

Mobile Boundaries and Rigid Worlds in Switzerland: Migration and Foreignisation

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Abstract

This paper explores how the paradox of mobile boundaries and rigid worlds has been played out in Switzerland in relation to the incorporation of migrants. Modern Switzerland has long been celebrated for its cultural, linguistic and religious diversity, as well as for its democratic ethos and institutions. Recently, some authors have suggested that this unique history of diversity and democracy would provide a tolerant, ‘multicultural’ basis for the incorporation of migrants. However, a closer examination of the discursive construction and exclusion of migrants since WWII reveals a different picture. The Swiss migration constellation has allowed the entry of significant numbers of labour migrants and asylum seekers, but largely excluded them and their children from the nation and political citizenship. An evolving ‘process of foreignisation’ has represented migrants as permanently different ‘foreigners’ (*Ausländer*), and as a potential threat requiring control and supervision by the state. Even the regular calls for the greater ‘integration’ of migrants frequently serve to stress the ‘cultural distance’ between migrants and the Swiss. This paper analyses the history of this foreignisation process and explores some of the reasons for its persistence, and in particular the use of the social construction of *Ausländer* in attempts to imagine a stable, essential national character as an alternative to multicultural models of the nation.

Introduction

This paper explores the paradox of mobile boundaries and rigid worlds in relation to the inclusion and exclusion of migrants in Switzerland in the post-World War II years. Like other highly developed countries (Castles and Miller, 2003; Castles *et al*, 1984), Switzerland experienced large-scale labour migration, resulting in a significant population of foreign-born residents. In keeping with its often-reproduced image of a ‘country of refuge’, Switzerland also accepted refugees (for instance, from Eastern Europe, Vietnam and Chile) during the Cold War years (Goehrke and Zimmermann, 1994). Since the early 1980s, an increasing number of asylum seekers from various conflict zones and so-called ‘Third World’ countries have sought refuge in Switzerland (Kälin and Moser, 1991).

The above overview gives the impression of a country characterised by a relative openness to migration or, to use a key concept of this conference, one of mobile boundaries. Moreover, modern Switzerland has long been celebrated as uniquely tolerant in relation to religious, linguistic and regional-cultural diversity. Recently, commentators have argued that this historical ‘multiculturalism’ would also augur well for the incorporation of culturally diverse migrants, without imposing undue assimilation pressures.

However, closer examination reveals a rather different picture of the situation of migrants in Switzerland: while a specifically Swiss pluralist imagining of the nation, coupled with direct-democratic and federalist political institutions, has allowed the incorporation of culturally, linguistically and religiously diverse groups within modern Switzerland, this historically evolved 'multiculturalism' has not been extended to migrants. In relation to migrants, a different, more rigid, view of the Swiss nation emerges, with definite, if shifting, boundaries separating the Swiss from the non-Swiss. According to this alternative view, the cultural diversity of migrants is seen as constituting a threat to national cohesion, rather than as an unproblematic addition to an already multicultural nation. The cultural diversity which goes beyond the boundaries of what is considered historic Swiss cultural diversity needs to be excluded from the country altogether, or at least strictly controlled and forced to 'assimilate'. Moreover, a great reluctance to grant citizenship has been reflected in restrictive citizenship laws. The result of this 'migration constellation' has been to categorise migrants and their off-spring as *Ausländer* (foreigners), and to exclude a fifth of the population from the nation and from voting rights - a far cry from the optimistic expectation of a multicultural inclusion of migrants. In this paper, I shall explore how this 'process of foreignisation' evolved and why it persisted in Switzerland.

In the first two sections of this paper, I introduce the concept of a 'migration constellation' and outline theories linking particular models of the nation with particular migration constellations. Next, I analyse the development and key aspects of the Swiss migration constellation, and the resulting foreignisation process since the 1950s. Finally, I outline some reasons for the persistence of this phenomenon. While this migration constellation appears to contradict dominant Swiss self-representations, and particularly Switzerland's supposedly multicultural and direct-democratic ethos, I argue that the boundaries erected between nationals and *Ausländer* have long helped - albeit in an unstable way - to suggest a specific, inherent sense of Swiss national character or identity in times of perceived crises and globalisation. In other words, they highlight the sense of a rigid world in worrying times of mobile boundaries.

1. The notion of a 'migration constellation': boundaries between nationals and non-nationals

For analytical purposes, we can distinguish three sets of boundaries which nation-states establish in relation to migrants. First, nation-states establish and try to enforce entry rules contained in immigration policies: who can enter the country legally? Secondly, nation-states establish a range of migration statuses or residence categories, such as various temporary and permanent categories, associated with particular sets of rights and obligations: how long can migrants stay? What rights and obligations do they have? These statuses are also linked to integration demands and expectations. For instance, migrants on temporary permits may not be expected to integrate (in terms of language skill, participation in local life, military service and political rights) to the same degree as migrants with a more permanent status. In fact, as the Swiss case shows, temporary labour migrants and asylum seekers who are not expected to attain refugee status may be discouraged or even prevented from 'integrating'. Thirdly, nation-states establish rules about access to political citizenship: who can become a member of the nation? Thus migrants and their off-spring ('second generation'/'third generation') find themselves in various locations of inclusion and exclusion in relation to the nation-state and in relation to the 'host' society.

Each 'boundary' is not just associated with particular state policies or legislation, but also with institutions entrusted with the development and enforcement of such state policies. Moreover, state policies and institutions are also associated with - and constituted by - specific political, public, academic and everyday discourses. I propose that this ensemble of laws, policies, institutions and discourses relating to the three boundaries (entry, migration status/integration

demands and political citizenship) constitute a particular ‘migration constellation’.¹ The following diagram shows the parameters of a migration constellation.

