CITIZENS WITH A MIGRATION BACKGROUND INVOLVED IN A RADICAL-RIGHT WING PARTY RESTRICTING IMMIGRATION

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Abstract

The populist radical right-wing Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC) has been largely known for its xenophobic discourses and its political agenda restricting immigration through popular initiatives such as the vote against minarets (2009), the deportation of "criminal foreigners" (2010) and the initiative against "mass immigration" (2014). This paper shows how SVP/UDC activists, who themselves or whose parents had migrated to Switzerland, understand their political engagement and contribution. This sheds light on their desire to become part of a "deserving minority" and on their use of boundary-making strategies to demarcate their positions from others they label as "undeserving migrants". Their political engagement needs to be understood as part of a broader quest for belonging to the Swiss national community. By showing that migration-related experiences inform the political involvement of activists at the Swiss People's Party, this paper questions widely spread assumptions on contradictory or counterintuitive political commitments.

Keywords: *political commitment, migration, SVP/UDC, Switzerland, boundary-making strategies, senses of belonging*

Introduction: SVP/UDC Activists' Understanding of Their Political Involvement[1]

How do individuals with a migration background involved in a political party that regularly fights for the limitation of immigration understand their political involvement? We will address this issue with the example of the Swiss People's Party (SVP/UDC), a populist radical right party. The focus will be on SVP/UDC activists with a migration background (MB) who themselves or whose parents had, experience of migration, bring their political commitment into the public eye, regularly engaging in the party's activities, and who are

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candidates or elected representatives.[2] Most of the literature on minority groups supporting (radical) right parties is situated in North America and focusses on voting behavior. Looking at the Swiss case of SVP / UDC activists with a migration background allows us to explore a stronger form of political engagement, drawing on activists' narratives with a particular focus on experiences related to migration. Showing how MB citizens understand their political engagement enables us to question widespread perceptions that people with a migration background behave contradictorily when defending a political agenda restricting immigration. In this qualitative assessment, sense of belonging and boundary-making strategies (Wimmer 2013) will be considered to show how activists' political engagement builds on migration experiences and inscribes itself in a broader quest of belonging to Switzerland (Lamont and Bail 2005).

Theoretical Framework
Citizens with a migration background and the Political Right

Left-wing parties are traditionally viewed as the most appealing to citizens with a migrant background (Ruedin 2018; Strijbis 2017) and to people with a history of racial exclusion (Shorter 2010). These parties are often portrayed as the closest to these citizens' preoccupations. In some cases, however, citizens with a migration background choose to commit for (radical) right-wing parties. This is, for example, the case of African Americans and Latinos supporting the US Republican Party (Esquivel 2010; Prisock 2018) as well as Russian-Germans voting for the Alternative for Germany (Spies et al. 2022). Voting studies alongside contributions focusing on political membership and party affiliation have begun to address this issue. This rather scarce body of literature seeks to explain political support, which is labeled as unexpected due to the supporters' backgrounds and their parties' discriminatory rhetoric and restrictive political positions on immigration, diversity and/or race. Broadly speaking, this literature came forward with two key explanations for the mentioned political support: group identity and origin-related experiences.

Hickel et al. (2020), who analyzed voting behavior during US national elections, found that favoring a so-called "US identity" over a "Latino identity" is the main factor in supporting the Republican party with restrictive immigration policies. This "identity prioritization" must be understood as a strategy of social mobility and dissociation from undocumented migration. The rupture with a collective (political) identity associated with left-wing politics can also be observed amongst African American Republicans who consider themselves as "free independent thinkers" (Shorter 2010). In her book on "multicultural conservatives" in the Republican Party, Dillard (2001) shows that these individuals base their political views

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on belief in individual success, assimilation to national values and rejection of identity politics.

Secondly, migration background citizens' party affiliation can be explained by origin and migration-related experiences. In an analysis of the 2011 Swiss election, Strijbis (2014) shows that people with experiences of discrimination tend to vote for left-wing parties and that those with an Eastern European background generally vote for the centre-right (probably related to anticommunist sentiments). Another factor, which explains MB citizens' support of restrictive migration policies, is the need to secure their own position on the labor market (Strijbis and Polavieja 2018). The centrality of economic issues is underpinned by several studies that point out the connection between financial hardship and the receptiveness for restrictive immigration policies (Spies et al. 2022).

