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Reference

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Depoliticizing integration through statistical indicators

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ABSTRACT

The concept of integration plays an increasingly important role in Western societies, which is accompanied by a similar increase in statistical indicators designed to measure the policies that shape integration. In this paper, we critically examine one such system of measurement: the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics’ Indicators of Integration. We use an interpretative methodology to analyse the political and conceptual construction of a quantitative policy-tool. As such, we provide an innovative and theory-based approach to analysing statistical policy-tools more widely.

KEYWORDS

Integration; migration; indicators; statistics; discourse

1. Introduction

In several European countries, debates and controversies around integration have led to a proliferation of policy tools designed to measure integration outcomes. Integration policies in themselves have been the object of continuous scientific scrutiny (Goodman 2010, Helbling 2012, Joppke and Morawska 2014, Kostakopoulou 2014a, Goodman and Wright 2015) however, the statistical policy-tools designed by national and European statistical agencies to measure integration outcomes and policies have received little attention in the scientific literature. While the concept of integration is abundantly used in policy and research, it is still an essentially contested concept (Connolly 1993) that is used to describe a wide range of views on ‘the proper way to include migrants’ in a given society.

In 2014, the Swiss Federal Office of Statistics (FSO) made public its Indicators of Integration, following up on a mandate handed down by the federal government in 2007. This project, promoted by fifteen federal offices, was intended to allow for a ‘systematic monitoring, in the long-run and with regular intervals, of the development of the process of integration in Switzerland’ (Swiss Federal Office of Statistics 2014a, p. 61). However, to date, a scientific scrutiny of these indicators has not yet been conducted. Moreover, several authors have pointed out that, in general, research on indicators often focuses on the methodological and technical aspects of indicators and seldom accounts for the conceptual logics that structure them (Gudmundsson 2003, Lehtonen 2015).

This article analyses the process of construction of federal indicators of integration in Switzerland, focusing on their conceptual framework and the construction of categories of population. By adopting a theoretical problematization of this system of indicators,
we seek to clarify what exactly this policy-tool measures. We will suggest that in the context of restrictive immigration policies, these indicators implicitly make use of concepts that historically have been associated with a far-right imaginary of ‘invasion by foreigners’, namely the ‘over-foreignization’ (Überfremdung) of the population (Skenderovic 2009). We will show that despite the legal and conceptual discourse in Switzerland about integration as a two-way process, the concept is still articulated as ‘integration into a given social fabric’ (Anthias 2014, p. 15), which has previously been called assimilation.

We argue that these indicators of integration institutionalize the idea of an irreducible ontological difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by concealing the political nature of integration. Depoliticization involves, for Brown, ‘removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its historical emergence and from recognition of the powers that produce and contour it’ (2008, p. 15). By depoliticization, we do not mean that these indicators are not political; on the contrary, this mechanism serves a political purpose of concealing political decisions through the categorization of populations and the outcomes of migration policies. These mechanisms of concealing the political nature of systems of measurement have the consequence of naturalizing highly contestable political categories such as the ones deployed by the FSO.

Following these perspectives, this paper argues that in order to provide a comprehensive analysis of a complex system of indicators, it is necessary to examine them in their historical, institutional, political and discursive contexts. To do this, we first explain why it is significant to examine the conceptual construction underlying a system of measurement. After briefly sketching the historical, institutional and political context of the construction of the Swiss system of indicators that are used to measure integration, this article will examine the assumptions, presuppositions and concepts that lie at the foundations of this new statistical tool. Through our analysis, we explain how these indicators institutionalized a new statistical category of ‘population with migration background’, which does not originate in a legal status such as citizen or non-national resident. We conclude by arguing that this process has led to the institutionalization of an ontological difference attributed to migrants and that this was made possible by concealing the political nature of these indicators.

2. Theoretical grounds

We use Political Discourse Theory (PDT) as the theoretical horizon of this paper. PDT has initially emerged from the works of Enesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe and has since been developed by various authors affiliated to the Essex School of Discourse Analysis. We do not systematically apply discourse analysis as a method in this paper, it rather constitutes what David Howarth has called ‘a research programme or paradigm’ that is centred around ‘the idea that all objects and practices are meaningful, and that social meanings are contextual, relational, and contingent’ (Howarth and Torfing 2005, p. 317). By positioning our research in such a way, we do not impute a specific meaning to the concept of integration; instead, our problematization rather seeks to unveil the meaning given to the concept by the system of indicators we analyse.
3. Methods and corpus selection