Diagram of the parameters of a migration constellation

	Laws/policies	Institutions	Discourses
Entry Rules			
Migration Status/ Integration Demands			
Political citizenship			

Of course, a country’s migration constellation changes over time. Moreover, migration constellations are not necessarily free of internal contradictions, especially since they result from political power struggles and embody a compromise between competing principles. In the Swiss case, there are tensions between the economy’s need for migrant labour, the humanitarian obligation to protect asylum seekers and refugees, and the official aim to “stabilise the foreign resident population” (Kälin, 1991, p.14). The Swiss case also demonstrates that few topics engender such regular and heated controversies as the issue of migration and the presence of migrants within the nation-state. Nevertheless, the concept of a migration constellation invites us to look at general, perhaps surprisingly stable, features of a country’s constellation of policies, institutions and discourses in relation to immigration, integration and citizenship.

2. Models of the nation and migration constellations: how multicultural is Switzerland?

Recent comparative research (Brubaker, 1989; Castles and Miller, 2003; Heckmann, 1991) has suggested that there is a close relationship between a country’s particular model of the nation and the inclusion or exclusion of migrants; in other words, between the nation model and the migration constellation of a particular country. Building on a key distinction in the literature on nationalism (for a critical overview, see Chatterjee, 1986), authors such as Castles and Miller (2003) and Heckmann (1991) distinguish between ethnic concepts of the nation and civic concepts of the nation, with the latter further divided into assimilationist/republican models and multicultural/ethno-pluralistic models.

The ethnic nation model conceives of the nation as a “community of descent with a common culture and history” (Heckmann, 1991, p. 68). As membership of such a nation is defined by descent, by biology (*ius sanguinis*), it is very difficult to conceive of new migrants becoming legitimate members of the nation (apart from ‘marrying’ into such a community of descent). In the paradigmatic case of Germany for most of the twentieth century,² this has until recently been reflected in a very low rate of naturalisations, thus excluding migrant minorities from democratic participation rights (Heckmann, 1991, pp. 68-69). Migrants, as well as their offspring, have instead been given the rather permanent status of *Ausländer* (foreigner/alien). Thus the migration constellation has been characterised by a process of foreignisation, turning migrants into foreigners both legally and discursively.

By contrast, the civic or political model of the nation does not define or ‘imagine’ (Anderson, 1991) the nation as an ethnic community based on common descent, but as a community based on shared values, institutions and political convictions. Because the nation is not a community of descent (*ethnos*), but a political and legal category (*demos*), it follows that - at least in principle - migrants are more easily incorporated into the nation and are expected to

become new citizens. However, in the assimilationist/republican model (commonly exemplified by France), the inclusion of migrants into the nation is associated with a strong expectation of cultural and linguistic assimilation. The assimilationist model is characterised by the insistence that “immigrants need to master the national culture, rather than preserve their culture” (Noiriel, 1996, p. xix). Finally, in the multicultural or ethnic-pluralist model, common political traditions and institutions are even more central in the constitution of the nation, but - unlike the assimilationist model - this nation model allows a significant degree of cultural diversity. Thus, in principle, nation-states based on such a multicultural concept of the nation tend to be more tolerant towards culturally different migrant minorities and allow their incorporation into the nation without demanding total cultural assimilation. Heckmann (1991, p. 73) explicitly discusses Switzerland as an example of such a multicultural or ethno-pluralistic nation.

Modern Switzerland has indeed long been analysed and celebrated as a unique, even paradigmatic case of allowing the relatively peaceful co-existence of cultural, linguistic and religious diversity (McRae, 1998; Altermatt *et al*, 1998). Like many other commentators, the historian Kohn (1956) felt that the evolution of modern Switzerland since 1848 was particularly remarkable, given that it has been surrounded by strong ethnic-linguistic nationalisms in neighbouring countries. Instead of succumbing to the assimilationist tendency of nationalism (Baumann, 1991), Switzerland has managed to include, side-by-side, four official language areas, substantial regional diversity and cantonal autonomy, two rather oppositional religious creeds (Catholic and Protestant), as well as to the strong tensions between federalism and centralisation which pitted the Catholic-Conservatives against the Radical-Liberals in the nineteenth century (Altermatt, 1996, p. 146). Thus the Swiss historian Altermatt described Switzerland as ‘multi-ethnic’ (1996, p. 51) and even ‘multicultural’ (1996, p. 18), based on a ‘political will’ and a ‘political community’ (1996, p. 145) rather than on some ethnic, cultural or even racial basis. Indeed, the notion ‘nation of the will’ is regularly evoked in speeches and commentaries in Switzerland (see, for instance, Koller, 1998).

Has this historical multicultural imagining and inclusion of different linguistic and religious groups within a politically conceived ‘nation of the will’ prepared the ground for a more tolerant, multicultural inclusion of migrants, as anticipated by Heckmann (1991) and Altermatt (1996)? The short answer is ‘no’.

3. The development of the Swiss migration constellation: the foreignisation of migrants

The official recognition and celebration of cultural diversity has not been extended to migrant minorities or individuals in Switzerland in the post-WWII era. Giugni and Passy (2003, p. 116) point out that, in relation to migrants, both legally and culturally the Swiss case is closer to the ethnic model or, to use their terminology, the ‘ethnic-assimilationist’ model. It combines restrictive access to citizenship (characteristic of the ethnic model) with assimilationist demands on migrants (characteristic of the assimilationist model). In the next few sub-sections, I trace the historical development of the key aspects of the Swiss migration constellation since World War II.

The expectation of temporary labour migration (1950s-1960s)

After World War II, the strong demand for labour in the building, manufacturing, hospitality and agricultural sectors in Switzerland led to large scale labour migration from neighbouring countries. The number of foreign residents increased steadily, in fact doubling between 1950 and 1960 from 285,000 (5.2% of the population) to 585,000 (10.8% of the population) (BIGA, 1964, p. 12; Straubhaar, 1991, p. 39). The large majority of workers came from neighbouring countries,

initially mainly from Italy. In 1960, 59% of the foreign population were Italians, 16% Germans, 6% Austrians, 5% French, 8% other Europeans and 6% non-Europeans and stateless persons (BIGA, 1964, p. 15).

