängungseffekte des Freizügigkeitsabkommens Schweiz-EU auf dem Schweizer Arbeitsmarkt”, *Schlussbericht* (2013):113 accessed 24 February 2018 www.news.admin.ch 113
- 13 Please note the Yugoslav Succession Wars lasted until 1999/2001
- 14 The use of the term Bosnian or Bosniak is highly disputed. The Kingdom of Serbia, Croatia, and Slovenia (KSHS), as well as the Yugoslav (SFRJ) authorities did not consider Bosniaks a titular nation until 1968; In 1961 Muslims could declare as ethnic *muslimani* in the census. However, *muslimani* were not considered a *narod* – a titular nationality or independent entity until 1968. In 1993, a number of Muslims of BiH and Sandžak declared themselves as Bosniaks – a term that appeared in Bosnia under the auspices of the Habsburg Empire, though there is disagreement about when the term was first used.

- 15 According to a study carried out in 2008 and by: Elisabetta Capezzali, André Farine, Thierry Murier, Emanuel von Erlach, Anouk Bläuler Hermann, Adrian Füglistner, Eric Cettaz, “Ausländerinnen und Ausländer in der Schweiz”, Bundesamt für Statistik (2008): 44, last updated January 24, 2018 at www.bfs.admin.ch
- 16 Elisabetta Capezzali, André Farine, Thierry Murier, Emanuel von Erlach, Anouk Bläuler Hermann, Adrian Füglistner, Eric Cettaz, “Ausländerinnen und Ausländer in der Schweiz”, Bundesamt für Statistik (2008): 54, last updated January 24, 2018 at www.bfs.admin.ch
- 17 Elisabetta Capezzali, André Farine, Thierry Murier, Emanuel von Erlach, Anouk Bläuler Hermann, Adrian Füglistner, Eric Cettaz, “Ausländerinnen und Ausländer in der Schweiz”, Bundesamt für Statistik (2008): 9, last updated January 24, 2018 at www.bfs.admin.ch
- 18 On the structuring structure, see Pierre Bourdieu (2003), *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, Oxford University Press: 77 - 79
- 19 For more information about the workshop, please see: https://www.gendercampus.ch/public/user_upload/CfP-samo_vjeran_pas-HSG.pdf
- 20 For more information about the documentary, please see: <https://hotel-jugoslavija-film.com/en/home-an/>
- 21 Own calculations based on the following statistical database: Ständige ausländische Wohnbevölkerung nach Staatsangehörigkeit, am Ende des Jahres, accessed February 12, 2020 at www.bfs.admin.ch; See also Thomas Bürgisser, *Wahlverwandtschaft zweier Sonderfälle im Kalten Krieg – Schweizerische Perspektiven auf das Sozialistische Jugoslawien 1943 - 1991*, Dodis, pp. 20
- 22 See, for instance: Facilitated naturalization of third generation foreigners at <https://www.admin.ch/gov/de/start/dokumentation/abstimmungen/20170212/bundesbeschluss-ueber-die-erleichterte-einbuengerung-von-personen.html>; The popular initiative to remove criminal foreigners: <https://www.bk.admin.ch/ch/d/pore/vi/vis357t.html>