Our analysis is based on an interpretative methodology and a multiplicity of sources. First, we analysed the policy documents which constitute the mandate handed down from the Federal Council to the FSO and which explain the reasons and needs behind this project and also articulate it in the wider context of Switzerland’s migration policy. This enabled us to identify the actors who participated in the project, and the demands, concerns and interests that have framed the project. We then scrutinized in detail the 68 indicators, focusing on their conceptual construction. For this we referred to the indicators themselves (available on the FSO’s website), to the detailed methodological report provided by the FSO and to intermediary and final progress reports that helped to trace the evolution of the project. At first glance, the data appeared to be extremely structured, logical and straightforward. The FSO had divided the 68 indicators into 11 fields: social aid and poverty (11 indicators); culture (6), religion and medias; education (5); family and demography (9); language (5); housing (4); the labour market (9); politics (7); health (8); racism, discrimination and security (3); and criminality (1). However, going through the 68 indicators and trying to understand the conceptual logic behind them proved extremely challenging. What does integration mean in such a broad measurement system? How are the different categories of population selected and why? How does this affect our understanding of the data and therefore of the social reality it is supposed to portray? Finally, what do these indicators actually measure? It is important to note here that the FSO is not an independent statistical organization like other national statistical agencies such as the National Institute of Statistics and Economic Studies in France, which is a public institution which operates with relative autonomy from the government. To the contrary, the FSO is directly attached to the Ministry of the Interior of the Swiss government, which is also why its conceptualization of integration is extremely relevant for understanding the Swiss philosophy of integration and migration policies. Indeed, as is noted in the FSO’s methodological report, the definition of integration is taken from Swiss laws which we also took into consideration in our analysis. We have also conducted an in-depth interview with the team in charge of coordinating the project within the 11 thematic branches of the FSO.

To interpret this corpus, we combined several strands of scientific literature because we consider that our object of study is better apprehended from a multiplicity of perspectives. First, we briefly expose relevant notions taken from the literature concerning the production of statistical indicators. This enables us to explain some of the theoretical, practical and political concerns related to such policy tools. Then we contextualize our study within the scientific literature concerning the history of statistics on foreigners and the history of migration policies in Switzerland. This enables us to give historical and contextual depth to our analysis, which is essential because the production of meaning and categories do not happen in a vacuum. Finally, we establish links with critical and theoretical insights from the literature on migrant integration, which makes our analysis useful with regards to the contemporary scientific debates on migrant integration policies.

4. Indicators and data: what difference for integration policies?

The use of statistical indicators and the reality measured by them are characterized by a bidirectional relationship (Desrosières 2008, p. 187); in other words, indicators do not
simply describe reality but also shape specific interpretations of social phenomena. According to the theoretical insights of Desrosières, even the indicators of integration can be conceived as the rules of exhibition of statistical data both signifying and structuring the reality of integration that they seek to describe. If scholars largely assume the metrological dimension of indicators, they often neglect or omit indicators’ retroactive agency in relation to reality. This capacity of an indicator to constitute real phenomena depends on the relationship between statistics and the process of state building (Desrosières 2008, p. 105). In fact, indicators have ‘a function of a coordination and orientation of policies and the evaluation and comparison of the results of those polices’ (Desrosières 2008, p. 71). The epistemology of indicators is rooted in the interaction between their producers and users. Conventional representations of reality are often naturalised as a result of the use of indicators (Perrot 1992). Indicators can be conceived as the most political statistical tool. Statistical indicators often hide the conventional character of the alleged reality they measure by reifying it.

In our case, the creation of national indicators of integration does not aim at gathering more structured information than pre-existing data concerning foreigners. Extensive statistical data concerning nationals and non-nationals already exist. The creation of Swiss indicators of integration targets three objectives: (1) the translation in statistical terms of a specific concept of integration, (2) the symbolic transfer of control of the process of integration at the national level and (3) the retroactive effect on the behaviours of quantified actors, citizens and non-citizens.

As Desrosières suggests, analysis of the form of the state in which indicators are produced can help to contextualise the purpose of their creation. In the case of Swiss indicators of integration, they are produced by neoliberal forms of state governance (Desrosières 2014, p. 37). Neoliberal governance implements benchmarking practices by influencing civil society actors via retroactive effects (Bruno 2008, p. 44). Evaluation, classification and hierarchization of performances of integration result in retroactive outcomes. These outcomes have a relevant influence on the process of crystallisation of individual and collective identities. The creation of new categories for measuring integration has transformative and performative effects on the reality those indicators aim to measure (Desrosières 2014, p. 46). Differently from data, indicators encourage individuals to interiorize norms and rules convened by them and to align their behaviours with the general behaviour (Burchell and Foucault 1991, Miller 1992, Desrosières 2014). The debate about integration itself is ignored because indicators cause public (and expert) opinion to focus on measuring integration instead of the processes which led to the definition of the concept in the first place. In the public sphere, indicators can be criticized only with regards to methodological characteristics and not their conventional nature.

Indicators also have a relevant impact on public policies. As Lehtonen (2015, p. 77) describes, indicators are a ‘heterogeneous policy tool, with a range of purposes, functions, disciplinary backgrounds, application areas and levels’, each with their own theoretical and normative presuppositions. Also, Gallopin defines indicators as ‘variables that summarize or otherwise simplify relevant information, make visible or perceptible phenomena of interest, and quantify, measure and communicate relevant information’ (1996 cited Lehtonen 2015, p. 78). Several types of indicators exist, but all of them are considered to be tools that aim to reduce the complexity of a situation or
process (Moldan et al. 1997). Regardless of the typology of a particular set of indicators, there is an underlying assumption that reducing the complexity of a phenomenon or process will be useful for informing people and, most crucially, for better decision-making (Gudmundsson 2003). This is perhaps the most common assumption when it comes to indicators.