Migrant workers were employed on a temporary basis and were generally only granted seasonal permits of up to nine months by the cantonal authorities (BIGA, 1964, p. 40). This industry-led temporary migration allowed for maximum flexibility in hiring practices in relation to seasonal and economic fluctuations. The principle of 'rotation' was also expected to apply, that is, other workers would replace individual workers after a few years of employment in Switzerland. In fact, the notion of 'rotation', as well as prohibitions on family reunions, was deliberately aimed at preventing permanent settlement, integration or even citizenship. Initially, treaties with neighbouring countries (for instance, with Italy in 1948) stipulated that foreigners on temporary permits needed to have worked and lived in Switzerland for at least ten years before they could claim permanent residency.

Thus while there was a relative *laissez-faire* attitude by the state in relation to the hiring of new foreign labour (Mahnig and Piguët, 2003, p. 68), there were tight controls on the length of stay and the type of employment for temporary foreign workers. Integration beyond the workplace was actively discouraged, and the granting of citizenship was not really a consideration. Indeed, citizenship laws became more restrictive in 1952, in the same era when the recruitment of temporary migrant labour began (Wicker and Steiner, 2000). At this stage of the development of the Swiss migration constellation, policy and political discussions were firmly guided by labour market considerations, and the temporary employment of workers from other countries certainly was not regarded as 'immigration'. Consequently, public discourse did not refer to 'migration' or 'migrants', but instead to 'foreign labour' or 'foreign workers' (*Fremdarbeiter* and *ausländische Arbeitskräfte*). Labour market authorities and the Foreigners' Police (*Fremdenpolizei*) were the major institutions dealing with the presence of 'foreign workers', and the Federal Law on the Residence and Settlement of Foreigners (ANAG) of 1931 provided the legal framework.

Political challenges since the 1960s: the Überfremdung movement

In the 1960s, the increasingly permanent presence of *Ausländer* (foreigners) became politicised, leading to a range of rather *ad hoc* immigration restrictions. The politicisation and restriction of migration occurred much earlier in Switzerland than in other European countries (Wicker, 2003). In the early 1960s, public discussion began to question what was considered uncontrolled immigration driven by the labour needs of Swiss industries (Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1985, p. 230). There was concern about the potentially negative economic and labour market impact of migration in terms of inflation and a lack of technological innovation in the sectors of the economy that employed a large number of migrant workers. However, first attempts by the government to limit the number of *Ausländer* on the level of individual companies proved unsuccessful. In 1964, pressure from the Italian government led to a bilateral treaty to improve the migration status of Italian migrant workers.³

Even though this agreement with Italy only introduced minor legal improvements for Italian foreign workers, it was widely interpreted as marking the end of the assumption of temporary rotation (Hoffmann-Nowotny and Killias, 1979, p. 55). Beginning from 1965, policy in relation to *Ausländer* began to be challenged by a series of popular initiatives launched by different organisations and new parties in an attempt to restrict and reduce the number of *Ausländer* in the country. For parties such as the Democratic Party and National Action, Switzerland was under threat of being transformed into an immigration country, thereby leading to a dangerous state of *Überfremdung* ('over-alienation' or 'over-foreignisation'). The concept *Überfremdung* has played an important role in Swiss discourse on migration on and off since the

early twentieth century (Romano, 1996), and is rather difficult to translate. It refers to a relatively vague and ambiguous sense of being swamped by foreign influences, mainly due to the presence of *Ausländer*. The concept of *Überfremdung* derived its power and legitimacy from its use in state discourses and policies, most notably in the *Ausländer* Law (ANAG) of 1931,⁴ and its confirmation in a report on the ‘problem of foreign workers’ by the Federal Office of Industry, Trade and Labour (BIGA, 1964). Rather than criticising the concept as part of a problematic, xenophobic discourse, the 1964 report spent considerable space trying to define the concept.

The so-called *Überfremdung* initiatives were accused of being xenophobic or *frendenfeindlich* (hostile to foreigners), but they attracted substantial popular support. While all of these initiatives were rejected at the ballot box, political pressure nevertheless brought about a shift in the Swiss migration constellation.⁵ In 1965, the Democratic Party of the Zurich Canton submitted the first popular initiative against *Überfremdung*, proposing that the number of foreigners with an annual permit (*Jahresaufenthalter*) and with a permanent residence permit (*Niedergelassene*) should not exceed 10% of the total population. Obviously, this initiative was aimed at curbing the shift towards allowing a greater number of permanent foreign residents, while not attacking the seasonal worker category at the core of the temporary migrant constellation.

The state countered this direct-democratic challenge with the assurance that immigration would be reduced and, as a result, the initiative was withdrawn in 1968 (Hoffmann-Nowotny and Killias, 1979, p. 55; Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1985, p. 230). The state thereby acknowledged and legitimised the concerns of the movement in terms of the supposed danger by *Überfremdung*, while disagreeing with the severity and types of restrictions proposed by the initiative. As an alternative, the state attempted to reduce the number of foreign workers by introducing a limit to the number of workers employed by individual companies (*Betriebliche Plafonierung*, ceiling on the enterprise level). However, this policy, like earlier efforts, failed to reduce the number of foreign workers due to the many exceptions granted by the authorities (Dhima, 1991, p. 51).