The existing literature on the support of members of minority groups for (radical) right-wing parties is mostly North American and few contributions deal with stronger political support than voting. Looking at the Swiss case of actively engaged citizens with a migration background at the Swiss People's Party thus contributes greatly to the literature, especially by adopting a qualitative approach as most existing studies are based on quantitative approaches. Drawing on narratives of SVP / UDC activists, with a particular focus on their self-understanding of their commitment in relation to migration experiences, allows us to problematize widespread assumptions on the improbability of such engagements and to obtain a better understanding of their political demands.

Boundary-making strategies

Strijbis and Polavieja show that MB citizens' high levels of support of the SVP / UDC popular initiative against "mass immigration" can be partially explained by ethnic boundary-making processes. They state that voters with a migration background may construct identities that draw "a boundary with newly arriving migrants" (Strijbis and Polavieja 2018, 5). In a different perspective, Elias and Scotson (1965) found that already established people name and shame newcomers who have no means of protecting themselves from stigmatization. The importance of boundary-making strategies (Barth 1969) can also be observed in Bader and Feddersen's analysis of the claims made by the SVP / UDC affiliated migrant organization *Neue Heimat Schweiz.* This organization makes use of ideological boundary-making to "reconcile its claim to represent immigrants with the anti-immigration agenda of the Swiss People's Party" (Bader and Feddersen 2021, 139). In some cases, constructions of otherness run along the lines of deservingness. The organization *Neue Heimat Schweiz* establishes "ideological boundaries within the immigrant population, dividing it into 'worthy' and 'unworthy' immigrants" (Bader and Feddersen 2021, 173). Building on empirical findings in Switzerland, Wimmer (2013, 118) considers boundary-making processes to be strongly influenced by the "code of order," which includes "virtues, such as cleanliness, punctuality, and quiet". He thus states that "anti-immigrant sentiment is not directed against immigrants per se but against newer immigrant cohorts that are seen as undermining the established social and cultural order" (Wimmer 2013, 137).

Belongings

Boundary-making strategies allow people with a migration background to create a sense of belonging to Switzerland by dissociating themselves from other immigrants while emphasizing their similarities with "Swissness" (Cretton 2018). Drawing boundaries between themselves and stigmatized others (Van Veelen et al. 2020) enables them to stand away from the exclusion triggered by the images of non-belonging (e.g., stereotypes) strongly related to "visible attributes," such as a Black skin color (Fibbi et al. 2022) or a foreign sounding name (Fibbi, Kaya, and Piguet 2003). Struggling to find personal stability may lead those with migrant backgrounds to view other minority members as rivals and adopt dominant discourses to secure their own position. In this regard, several studies show that the "incorporation effect" of becoming a national might lead people to adopt restrictive views on immigration (Kolbe and Crepaz 2016), especially when naturalization is linked to a strong sense of belonging to the host society (Politi et al. 2020). Building on these findings, it seems crucial to consider SVP / UDC activists' multiple senses of (non-) belonging and strategies to shape boundaries to fully grasp the complexity of their political engagement. In order to do so, it is helpful to make use of the concept of belonging which "provides us with a tool to inquire how horizons of togetherness are and can be widened in order to incorporate newcomers" (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011, 8). Belonging is partly determined by regimes of belonging which "are not only structured by restrictive state rules" but also by public opinion, which "is often dominated by voices celebrating the inlanders' cultural authority in determining values and norms" (Pfaff-Czarnecka 2011, 6–7). This sometimes leads established citizens with a migration background to dissociate themselves from newcomers and their associated external attributions that might be loaded with stigmatization (Van Veelen et al. 2020). The conceptual framework of multiple belongings helps overcome static and homogeneous views on social representations and on people's relation to their migration background. It shows how, depending on the context, the migration background may be mobilized and referred to in several ways, from rejection to overvaluation. Building on the mentioned theoretical considerations, we decided to focus on SVP / UDC activists' self-identification, external ascriptions and their interdependence (Jenkins 2000).