There are different typologies of indicators. The system of indicators developed by the FSO can be described as a monitoring system composed of descriptive indicators. Descriptive indicators are the most basic type of indicators. They can be ‘dichotomous, number, grade, time series, ratios or other derived functions’ (Gudmundsson 2003, p. 3). Although these indicators are often perceived and presented as objective, descriptive does not mean that they are objective but rather that they do not provide specific policy recommendations. These types of indicators are opposed to performance indicators that compare ‘descriptive variables to targets or benchmarks in order to monitor the performance or results of policies’ (idem). A monitoring system aims to provide reporting at regular intervals of time.

Indicators receive their legitimacy in two ways: by being perceived as ‘scientific and objective information’ on the one hand, and, on the other, as ‘policy-relevant, tailor-made and hence partly subjective type of evidence’ (Lehtonen 2015, p. 76). There is evidently a tension between these two sources of legitimacy. The first one projects neutrality and objectivity, while the second one presupposes the opposite, that is, subjective choices that aim to make indicators more relevant for a particular case. In fact, we can find this tension in the FSO’s indicators. On the one hand, the FSO’s system of indicators is presented as objective, being influenced by the scientific literature and by experts. On the other hand, it is said to be more relevant than other indicators with regard to the Swiss case, because the FSO’s system was tailor-made (the FSO’s methodological report). This remains one of the main lines of argument justifying the creation of such a system of indicators: the fact that it was tailor-made to be more relevant for the Swiss case.

The conceptual framework underlying the construction of indicators is what distinguishes them from data or statistics by prescribing ‘a specific worldview with associated categories’ (Gudmundsson 2003, p. 4, Lehtonen 2015). This conceptual framework determines the ‘criteria and logic for the choice of specific indicators […] and] anchors indicator systems in theory’ (Lehtonen 2015, p. 78). In other words, it is the logic underlying a particular system of organizing, representing and ultimately giving meaning to data. In order to capture this logic, it is essential to place the production of indicators, especially such political ones, within their historical context.

5. The historical context of statistical categorization of foreigners in Switzerland

Founded in 1860, the FSO has been, since its origin, an institutional instrument evolving in conformity with the government’s political agenda (Arlettaz and Arlettaz 2004, p. 44). Between 1850 and 1870, the Swiss census made a simple distinction among non-Swiss residents, using the following three categories: settled, visiting and passing people (Arlettaz 1985, Le Goff 2005). However, by the end of the 19th and the beginning of the 20th century, statistics on non-Swiss residents, defined at that moment
as foreigners, began to be produced in relation to political debates on the denationalization of the country due to a perceived ‘over-foreignization’ (Überfremdung) of the population (Arlettaz 1985, Le Goff 2005). Since 1880 the FSO has, in fact, contributed to framing the growing presence of foreigners as problematic. Already in 1880, the census had gathered statistical information to defend the nation’s alleged racial purity and to understand whether ‘immigration was growing at the point that one day a foreign race will dominate in Switzerland’ (Arlettaz and Arlettaz 2004). Between 1885 and 1914, the FSO has defined the phenomenon of immigration as an anomalous augmentation, infiltration, invasion and colonization (Arlettaz and Arlettaz 2004). Statistics gathered on foreigners steadily increased from 1888 to 1910. In 1888, for the first time, the FSO collected data concerning the place of birth of the population, and in 1910, it collected data concerning the length of stay of residents. At that period, the FSO gathered statistical data to manage the presence of allegedly exotic individuals becoming part of the social and economic life of the country without, according to the FSO, sharing the same political and civic culture of nationals (Arlettaz and Arlettaz 2004, p. 58).

Since the creation of the FSO, the need to gather statistical data on the foreign population in Switzerland was associated with the need to measure the degree of denationalization of the country. Federal statistics have in fact translated two apparently diverging political positions on national identity: one conceiving of naturalization as a way to impose cultural assimilation on foreigners, and the other conceiving of it as a way to impede foreigners from obtaining legal citizenship. Both are associated with the fear of over-foreignization, the first coming from inside national borders, and the second coming from outside (Arlettaz and Arlettaz 2004). The first political position reflected a civic-assimilationist conception of citizenship, which predominated before 1917 (Arlettaz 1985). The second position fostered an ethnic conception of citizenship, which was institutionalized after 1917 with a vote for the expulsion of foreigners who organized political activities and the creation of a central office of police for foreigners (Arlettaz 1985). In this way, by stimulating the production of new statistics, over-foreignization became the unique conceptual framework by which the undesirability of foreigners was justified.