In 1969, the newly formed organisation ‘National Action against the *Überfremdung* of People and Country’, led by the prominent political figure James Schwarzenbach, launched the second *Überfremdung* initiative. This initiative demanded a reduction of the ratio of foreigners to the Swiss population to less than 10% in every canton except for Geneva (Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1985, p. 230). The campaign triggered intense national debates and enormous pressure on the state. While most public commentators, the government, the parties, the employers’ associations, the trade unions and churches opposed the so-called ‘Schwarzenbach’ initiative, popular discontent about the presence of foreigners was voiced increasingly in the media and in public meetings (Reck, 1969, pp. 429-430). On 7 June 1970, this initiative was narrowly rejected at the ballot box by 54% of the voters. As there were over a million *Ausländer* in Switzerland in 1970 (Straubhaar, 1991, p. 39), Hoffmann-Nowotny (1985, p. 230) estimated that the adoption of this initiative would have forced a reduction of the number of *Ausländer* by 44%.

The *Überfremdung* movement did not object to the temporary employment of migrant workers *per se*. Rather, it expressed strong concerns about the consequences of migrants integrating into society and gaining permanent residence, and even citizenship. For instance, Schwarzenbach (1980) himself warned about integration costs for local governments, such as the cost of educating *Ausländer* children, and about the dangers of the split loyalties of *Ausländer* in cases of war. Moreover, Schwarzenbach saw permanent residents (*Niedergelassene*) and new citizens (*Neueingebürgerte*) as a particular danger to the fragile nation of Switzerland.

Our Federation is a work of generations, and this harmonious co-existence [*ausgeglichenes Nebeneinander*] of different languages, cultures and confessions is far too subtle, so that a massive, regionally concentrated and economically driven mass migration [*Völkerwanderung*⁶] would lead to serious disturbances. For this reason alone,

we should reject the suggestion of the Federal Council, to reduce the foreign stock [*Fremdbestand*] by making it easier to assimilate and gain citizenship. (p. 50; my translation)

From this perspective, social integration and citizenship for migrants do not reduce the danger of *Überfremdung*, but in fact increase it. A persistent and influential theme of the *Überfremdung* discourse is the claim that most *Ausländer* would always ‘deep down’ constitute a potentially dangerous difference, even if - or *especially* if - they appear to have ‘assimilated’ and become ‘citizens’. According to this discourse, the Swiss nation appears very fragile and under the constant, but rather unspecified, threat from *Ausländer*. Importantly, the threat often does not refer to particular actions by particular individuals or groups of *Ausländer*,⁷ but instead it refers in a general, often vague, way to the presence of *Ausländer* as a dangerous category of people requiring constant control and supervision because they threaten “to disturb” the “uniqueness of Swissness” (p. 134). Thus Schwarzenbach maintained that “[o]ur popular initiative is primarily a solution to Swiss domestic problems and it only deals with the *Ausländer* in Switzerland as a secondary consideration” (p. 134). I shall return to these sorts of arguments in the final section of this paper, because they provide an important clue for the persistence of the Swiss foreignisation process.

Quotas, stabilisation and balanced ratio: new constellation since the 1970s

Most analysts agree that the main reason for the defeat of the Schwarzenbach initiative was the state’s promise to pull the “emergency brake” (Hoffmann-Nowotny, 1985, p. 230) and to change its policy towards *Ausländer* “literally in the last minute” (Dhima, 1991, p. 52). On 16 March 1970, a Federal Decree introduced the so-called ‘national ceiling’ (*Globalplafonierung*) on the number of *Ausländer* (Straubhaar, 1991, p. 39), which demanded the maintenance of an unspecified ‘balanced relationship’ or ‘balanced ratio’ between the size of the Swiss population and the foreign population (Hoffmann, 1985, p. 230). This was to be achieved by setting annual quotas (*Kontingente*) for new annual permit holders (*Jahresaufenthalter*), seasonal workers (*Saisonsarbeiter*) and short-term permit holders (*Kurzaufenthalter*) (Dhima, 1991, p. 63). The quotas were determined every year on the basis of the departures of the previous year (Straubhaar, 1991, p. 40) and in consultation with labour market authorities, employers and trade unions (Soysal, 1994, p. 53).

Thus, since the early 1970s, the entry rules of the Swiss migration constellation experienced an important change. Employers’ access to new foreign workers was curbed substantially by strong state intervention in the labour market, as a response to strong popular and populist pressure exerted by *Überfremdung* initiatives. In the 1980s, further restrictions were introduced in terms of the country of origin of new foreign workers. The Decree on the Limitation of *Ausländer* of 1986 introduced the principle that new permits should only be issued to foreign workers from ‘traditional recruitment areas’. Since “traditional recruitment areas” were regarded as mainly “our neighbouring countries and countries with similar living conditions” (cited in Dhima, 1991, p. 65), they included the countries of the European Community and the European Free Trade Association (EFTA), as well as Yugoslavia. This principle was explicitly designed to limit immigration from countries with a “considerable cultural distance” (Dhima, 1991, p. 65). State documents stopped referring to *Überfremdung*, and instead stressed the importance of ‘stabilising the foreign population’, ‘maintaining a balanced ratio’ and focusing on ‘traditional recruitment areas’.

As these new principles were also based on the assumption of an increasingly permanent *Ausländer* population, the issue of ‘integration’ assumed even greater significance than in the 1960s, when the BIGA report (1964) first recommended greater ‘integration’. The 1986 Decree

on the Limitation of Foreigners declared the “creation of suitable conditions for the integration [*Eingliederung*] of the *Ausländer* who live and work here” a key policy principle (cited in Dhima, 1991, p. 65). It is important to note that, in the Swiss context, ‘integration’ refers to an individual effort of integration into local Swiss society, mainly through employment. The Swiss state has given comparatively little ‘integration support’ to individual migrants, let alone ‘multicultural support’ to migrant organisations or ethnic communities (Soysal, 1994, p. 53).⁸

By the late 1980s, the new migration constellation enjoyed broad political support. Schmitter Heisler (1988) observed that the relatively large numbers of foreign residents “no longer excite social and political actors,” and that the so-called ‘*Ausländer* question’ had “lost much of its bite” (p. 694). However, “the majority of the Swiss people are not ready to embrace fundamental changes that would permit the legal recognition of immigration rather than prolonged labour migration” (p. 694). This was reflected in the restrictive conditions for citizenship applicants in terms of required length of residence, level of integration, fees, and the uncomfortable and somewhat arbitrary process of citizenship applications being voted on by local communities (Wicker and Steiner, 2000). The number of annual naturalisations remained very low; in fact, it dropped by almost half between 1980 and 1990 from 16,060 to 8,658 (Wehrli, 2004).