Methodological Considerations
The Swiss People's Party: A case-study of populism

The Swiss People's Party is "one of the most consistently successful right-wing parties in Europe" (Wimmer 2013, 136). By the late 1990s, its political positioning shifted from center right to radical right (Mazzoleni 2003), simultaneously transitioning from a small party with only one representative in the Federal Council to the largest political group in Switzerland (FSO 2019). The SVP / UDC received widespread media attention in relation to several popular initiatives that promoted xenophobic discourses such as the initiative against minarets (2009), the deportation initiative (2010) and the initiative against "mass immigration" (2014). Following D'Amato and Skenderovic, we will consider the SVP / UDC as a populist

radical right-wing party that is "connected with radical-right ideology that entails exclusionary ideological elements" (2009, 78, footnote 1).

The SVP / UDC is a particularly interesting case for studying populism as it developed in a country with a high proportion of foreign-born residents (Piguet 2009) and with a long-established system of direct democracy. Looking at the political engagement of SVP / UDC activists with a migration background is particularly interesting when we observe candidates with a migration background face discrimination from Swiss voters, particularly when they are on right-wing lists of the SVP / UDC (Portmann and Stojanović 2019).

Selection of the research participants

Our criteria to select SVP / UDC activists with a migration background were migration experiences and political involvement. We define migration background citizens as people who themselves have had, or whose parents had, experience of migration. By focusing on relatively recent past experiences, we ensured that their experiences in migrating, arriving and living in Switzerland and/or going through a naturalization process could still be vividly recalled and related to. Focusing on these experiences neither assumes ethnic or national identification nor does it ignore this facet. We thus pursue a "strategic positive essentialism" (Dahinden 2016), in which we consciously and reflexively use terms such as "migration background" to provide a better understanding of SVP / UDC activists' senses of belonging. Our second criterion was to include SVP / UDC activists who regularly engage in the party's activities, who are candidates or elected representatives. This focus on activists bringing their political commitment into public gaze enabled us to include people who might be subjected to reactions in their surroundings and regularly position themselves politically. This allowed us to grasp the way SVP / UDC activists narrate their migration experiences and understand their political engagement. Following these selection criteria, we selected the participants of this study via the following:

a) Is the person portrayed as a migration background citizen involved at the SVP / UDC in the media?
b) Is the person part of a political subsection, affiliated group, or voters list that brings together citizens with migration background profiles at the SVP / UDC?

Participants' profiles

We conducted sixteen narrative in-depth biographical interviews with eleven men and five women (see table 1). The higher proportion of men is representative of the composition of the target group and the systematically lower proportion of elected women in the SVP / UDC. Interviewees were met once in a one-to-one setting. Interviews were recorded in accordance with participants consent. Based on an interview guide, questions on the path

Table 1   List of Interviewees (anonymized)

Name	Gender	Age (approx.)	Region of non-Swiss origin	Born Swiss (BS) or Naturalized (Na)	Born in Switzerland?
Bashkim	M	40s	Balkans	Na	No
Darian	M	50s	Balkans	Na	No
David	M	30s	Indian Ocean island	BS	Yes
Denis	M	50s	Caribbean	Na	No
Erik	M	60s	South Asia	Na	Yes
Ivan	M	40s	Balkans	Na	No
Joanna	F	60s	West Africa	BS	Yes
Joseph	M	60s	Middle East	Na	No
Luc	M	20s	Central Africa	BS	Yes
Lydia	F	60s	Mediterranean island	BS	Yes
Murat	M	20s	Middle East	Na	Yes
Natasha	F	40s	Eastern Europe	Na	No
Rafael	M	40s	Western Europe	Na	No
Sara	F	50s	Balkans	Na	Yes
Shafer	M	40s	Middle East	Na	No
Sophie	F	50s	South Asia and central Africa	Na	No

Source: SNF Project "An Improbable Commitment. Explaining Naturalized Citizens' Political Engagement in the Swiss Social-Democratic Party and the Swiss People's Party."

into politics, the evolution of the commitment, party experiences and political ideas were systematically asked.