Between the end of the 1940s and the beginning of the 1950s, the census asked foreigners, for the first time, for information concerning their type of visa permit (Le Goff 2005). Furthermore, the census asked for the place of origin and the place of birth in a more systematically and intertwined way. As Le Goff (2005) describes, both data were used to grasp the rate of over-foreignization framed politically and consequently statistically as the number of ‘non-nationals born in the country’. Over-foreignization was statistically operationalized, as the count of foreigners settled and born in Switzerland. Le Goff (2005) argues that multiplication of statistics concerning naturalization that at period was a way to control and measure this perceived over-foreignization from the inside.

Between the 1960s and the first half of the 1970s the non-Swiss population were statistically defined mainly as a foreign worker population, and other subcategories were abandoned (Le Goff 2005). However, by the end of the economic crisis of the 1970s, the restriction of employment of foreign manpower and growing xenophobia resulted in a political discourse which fostered the need for better statistics concerning foreigners working independently of their workers status (Le Goff 2005). Following this,
the quality and quantity of the statistics data were improved for all legal categories of non-Swiss residents. In the last two decades, the census, thematic surveys and the Central Register of Foreign Nationals gathered data exhaustively concerning all typologies of the country’s population except for undocumented persons. At the same time, the political debate and statistical concerns increasingly focused on the integration of foreigners (Le Goff 2005, Mahnig 2005).

The recent indicators of integration should be examined in the context of a history of statistical tools concerning non-Swiss residents that have legitimized the implementation of specific political views on immigration and national identity. Legislation concerning integration and the related indicators have their origin in the political period that followed the popular vote against the Federal Council’s proposal to facilitate the naturalization of second-generation ‘immigrants’ and to concede _jus soli_ to the third generation (Wanner and D’Amato 2003, Kaya 2005). Between 2003 and 2007, the prominent leader of the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), Christoph Blocher, was the federal chancellor at the head of the Federal Department of Justice and Police, which manages the Federal Office of Migration. During his mandate, Blocher created the institutional conditions which paved the way for the production of the most relevant documents concerning integration measures and polices: the Aliens Law and the Immigrant Integration report of 2007 (Efionayi-Mäder _et al._ 2003, Wanner and D’Amato 2003). Both documents have greatly shaped the production of the recent indicators of integration. They represent a political shift concerning the meaning of integration, which became associated with ‘coercion and repression’:

They rely on the assumption that EU/EFTA citizens are fully integrable, whereas third-country nationals are supposed to have deficits (if they are not highly qualified). The immigrant integration report thus underlines the various deficits and risks of immigrants (in comparison to Swiss citizens) with regard to education, unemployment, social assistance dependency and criminality. These assumed deficits are located either in the culture, religion or language of immigrants or in the alleged lack of acceptance of their duties towards Swiss society, in particular the lack of respect for laws and constitutional rights. (D’Amato and Suter 2012, p. 300)

Already in 2005, under Blocher’s direction, the Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) mandated the Federal Office for Migration (FOM) to analyse problems arising from immigrant integration in Switzerland. Federal authorities and some concerned cantonal authorities were consulted on different issues. In 2006, the FOM published the report ‘Integration problems of foreign nationals in Switzerland’. It referred to statistics to illustrate deficiencies among foreigners in terms of poverty, dependency on social aid, health care and high rates of criminality, and outlined the incompatibility of foreigners in terms of religious and cultural differences. In this report, the category mainly employed to define the target population for integration policies was that of ‘foreigner’, while the category of ‘segundos’ and ‘with migratory background’ appear for some specific issues such as education and professional insertion. The category ‘population with foreign origin’ appears in the paragraph of the report introducing the creation of indicators of integration by the FOM (Office fédéral des migrations 2006, p. 19).

In August 2006, in response to a proposal by the Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP), the Federal Council decided to implement measures to improve the
integration of foreigners. From August 2006 to March 2007, the FDJP coordinated an inter-departmental Working Group on Migratory Problems (GIM). Then, in 2007 the FDJP addressed the Report on the integration measures to the Federal Council to implement integration policies. In this report, the categories of ‘foreigner’, ‘population of foreigner origin’ and ‘population with migratory background’ were used interchangeably and ambiguously. Moreover, the report clearly stated that the degree of integration had to be measured for the population ‘with migratory background’. The report also assigned to the FSO three tasks considered significant for the implementation of integration polices (Office fédéral des migrations ODM 2007, pp. 94–95).

1. The developing of ‘a set of indicators allowing the measurement of the degree of integration of people with migratory background’ from 2009 to 2012.
2. The revision of police statistics on criminality.
3. The revision of statistics on social aid.

It is important to note how the production of the indicators of integration was, from the start, closely connected with the statistics on criminality and social aid. This, coupled with the fact that the report from which the project of the indicators originated came from the Federal Department of Justice and Police, speaks to the association between migration policies, securitization and the idea that the ‘migrants with poor prospects’ of integration are ‘likely to be unemployed and dependent on welfare’ (Bonjour and Duyvendak 2017, p. 12). Indeed we have found four parliamentary interpellations (08.3407; 02.3329; 06.3071; 09.4277) dating between 2002 and 2009, all coming from the far-right party SVP/UDC, that pushed for the creation of statistics concerning the rate of criminality, social aid and naturalisation among foreigners. The most prominent theme was that of a supposedly higher criminality rate among foreigners, which had to be documented. Moreover, in two of those interpellations, there was an insistence that criminality statistics should be reported in a way that distinguished between nationals and naturalised nationals.