Throughout the 1970s and 1980s, the average foreign population in Switzerland was over one-million for most years, and since the late 1980s it began to steadily increase again as a result of family reunions and low citizenship rates (Mahnig and Piguët, 2003, p. 97). The Swiss migration constellation continued to be characterised by its foreignisation process rather than by a multicultural inclusion of migrants into the nation.

Asylum seekers and Europe: cultural exclusion instead of multiculturalism

Towards the late 1980s, increasing numbers of asylum seekers and the anticipated joining of the European Economic Area (potentially leading to full membership of the then EC) added new dimensions to discussions and policies in relation to immigration and migrants. Annual asylum seeker applications rose from a low of 3,010 in 1980 to a peak of 41,629 in 1991 (Federal Office for Refugees, 1998). Increasingly, asylum seeker migration was associated with ‘migration from the Third World’ (Kälin and Moser, 1991) and ‘migration pressure’ due to global economic inequalities (Hofmann-Nowotny, 1991). The state introduced more restrictive laws and assessment procedures, in quick succession, in an attempt to deter asylum seekers. It also aimed to reduce the length of stay of asylum seekers and the number of successful refugee applications (Kälin and Stöckli, 1990; Däpp and Karlen, 1984). As the state authorities struggled to process the asylum applications, there was talk of an ‘emergency situation’ (Strategy Group, 1989). Political debate became increasingly polarised with conservative parties accusing the state of not doing enough to prevent the ‘abuse of the asylum tradition’ by ‘economic refugees’, while left-wing parties and the asylum seeker support movement criticised the state for ‘hollowing out’ the formerly generous asylum law and assessment practice (Däpp and Karlen, 1984). Moreover, verbal and physical attacks against asylum seekers, as well as the emergence of new explicitly racist and violent groups (the ‘New Fronts’) further increased the sense of emergency and urgency (Frischknecht, 1991).

Dealing with what was called ‘migration pressure’ from ‘further distant countries’ was further complicated when moves towards joining the European Economic Area (Federal Council, 1991) meant that Switzerland had to consider opening the labour market to citizens of the EEA (and, later, potentially the entire EC) (Federal Council, 1991). In this context, two reports, commissioned by the state, warrant special consideration as they reflected influential thinking on the issue of entry rules and on integration/multiculturalism in the early 1990s: the government’s

report on *Ausländer* and refugee policies (Federal Council, 1991) and Hoffmann-Nowotny's report (1992) on the 'chances and risks of multicultural immigration societies'.

The government's report on *Ausländer* and refugee policies (Federal Council, 1991) sought to develop a 'Euro-compatible' policy in relation to both labour migration and asylum seeker migration. The report reiterated the importance of a "balanced ratio between the Swiss and the foreign population," because it regarded the number of *Ausländer* "a significant challenge to national cohesion, which is not easy to maintain given the four different Swiss cultures and ways of life [*Lebensarten*]" (p. 11). The report then sketched the so-called 'Three Circle Model' which was to determine the 1990s approach to entry rules. According to this model, the world was divided into three circles:

- a) An Inner Circle consisting of the countries of the EC and European Free Trade Association (EFTA). Immigration restrictions would be gradually removed for citizens of these countries.
- b) A Middle Circle consisting of the USA, Canada, and 'possibly' some Eastern European countries. Limited recruitment of migrant workers from these countries would be permitted subject to quotas. This would mainly involve the recruitment of highly qualified experts.
- c) An Outer Circle comprising all other countries. Citizens from these countries would be excluded from any residence or work permit.

Significantly, the Outer Circle was described as containing "countries that do not belong to the same (in the broad sense) culture area [*Kulturkreis*] with living conditions similar to our own." Without going into detail or providing evidence, the report claimed that citizens from the Outer Circle countries were culturally incompatible with 'European culture', and therefore needed to be excluded from entering the country: "[b]ecause the maintenance of the national identity and of social peace requires a balanced ratio of Swiss and foreigners, it follows that Switzerland adopt a rigorous restriction policy regarding the other states [in the outer Circle]" (p. 2). In what has become something of a ritual in such documents, the report also recommended the promotion of the integration of resident *Ausländer* and a simplification and speeding up of naturalisation procedures (p. 18). However, its main significance lies in establishing the 'Three Circle Model' as a guiding principle for the migration constellation of the 1990s, even though it was criticised by some authors as a form of institutional racism (Caloz-Tschopp, 1996).

In response to the emerging debate about 'multiculturalism' in Switzerland, the state commissioned a report by the sociology professor Hoffmann-Nowotny (1992) on the 'risks and chances' of adopting multicultural policies. Echoing the assumptions of the three circle model, the report was very critical of adopting multicultural policies, especially in relation to contemporary migrants who were characterised as mainly originating from "culturally further distant" countries with "incompatible cultures" (p. 26). Hoffmann-Nowotny argued that the structural and cultural distance which supposedly existed between new immigrants and the host society could 'lead to' structural discrimination and cultural rejection by the host country. This in turn 'often' led immigrants to put renewed emphasis on their cultural identity (for instance, the 're-Islamisation of North-Africans and Turks'). This 'vicious circle' would only be accelerated if the Swiss state and society actively promoted a 'multicultural society'. Hoffmann-Nowotny also warned that the adoption of multicultural policies in such a context would lead to a low status (*Unterschichtung*) for migrants in the host society, and possibly to a ghettoisation of migrants (pp. 82-83). Subsequently, 'multiculturalism' did not become part of state policy in relation to migrants, nor did it become an important concept in public discussions.⁹