The interlocutors[3] are between 21 and 64 years old and just over half were born abroad. Their religious affiliations are diverse, including various Christian denominations, Islam, Hinduism and atheism. Several interviewees' parents came to Switzerland as guest workers between the 1960s and 1980s. The countries of origin of one or both parents are situated in (south) eastern and western Europe, central and west Africa, South Asia, and the Middle East, as well as several islands (Mediterranean Sea, Indian Ocean, Caribbean Sea). Interviewees' political engagement is mostly long-standing. A majority hold positions in communal parliaments or participate as active members. Some hold a political mandate in cantonal parliaments or managing positions in local sections and affiliated groups. Naturalization is a prerequisite for elected members of the Swiss national and, except for some regions, cantonal and regional political arenas. Participants consequently all have Swiss citizenship. Approximately two-thirds acquired nationality through the naturalization process, a majority via an ordinary[4] procedure.

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[3] In order to protect their anonymity, all research participants' names have been replaced by aliases. We mention neither their countries of origin nor their regions of residence in Switzerland. At times, quoted matter needed to be slightly adapted to preserve anonymity.

[4] Foreign nationals who acquire the Swiss nationality via an ordinary naturalization must have lived in Switzerland for ten years and hold a permanent residence permit (State Secretariat for Migration).

Drawing Boundaries to Face Exclusion

Interviewees commonly refer to multiple belongings in their narratives, with a prominence of references to their origins. Lydia, in her sixties, whose father came from an island in the Mediterranean, states that being perceived as a foreigner was related to expectations she could not meet as she was born and raised in Switzerland. She describes her memories of school as follows:

> *No one had a strange name like me [...] from the first day of school I was aware: "something is different with me." [...] Just reading down the list: "Ah you are a girl." And then the teachers: "Say something in your language." And I couldn't say a sentence.*

In contrast to Lydia, who finds it "quite normal" when people think that she cannot speak German, Murat, a man in his twenties, also born in Switzerland, negatively experienced stereotypes of Islam triggered by his foreign-sounding name:

> *Between 15 and 19 [years old], I had extreme difficulties understanding [= identifying with] my name. I carried a name that I am not. [...] I got into a situation in which I could not explain myself. Yes, that's my name, but I am not a Muslim.*

Stereotyped external ascriptions and self-identifications frequently do not correspond. Shafer, a Christian born in the Middle East, suffers from people ascribing to him the identity of the majority Muslim group of his country of origin. Here is how he describes the discrepancy between self-identification and external categorization:

> *In the Middle East, you're a minority, and you're insulted as a Christian [...] Then you come to Switzerland and you're suddenly [perceived as] a member of the majority [which persecuted you]; then they say "Show me your passport." [...] "Hey, you're one of them!"*

To face exclusionary experiences, MB citizens perform multiple belongings (Amiotte-Suchet, Sainsaulieu, and Salzbrunn 2010) and draw boundaries between themselves and other migration background citizens. Ivan, born in former Yugoslavia, remembers the negative impact of being identified as from the Balkans and emphasizes that he, contrary to other "ex-Yugoslavians," wanted to be part of Swiss society. He emphasizes what he considers to be his "good behavior" and how this enabled him to be perceived positively as a "well-integrated" person:

> *At the beginning I was never considered as someone who has a foreign origin. Then people are surprised: "You speak so perfectly, and one is not able to tell it by the look of you, and your behavior" [...] apparently there is a difference, I can choose myself how I behave and that*

behavior triggers something. So, for me the question was, "Do I want to trigger antipathy, or do I want to be integrated"?

A similar strategy to deal with discrimination experiences consists of eliminating attributes that trigger stereotypes. This is the case for Murat, who considers changing his foreign-sounding name, often related to stereotypical ideas about Islam: "My father said, 'if you get married and your wife's name is better, take your wife's name'."