The Federal Council adopted the recommendations of the report in August 2007 by appointing 15 federal services to implement 46 measures to improve immigrants’ integration. The FSO received a political mandate to measure the integration of a category that is not rooted in the legislation concerning integration. In fact, the Ordinance on the Integration of Foreigners (OIE) and the Foreign Nationals Act (FNA) always referred to ‘foreigners’ and ‘nationals’, making the distinction in terms of citizenship status. While the Swiss legislation aimed to provide equal opportunities between nationals and foreigners by monitoring the degree of integration, the report of 2007 introduced a new category of population for this monitoring. The report argues that the degree of integration has to be measured not only for foreigners but also for citizens with ‘migratory background’. As we explain in the following parts of this paper, the FSO implemented a political decision by applying this new classification. Moreover, the FSO exported this categorization beyond indicators of integration, which is evidence of the growing significance of this categorization. The FSO extended the use of this new classification to all statistics, gradually replacing the old classification, which distinguished between ‘foreigners’ and ‘nationals’.
6. What does integration mean?

The political aim of the federal indicators of integration was explicitly to contribute to the effort to control and cope with the ‘deficit of integration’ among the immigrant population. In fact, in 2005, the Swiss Federal Department of Justice and Police (FDJP) appointed the Federal Office for Migration (FOM) to analyse Swiss immigrants’ integration. The FDJP was crucial in problematizing the presence of foreigners as a risk and potential cost for the nation. It is said that an alleged ‘deficit of integration’ can lead to ‘deviant’ practices such as high criminality rates and dependency on social aid. To respond to this problematization, the indicators measure the negative effects of the presence of immigration without an account of the positive effects of immigration. The indicators consolidate the idea that ‘integration is a problem’ by exclusively focusing on the potential negative aspects of immigrants’ presence: poverty, unemployment, dependency on social aid, criminality rates, health problems and lack of education, etc. Characterizing integration in these terms (re)presents the trope of the migrants’ inability or ‘deviant unwillingness’ to integrate (Anthias 2014).

Indeed, at the demand of the FDJP, the Federal Office of Migration published its 2006 report titled ‘Integration problems of foreign nationals in Switzerland’. This first report stated that integration is ‘sort of equal opportunities’ (p.3). The report explained that if statistical results were similar for immigrants and Swiss citizens with comparable attributes, the process of integration could be considered to be successful. In this sense, restrictive migration policies in Switzerland are still, in part, justified by the responsibility of the state to provide equal opportunities. Integration is therefore understood as the equalization or homogenization of the living conditions of those with a foreign background and the rest of the population.

In Annex 1 we have provided a complete list of the 68 indicators classified according to the 11 thematic fields of the FSO. We have added a column that shows which indicators are recommended by the European Union (13). This is an indication of the number of indicators that were specifically chosen for Switzerland (55). The table also provides a column showing the diversity of sources used to make these indicators. Here we can see the multiplicity of sources used to make the indicators. Several methodological and technical problems arise as a result of this, but these are not the focus of this article. Regarding our analysis, the most interesting part of the table is the classification of each indicator in terms of the concept of integration to which it relates. The FSO’s methodological report cites four different concepts of integration: social (25 indicators), systemic (30), social structure (4), two-way process (5) and a fifth concept that is used without being defined that is assimilation (4). We chose to analyse these indicators with the concepts chosen by the FSO, because the focus of this paper is on excavating the underlying conceptual framework inherent in this system of measurement. It is important to note that all four of these notions are relatively ambiguous and malleable and thus the categorization we offer is not the only possible one but serves to give an idea of the conceptual presuppositions in play in this system of measurement as well as the weight of each of these concepts in the distribution of the 68 indicators.

Social integration is defined in the FSO’s methodological report as the ‘structural, cultural, social and identity dimensions of integration’ (Swiss Federal Office of Statistics 2014a, p. 6). In this view, social integration relies on a ‘deliberate effort of cooperation between individuals and groups’ (idem), with the idea of measuring the differences in
statistical results between ‘nationals and immigrants’. This view purportedly puts the accent on agency rather than structure, as is evident from the use of the word deliberate in the definition given by the FSO. A first glance at the table in Annex 1 reveals that the classification of particular indicators as using the concept of integration might look obscure. For example, most of the indicators in the Health section, such as Limitation of work for at least 6 months or the indicator Social support: trust relations, are classified under this category because their relevance, as described on the FSO’s website and in its methodological report, is explained in terms of having an effect on social integration. This definition has its roots in structuration theory in the field of sociology where this process is also referred to as integration to society as opposed to systemic integration, which is the integration of society. Social integration, then, puts the accent on agency rather than structure. While this view recognizes the agency of migrants, the correlate of this conception is that if the integration process is deemed as failed, it is assumed to be because of the ‘unwillingness’ or ‘inability’ of the migrant to integrate (Anthias 2014). Characteristically rooted in a civic integration paradigm, this conception shifts from addressing structures of inequality and discrimination towards individuals’ responsibilities to integrate (Goodman 2010, Kostakopoulou 2014b). As for the application of the conception of integration as social integration, it is reported in the FSO’s methodological paper that this definition can be readily operationalized statistically by ‘observing the difference of results between nationals and immigrants’ (FSO 2014, p. 6). It is interesting to note here that this is indeed the conceptual aspect upon which the Swiss indicators rely the most, although it is considered ‘unable, on its own, to summarize the complexity of integration’ (FSO 2014, p. 6). In this way of conceptualizing integration as social integration, the indicators reflect a vision of integration as-adaption (Gianni 2016), which considers immigrants as integrated when they display similar results as nationals. In this sense it is difficult to see how the concept of integration differs from assimilation.