In keeping with such analyses, the 1990s migration constellation saw the introduction of a culturally discriminatory approach in relation to entry rules, and a rejection of multicultural

policies in favour of a continuation of 'integration' as an individual responsibility with little support from the state (Soysal, 1994). This reflects the Swiss notion that the diverse 'cultures' which make up the Swiss nation are tied to particular territories (for instance, French speaking areas and German speaking areas) rather than co-exist or even interweave in the same 'multi-cultural' locale (Prodoliet, 1998, p. 10). The discourse of *Überfremdung* was replaced by a discourse in terms of a balanced ratio of foreigners/Swiss and concerns about the unbridgeable 'cultural distance' of new migrants from 'the Third World', a cultural distance that would only be reproduced by the misguided adoption of multicultural policies.

Annual naturalisations rose from 8,658 to 36,515 between 1992 and 2002 (Wehrli, 2004). This increase occurred because Switzerland has allowed dual citizenship since 1992, but also because some cantons eased the conditions for applicants. However, the rate of naturalisations in relation to the total foreign population remained very low, at 2.4% in 2003 compared to most other European nation-states (Wehrli, 2004). Thus Swiss naturalisation policy is still rather restrictive; migrants, for example, have to have resided in Switzerland for 12 years, and the principle of citizenship of the place of birth (*jus soli*) does not even apply to the second and third generation. Attempts to improve the situation for second and third generation migrants were rejected in a referendum on 26 September 2004.¹⁰ In recent years, the issue of citizenship has become one of the most controversial issues in relation to Switzerland's migration constellation. The discriminatory rejection of citizenship applicants 'from the Balkans' in particular municipalities has led to a heated debate on the national level about the fairness and appropriateness of this uniquely Swiss process (see Wicker and Steiner, 2000, on the wide variety of local citizenship procedures and outcomes). A controversial Federal Court decision declared mandatory voting procedures on citizenship applications as unconstitutional (Hasler, 2003), while the conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP) has begun to collect signatures for an initiative 'for democratic citizenship decision' in an attempt to define the granting of citizenship as political decisions, rather than as administrative decisions that can be appealed (Rosenberg, 2004).

The number of *Ausländer* reached 1,487 896 in August 2004, that is, over a fifth of the population (20.2%) (Wehrli, 2004). Spescha (2002, p. 35) argues that the proportion of *Ausländer* in Switzerland would be below 10% if Switzerland had an average European citizenship quota. In 1997, 48% of *Ausländer* had lived in Switzerland for more than ten years and 22% were born in Switzerland. 72% had a permanent residence permit (*Niederlassungsbewilligung*), in other words, a right to stay in the country (*Expertenkommission Migration*, 1997, p. 81). However, the foreignisation effect of the Swiss migration constellation ensures that over 20% of the population are categorised as *Ausländer*. Such statistics in turn play an important role in public and political discussions, as the latest statistics are regularly reported in the media and have become the preoccupation of several initiatives and public debates since the 1960s.¹¹

4. The obsession with *Ausländer*: fear of difference or fear of similarity?

Let us return to the initial observation of the paradox of the Swiss foreignisation process in a supposedly multicultural nation-state. It appears puzzling that a nation that prides itself of its tolerance of cultural diversity and of its democratic ethos has for so long excluded migrants from citizenship and has simultaneously expected a high degree of 'integration'. Current attempts at explaining the Swiss migration constellation make valuable contributions, but I shall briefly suggest their limitations and point to an additional factor that needs to be taken into account.

Analysts have proposed to explain the emergence and evolution of the Swiss migration constellation as the outcome of a political compromise between various competing social and political actors, both within the corporatist realm (employers, trade unions and labour market authorities) as well as the direct-democratic realm (*Ueberfremdung* movement, pro-*Ausländer*

groups and movements) (Mahnig and Piguet, 2003; generally Soysal, 1994). In the Swiss case, the opportunity structure provided by direct-democratic institutions would therefore form an important aspect of the explanation (Kriesi, 1992). Populist forces, such as the *Überfremdung* movement of the 1960s and 1970s, or the Swiss People's Party (SVP) in the 1990s (campaigning for more restrictive asylum laws and against easier access to citizenship), could play the 'Ausländer card' for their own political purposes and put pressure on state policies.

However, this explanation does not address the question of why there has been so much popular support for a restrictive migration constellation. In this context, analysts have argued that racism and xenophobia serve to treat *Ausländer* as scapegoats for a range of social and economic problems (Altermatt, 1996, p. 172). This line of analysis would also have to consider the long history and institutionalisation of particular discourses which have constituted migrants as *Ausländer* and as a potential threats in terms of *Überfremdung*, in other words, as targets for scape-goating theories (see, for instance, Romano, 1996). Nevertheless, the analysis so far is still limited, as it can not fully account for what may be called the 'obsessions' and the 'excesses' of the foreignisation process which is characteristic of the Swiss migration constellation. Let me briefly recall some of these 'obsessive' aspects.

First, strong emotions have been expressed in relation to the issue of *Ausländer*, especially recently, in relation to asylum seekers. There have been moral panics about the issue of 'Ausländer criminality'. Strong emotions have been expressed in letters to the editors of newspapers, in verbal and physical violence, and in parliamentary debates. The emotionality involved has been observed by various state reports and academic texts, which in turn hoped to introduce some 'facts' and 'calm' into the heated discussions. The whole field has often been characterised as 'highly polarised', and the search for a compromise or accommodation has often proved short-lived and illusionary. Why such strong emotions - in a country whose political process has often been caricatured as lacking in emotions and drama?

Secondly, a sense of emergency and urgency is regularly expressed in relation to migration and migration policy, most notably in the frequent calls for emergency measures and policies to be introduced by the state to 'prevent *Überfremdung*' or to prevent the success of certain referendums, to 'stem the flood' of migrants, to reduce the 'mountain' of pending asylum applications, and so on. Why this sense of urgency and emergency - in a country whose political decision-making process is often characterised as particularly slow, since it is based on a painstaking, institutionalised search for compromises and broad political support?

Thirdly, policy making surrounding the issue of *Ausländer* has often been referred to as *ad hoc*, perhaps reflecting - and reinforcing - the sense of urgency and emergency. Why this *ad hoc*-ness - in a country that prides itself on systematic, well-researched professional practices, and is often caricatured as lacking improvisational flair?

Fourthly, the issue of *Ausländer* and migration policy has led to enormous discursive output. Countless reports and studies by the state, NGOs and academics have appeared over the last few decades. Nobody can keep up with all the books, media coverage and letters to editors on this topic (let alone everyday discussions). Not surprisingly, there has not been a definitive book or text on this topic that would spell the end to this stream of discourse. This discursive preoccupation has also led to the emergence of 'experts', specialist organisations and government departments on *Ausländer* issues. Why such a high output of text and talk; why such a strong discursive pre-occupation - in a country whose people have often been caricatured as taciturn?

Fifthly, there has been an obsession with numbers and statistics, such as the numbers of *Ausländer*, the numbers of asylum seekers, the quota of the acceptance rate for asylum seekers, and - again and again - the ratio between *Ausländer* and Swiss citizens. This obsession goes well beyond the state's routine collection of data, and extends to regular up-dates in the media (new statistics are often front-page news) and to an obsession with percentages, numbers and ratios of *Ausländer* in the *Überfremdung* initiatives. Debates often employ statistics in an attempt to

objectively ‘measure’ the degree of this vague state called *Überfremdung* (see, for example, the state report by BIGA, 1964). Why this obsession with relative statistics on the *Ausländer* and the Swiss population?

How can we account for this excess of emotionality, this excess of urgency and emergency, this excess of improvisation, this excess of discourse, this obsession with numbers? On the surface, this excess appears to express either a fear of foreigners and foreign influences (xenophobia), or a neo-racist concern with incompatible cultural differences (Taguieff, 1991).¹² However, it is important to note that the *Überfremdung* discourse also expresses a sense of national vulnerability, in particular a lack of trust in the multicultural Swiss nation that is to be held together by political will.

Throughout the modern era, mainly conservative thinkers have criticised the Radical Liberal view of the Swiss nation as a ‘nation of the will’, and worried about the ability of an exclusively democratic, voluntarist commitment ‘to hold the nation together’ (see the studies of Matter, 1996; Romano, 1996; Jost, 1991). Consequently, there have been various attempts to find a firmer, essentialist definition of - or basis for - the nation: for instance, in terms of a common innate spirit, geology, religion or even race. Invariably, though, these attempts have failed to provide a secure foundation for a definition of the nation. Attempts to find a ‘Swiss race’ (*homo alpinus helveticus*) have been as unsuccessful (Kreis, 1992) as the search for a distinct ethnicity, language, religion or geology which would unambiguously unite the diversity of the Swiss nation and clearly separate it from neighbouring nations. This failure in turn can heighten the sense of anxiety about the nation’s survival, particularly in times of ‘national’ crises (Romano, 1996).

It is in the context of this anxiety about a Swiss identity that the persistence of the foreignisation process after World War II reveals its hidden significance: it helps to imagine a unique, distinct Swiss nation and culture. The Swiss migration constellation does not only reproduce the category of *Ausländer*, but also the category of the ‘Swiss’. As Schwarzenbach made explicit, the *Überfremdung* initiatives were primarily about the Swiss rather than the *Ausländer* as such. Admittedly, the argument that the social and discursive construction of *Ausländer* can act as a ‘significant Other’ in order to (re)define the nation is very familiar to anthropologists and sociologists operating with a relational concept of collective identifications, following Barth’s (1969) important insights into the formation of ethnic identities (see, for instance, Triandafyllidou, 2001). However, it is still important to document the precise way this mutual construction of the nation and the *Ausländer* is played out in the specific case of Switzerland as a complement to - rather than as a contradiction of - the celebration of a limited territorial, home-grown ‘multiculturalism’. Moreover, an analysis of the mutual constitution of *Ausländer* and the Swiss nation could also lead to important and illuminating interventions in contemporary public and political debates in Switzerland. However, this is not the purpose of this paper. Instead, I shall briefly point to some of the specific ways in which the Swiss nation has been constituted within the discourse on *Ausländer*.

Firstly, if there are *Ausländer* as a distinct category of people with particular characteristics, then there must also be *Inländer* (that is, the Swiss) with particular characteristics. Therefore, the constant, daily invocation of the concept of *Ausländer* affirms the separate identity of Swissness.

Secondly, if there is constant ‘migration pressure’ on Switzerland, that is, if so many people wish to migrate to Switzerland, then there must be something valuable and distinct about Switzerland. The constant warning of future ‘waves of migrants’ (for instance, in the event of joining the European Economic Area in the early 1990s or, more recently, in relation to bilateral treaties with the EU which allow for the free movement of people between Switzerland and the EU) serves to highlight the attractive difference of Switzerland.

Thirdly, if we can identify a threat to Swiss culture, then there must be such a thing as Swiss culture. Therefore, a constant invocation of a ‘threat’ of *Überfremdung* in fact affirms the existence of the Swiss nation.

Fourthly, the very idea that migrants should integrate into a Swiss culture or Swiss way of life again appears to confirm that there is such a thing as a uniform Swiss culture or Swiss way of life (rather than a modern plurality of milieus or post-modern cultural flows in a globalising world). If it takes years of individual effort to integrate, as is so often claimed in Switzerland (BIGA, 1964), then the number of years and the amount of effort again signals the distance or difference between *Ausländer* and the Swiss. This is especially significant in relation to migrants from neighbouring countries, who appear to share many characteristics with some part of Swiss culture (such as language and religion). In this context, the stipulation that *Ausländer* have to reside in the country for at least 12 years before they can be considered for citizenship evoke and impose a sense of a distinct Swiss identity.