Systemic integration is said to function in ‘relative independence from the motivations and aims of the actors’ and as the ‘fruit of mechanisms of coordination between different elements of a system: institutions, organizations, the State, communes, the legal system, corporate actors [and] the markets’. It concerns the ‘necessity to conform to institutional rules and logics’ (FSO 2014, p. 6). The problems said to be related to systemic integration are xenophobia, racism, inter-ethnic and inter-religious conflicts, hate speech, violence, criminality and anti-social behaviours (FSO 2014, p. 6). All the indicators under the sections of Housing and Social Aid and Poverty have been classified under this category, as they all address issues of institutional configuration which go beyond the motivations of individual actors. For example, the indicators in the section Housing, such as Rent by m2 or Average area by inhabitant, relate to issues of urban planning, access to social housing and overall socio-economic structuration of cities, while the indicators in the section Politics, such as Probability of acquiring a residency permit or Communal and cantonal voting rights and eligibility of foreigners, speak of politico-institutional configuration in terms of rights and laws that exist before and beyond immigrants’ motivations or aims. This is the most prevalent aspect of integration in the indicators (30 of them), and one concern is that this way of framing the indicators eliminates a possible causal understanding of the results. For example, all of the indicators in the section Social Aid and Poverty are defined by this conception;
however, the way the indicators are constructed makes it impossible to distinguish between the different cantonal welfare regimes that have a great impact on social aid and poverty rates. As such, one can only observe in the results that ‘the population with a migration background’ is more prone to poverty and social aid, but these results omit the causes of poverty.

Social structure seeks to capture the aspects of integration relating to the profile of migrants, especially when there is an immigration policy that selects migrants according to socio-economic, cultural or ethnic preferences (FSO 2014, p. 7). Only a handful of indicators (4) provide information on this aspect. In the Language section, National language as main language and Language use by sphere (professional or familial) might exemplify this cultural selection; however, the issue with such indicators is that they do not differentiate between individuals who were, for example, born in Switzerland and as such employ a national language as their main language, and individuals who migrated from (or were born in) a country sharing a similar language such as France, Germany or Italy.

Two-way process is also a conceptualization of integration that seldom appears in the indicators (only 5 of them). This way of capturing integration emphasises integration not only as a process (that is, not just an action or a choice) but as a reciprocal relationship between society and immigrants. It is said that ‘the attitude and efforts of both parties have a consequence on the good proceeding of integration’ (FSO 2014, p. 7). Moreover it is important to add that the definition of integration as a two-way process also appears in Swiss law; it is, therefore, curious that it is not given more importance in the construction of the indicators. The indicator Political opinion on equal opportunities is an example of such a conception of integration that seeks to assess the view of society on integration. The issue that remains is the question of how ‘society’ is conceptualized.

Assimilation does not feature in the definitions given by the FSO, but there are indicators (4) that explicitly report that they are ‘rather indicators of assimilation than integration’. This is why the number of indicators we presented until now only adds up to 64 of the 68 indicators. The four remaining indicators are under the ‘Family and demography’ section. For example, the indicator Professional activity and household and family tasks is said to report on the gap between the way households function in their distribution of tasks (who takes care of family and household tasks and who participates to the labour market) (FSO 2014). To make this even more explicit, it means that the ‘population with a migration background’ is considered ‘assimilated’ if and when they display similar results as the ‘population without a migration background’ concerning their practices in terms of sharing household tasks. As such, the sudden apparition of the concept of assimilation, a concept that is considered a taboo of the past, seems almost like a Freudian slip. This confirms Brubaker’s observation that there has been a ‘shift from organic understandings of assimilation, focusing on an end state of complete absorption, to abstract understanding of assimilation, focusing on a process of becoming similar (in some respect, to some reference population)’ (Brubaker 2001, p. 542). It is also interesting to note that these indicators all concern the section Family and Demography and are linked to reproductive matters such as the fertility rate, which signals a concern with the control of women’s bodies.

Independently of the concept of integration that they refer to, the indicators selected by the FSO do not measure migrants’ positive contributions to Swiss society. As Tabin
shows, the integration of immigrants to the nation is the downside of an integrative process of the nation in itself (Tabin 1999). However, public and institutional discourses frame the presence of immigrants as an external component of societies. Furthermore, they often hide their crucial demographic, socio-cultural and economic contribution to society. In the case of Switzerland, as Tabin has repeatedly shown, this process is extremely paradoxical in the case of welfare contribution. In fact, the migrant contribution to welfare insurance allows the national welfare system to provide services for citizens. The lack of indicators measuring this contribution contributes to characterizing the relationship between welfare services and immigrants in negative ways across institutional discourses. Immigrants are described as benefiting from the welfare services and social aid by representing the danger of the system’s sustainability. By analysing the FSO’s indicators of integration concerning social aid and poverty, the integration of immigrants to the nation is investigated almost only as a problematic process. The FSO’s indicators of integration do not allow for measuring the positive immigrant contribution to the social system by migrants.

In the same way, the indicators of integration do not allow for measuring the non-take-up of welfare benefits by immigrants (Bruckmeier and Wiemers 2017). In fact, they include the indicators concerning the social aid rate and rate of assistance, but they do not include indicators measuring the difference between the non-take-up rate of social aid of immigrants and that of citizens.

7. ‘Population with a migratory background’ and the blurring of citizenship boundaries

The FSO’s categorization of the population to be integrated extends beyond citizenship status to all people with ‘migratory background’ whether naturalized or not. This extension can be characterized as the suspicion that the ‘undesirable difference’ might itself extend beyond the categories of legal citizenship. At this stage in the process, the contours of legal citizenship have been blurred as a result of a reconfiguration of the boundaries between citizens and foreigners. The function of the indicators is declared as measuring the deficit of integration, which explains the racialization of immigrants as irreducibly different from nationals, even for those who possess citizenship. Despite portraying a picture of the heterogeneity of the population, the indicators impose a dichotomized representation of identities by dividing the Swiss residents into two hierarchized groups of ‘us’ and ‘them’, in-group and out-group, which goes beyond categories of legal citizenship. In fact, the FSO adopted as its main analytical category the dichotomous categorization of individuals with or without migratory background, which means that a racialized conception of belonging is at the heart of the system of measurement.

In doing so, the FSO aligned itself with the recent European trend of defining the distinction between nationals and foreigners as inadequate and too restrictive for measuring migration and integration (Krekels and Poulain 1996). The FSO, following the recommendations of the UN and the path taken by other European countries, has established its own typology of the population ‘with a migration background’ (Swiss Federal Office of Statistics 2014a, p. 7). Going beyond the variable of citizenship status, this type of classification seeks to include the migratory experience of individuals by adding, alongside nationality, the place of birth of both the individual and his or her parents.
The team in charge of the production of the indicators at the FSO describes this categorization as follows:

This population includes all foreigners up to the second generation (the third generation or higher is considered to have a migration background solely in the scope of the integration indicators); all persons who have acquired Swiss nationality in their lifetime except those born in Switzerland with both parents also born in Switzerland; and Swiss citizens by birth with both parents born abroad.

(Swiss Federal Office of Statistics 2014b, p. 3)

This enables a typology that goes beyond the traditional distinction between ‘nationals’ and ‘foreigners’, which tends to consider integration to be the acquisition of citizenship, and it also allows for distinguishing, as the table above shows, between 1st and 2nd generation migrants. However, this new typology does not go beyond the ‘us’ and ‘them’ dichotomy previously centred on the ‘national’ versus ‘foreign’ divide. It only serves to displace this dichotomy to a different one, which is ‘population without a migration background’ versus ‘population with a migration background’, while still reproducing the figure of ‘the Other’ as different (Anthias 2014, p. 14). The indicators of integration measure the undesirable differences between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by introducing a racialized categorization of population.

One could argue that it is important to make these categories in order to account for discrimination. In fact, anyone familiar with the controversies regarding the creation of ethnic categories in France (Heckmann and Schnapper 2003, Schnapper 2008) will be reminded that this is typically the line of argument that was made by those who deemed it necessary to put figures on discriminatory practices. However, this line of argument cannot apply here because the FSO’s indicators are carefully constructed to ignore crucial cantonal differences. Indeed federalism in Switzerland not only leads to different migratory regimes across cantons (Manatschal 2012) but also different welfare regimes. Because the data is structured in a way that erases cantonal difference, the indicators further depoliticize integration by abstracting...
away the structural effects caused by differences in migration, health, social and other policies.

The reification of the difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ correlates with the conceptualization of integration as a two-way process, which is described as the necessity of both migrants and the host society to make efforts for integration to be successful:

(...) the openness of the majority of society to what is new is a central condition for a successful integration, without discrimination and by using the potential brought in migrants and that ‘if difference and diversity are not tolerated, the processes of integration might not lead to identity construction and equilibrium but to discrimination(s), exclusion(s) or stigmatization(s). (Swiss Federal Office of Statistics 2014, 7 emphasis added)

There are two important remarks to me made here. First, to speak about ‘integration as a two-way process’ presupposes an intersubjective relationship between parties with equal status (Kostakopoulou 2014a, pp. 49–51), whereas the position in which most migrants find themselves is one in which integration requirements are imposed upon them and decided for them and not with them (Kontos 2014). The hierarchization of diversity is a crucial conceptual mechanism by which statistics shrink or abolish the possibilities of immigrants defining themselves and their positions across societal power relations.