The above discussion points to an important reason why there has been so much resistance against granting easier access to citizenship for *Ausländer*. Making it difficult to attain citizenship maintains a stronger difference between nationals and non-nationals, regardless of how long migrants have lived in the country, and regardless of their level of ‘integration’. Paradoxically, the more migrants have integrated into society, the more important it is to ‘foreignise’ them by means of laws, institutions and discourses. Swiss distinctiveness depends on this foreignisation process.

Conclusion

It can be argued that the Swiss indeed need their *Ausländer*, as is so often claimed. However, they are not just needed to fill certain jobs in industry or to contribute to pension funds for an increasingly aging population. If they were simply required as workers, tax payers or consumers, then there would be no reason not to extend citizenship to them. It appears that many Swiss do not simply need migrants; they need them in the status of *Ausländer* - regardless of who they are, what they do, what they think, or how much they have ‘integrated’. Migrants need to remain *Ausländer* to allow many Swiss, who are worried about a distinct Swissness in a globalising age of mobile boundaries, to imagine a distinct and rigid world of Swissness. Paradoxically, the discourse on *Ausländer*, *Überfremdung* and the cultural incompatibility of non-Europeans does not only express a concern about the excessive, incompatible *difference* of migrants, but also a deep worry that migrants may turn out to be very much like the Swiss, in other words, a deep anxiety about *similarity*. As Appadurai (1999) suggested, in an era of globalisation the main concern may not be incompatible cultural or ethnic difference, but categorical uncertainty, and especially a “deep and dramatic uncertainty about the ethnic self” (p. 322). Appadurai interpreted the physical brutality of recent ‘ethnic violence’ as a way of resolving categorical uncertainty and of restoring “the worst kind of certainty: dead certainty” (p. 322). This paper has interpreted the discursive constitution and political-legal exclusion of *Ausländer* in Switzerland as an alternative way of restoring categorical certainty - which raises the important question of the violence involved in this seemingly peaceful process.

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¹ The concept of 'migration constellation' was inspired by Wicker's (2003) insistence that immigration and citizenship should not be analysed separately, but instead in relation to each other as constituting a country's 'immigration configuration' or 'migration regime' (p. 21). See also Soysal's discussion (1994) in terms of 'incorporation regimes'.

² German citizenship laws changed in 2000 (Castles and Miller, 2003, p. 211), marking a shift from *ius sanguinis* towards *jus soli*. Naturalisation rates also increased significantly in the 1990s.

³ According to this treaty, foreign workers were allowed to change their employment or type of job after five years residence without needing a permit; seasonal workers gained the right to a annual permit after five years of uninterrupted seasonal years; and family reunion was allowed already after eighteen months instead of thirty-six months

⁴ The *Ausländer* Law (ANAG) was introduced in 1931 out of a defensive posture against migrants, and increasingly against Jews (Ludwig, 1957). The law stipulates that the authorities did not only have to take into account the economic interests of Switzerland, but also the 'degree of *Überfremdung*' when granting permits to *Ausländer* (Ludwig, 1957, p. 26).

⁵ The Swiss direct-democratic tools of referendum and initiative provided an opportunity structure for anti-immigrant sentiments to be voiced, and to be put on the political agenda earlier than in other countries (Kriesi, 1991, 1992). In this context, it is important to keep in mind that the influence of initiatives and referendums cannot simply be measured by their success at the ballot box. Even failed or retracted initiatives and referendums may help set the political agenda and public discussion topics, or may prompt concessions from the government. Finally, the mere threat of launching an initiative or a referendum by any sufficiently organised group can be very influential, and lead to the inclusion of their demands through formal and informal consultation (*Vernehmlassung*) by the policy and law makers (Kriesi, 1991).

⁶ *Völkerwanderung* is the term used by historians to refer to massive migrations after the fall of the Roman Empire in Europe, usually associated with chaos and destruction as a result of the invasion by war-like peoples.

⁷ However, negative actions by individual *Ausländer* are often highlighted in popular and media discourses. For instance, media coverage frequently identifies individuals involved in crimes or accidents in terms of their migration status (*Ausländer*), nationality (such as Turk) or regional-cultural background ('Balkan' and 'Albanian') (Kreis, 2004). In the context of the Swiss migration constellation, these media discourses do not simply 'report the facts', but in fact contribute to the foreignisation process.

⁸ Moreover, in the case of seasonal workers, the general call for improved integration conditions for *Ausländer* was obviously undermined by legal restrictions, such as the prohibition on family reunions.

⁹ Occasionally, the concept of 'multiculturalism' (usually followed by a careful question mark) has been promoted by authors in a utopian spirit. See Tanner (1998) and Prodolliet (1998)

¹⁰ Anti-Muslim propaganda featured prominently in the debates surrounding this referendum. An anonymous 'committee against mass naturalisations' placed advertisements in newspapers asking whether 'Muslims will soon be in the majority' and whether 'Muslims will soon determine our policies towards women' (Vanoni, 2004, p. 6).

¹¹ The most recent initiative in this regard (the seventh so-called *Überfremdung* initiative) demanded the reduction of the foreign population to 18% of the total population (Federal Council, 1997).

¹² Emotionality and urgency may also be expressed by those who campaign against xenophobia and racism, and for more inclusive policies in relation to migrants. In fact, it is common to dismiss such concerns as 'emotional' and 'sentimental', such as, for instance, in an aggressive campaign by the conservative Swiss People's Party (SVP) against '*die Linken und die Netten*' (the politically left and the 'nice' people). On the discourse of the national-conservative movement, see Hartmann and Gross, 1995.