Second, it is interesting that the term ‘tolerated’ is used. This supports the idea of an asymmetric relationship existing in which the host society only tolerates difference rather than accepts it or even allows itself to be transformed by it in the way that the two-way-process notion of integration suggests. Tolerance becomes in this context a stigma associated with a definitive incompatibility. It is not tolerance that is in itself the problem; as Wendy Brown explains, ‘[r]ather, the call for tolerance, the invocation of tolerance, and the attempt to instantiate tolerance are all signs of identity production and identity management in the context of orders of signification or marginalization in which the production, the management, and the context themselves are disavowed’ (Brown 2008, p. 14). Despite the legal and conceptual discourse about integration as a two-way process, the concept is still articulated as ‘integration into a given social fabric’ (Anthias 2014, p. 15) previously called assimilation. The indicators of integration institutionalize the idea of an irreducible ontological difference between ‘us’ and ‘them’ by concealing the political nature of integration. Depoliticization involves, for Brown, ‘removing a political phenomenon from comprehension of its historical emergence and from recognition of the powers that produce and contour it’ (2008, p. 15). This is precisely why we sought to examine the conceptual production of these indicators in their historical, institutional, political and discursive context.

8. Conclusion

This paper deconstructs and examines the process leading to the creation of the system of measurement of integration in Switzerland. In line with Lehtonen (2015), we show how the process of inventing indicators, in order to gain legitimacy, must project an
image of exactitude and scientific neutrality to inform public opinion and influence collective categorization. However, indicators are data and information reshaped under a concealed conceptual framework (Gudmundsson 2003, Lehtonen 2015). For this reason, we examine this set of indicators by placing them in their institutional, historical, political and discursive contexts in order to shed light on their conceptual construction. This enables us to argue that, by concealing the political nature of integration, indicators serve to depoliticize integration and naturalize contestable political categories of population. Further studies could focus on different dimensions of these categorizations of population, such as processes of racialization. It would also be interesting to examine the relationships between indicators and policymaking. Indeed, in our paper we have explained how these indicators are shaped by certain discursive legacies that create categories of population beyond the legal categories of citizenship. However, it would be interesting to examine if and how these indicators shape policymaking or whether their deployment signals an already existing policy shift.

Several theoretical conclusions arise from our study. Firstly, regarding contemporary debates on integration specifically, further research should go beyond explanations of the path-dependency to unveil the discursive legacies that structure integration policies and policy tools. Secondly, our analysis suggests that statistical tools are powerful mechanisms for naturalizing socially constructed and sometimes highly contestable meanings. Whether the statistical tools seek to capture migrant integration or another topic, our analysis suggests that it is worthwhile engaging in a thorough interpretative analysis in order to examine what exactly is being measured and what kind of political categories are being naturalised. Moreover, this approach is not limited to integration or migration studies. By addressing topics traditionally reserved to technical and quantitative scrutiny (such as statistical indicators) while using a theoretical problematization, we hope this research might inspire new avenues of dialogue between interpretative and quantitative methodologies.

Notes

1. The FOM became in 2015 the State Secretariat for Migration (SEM).
2. For example, see Wobmann Walter’s interpellation titled ‘Is there no statistics on naturalised delinquents?’ number 08.3407 dating from 13.06.2008, available on the website of the Swiss Parliament.
3. In a further report on the integration measures of 2010, the GIM defined the timing for realizing these indicators (Office fédéral des migrations ODM 2010).
4. This was also the case in other European countries before there was a shift towards an emphasis on the individual’s responsibility to integrate. For the Dutch case, see, for example, Bonjour and Duyvendak (2017). Moreover, the biggest party in Switzerland, the Swiss People’s Party (SVP), a populist far-right party, has been promoting the same idea of shifting the responsibility to integrate from the state to the individual.
5. Perhaps the most striking issue with the sources is the matter of the geographical and political division of the data. The data presented by the indicators neglect the political divisions of Switzerland, which greatly impacts the results. There are, for example, different welfare regimes and even migratory regimes in different cantons, which makes it difficult to interpret the results without taking into consideration these differences. And indeed the FSO’s indicators erase these differences to the point that most of the factors that
explain the results disappear. For more on the variety of migratory regimes in Switzerland, see, for example, Manatschal (2012).

6. It would indeed be possible to impose an ‘external’ analytical grid, for example, to apply a purely normative analysis of these indicators.

7. See, for instance, the indicators concerning the risk of material deprivation, poverty rate, risk of poverty rate, social aid rate and rate of assistance, difficulty making ends meet, deviation of risk of poverty, deviation of poverty and the poverty rate of active and occupied persons.

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