Other participants expand the boundary by stressing similarities with "Swissness" (Cretton 2018). Denis, for example, explains never having felt foreign in Switzerland as he discovered similarities with his region of origin:

[In Switzerland] I found myself as if I was in the Caribbean. [...] They saw me, black [...], they have a certain distance when they don't know you, and once they speak with you, they see that you drink wine, you eat sausage, you eat pork with them, that you are Catholic it is automatically alright.

The performance of multiple belongings, in this case of religion and (cultural) habits, allows Denis to (partly) overcome the categorization as a foreigner triggered by his skin color and create a feeling of belonging to Switzerland. Facing exclusion and discrimination due to attributes as a foreign-sounding name or a skin color thus trigger a need for demarcation from other migrants among SVP / UDC activists, especially when ascriptions, such as being a Muslim, trigger strong stereotyped images.

Defending Swissness

Having demonstrated that interviewees face exclusion experiences due to stereotypical ascriptions of being a foreigner, we will now show how they understand their political engagement for restrictive migration policies as a way to defend Swissness and its distinguishing features, which are, according to participants, marked by a specific social and cultural order. This engagement is commonly understood as a contribution related to a feeling of gratitude to Switzerland which needs to be counterbalanced by a commitment in favor of Swiss society, or, in Shafer's words, the will to "give something back to the country he was well received [and] naturalized by."

Migration-related political issues are at the core of SVP / UDC activists' political engagement. Interviewees frequently emphasize the specificity of their own migration history, defending an economic use–benefit perspective on migration and focusing on their parents' or their own economic contribution. David praises the previous system of guest workerss – who had the right to short-term stays – which, in his view, allowed Switzerland to "keep the good and motivated people." Joseph, whose parents came as guest workers, refers to a "win–win situation" in which his father needed work and Switzerland needed workers. He adds that "one could not just come and do anything," as his parents had to prove their professional worth. Established residents (Elias and Scotson 1965) who have resided in Switzerland for

a long time as guest workers are now considered citizens who, through their economic contribution, made an effort regarding conformity to local norms like the Swiss "work ethic." This respect of the "code of order" (Wimmer 2013) is often described as more difficult for newcomers who have backgrounds with more alterity and whose presence must consequently be limited as it could endanger what interviewees' depict as the Swiss "mentality of correctness." This is the case of Natasha, born in Eastern Europe and later naturalized:

> *People should know why they come here. If they want to do something unacceptable for our culture, custom, or mentality [...] like the ones of other religions, they may [try] to impose their laws and rules and this is dangerous. We must limit the number of these people.*

While advocating restrictive migration policies, SVP / UDC activists draw boundaries between newcomers and established migrants with whom they self-identify. This confirms Wimmer's finding that "many immigrants who came as guest workers to Europe vehemently distance themselves from the more recently arrived asylum seekers as 'bogus refugees' and 'abusers of the welfare state'" (2013, 65). In addition to migration experiences, interviewees build political opinions in various social spheres. Alongside family members, friends and key (political) figures, who sometimes serve as role models, professional environments are also decisive. Denis, who advocates strict asylum policies and whose political opinions have been influenced by his professional experience in a center for rejected asylum seekers, states that most asylum seekers are not "manageable" as they do not follow certain rules that apply in Switzerland:

"They are going to heat up some pizzas and they throw [the garbage] out of the window while there is a bin right next to it. You tell them that 'we're in Switzerland'. They don't care!"

This image of asylum seekers challenging local rules and the established order is strengthened by linking them to supposed abuses of the welfare state and to criminality, which in turn legitimizes restrictive asylum politics. Sophie, who underlines her South Asian belonging while distancing herself from her Central African origins, expresses this idea:

> *The asylum seekers who arrive here, they are lazy. They are people who do not do anything in their country of origin [...] Most people who come here are people who cannot even write their name. What will they be able to do here? They do not want to work, they ask for asylum, they sell drugs, and they receive subsidies.*

SVP / UDC activists defend virtues such as being quiet, punctual and maintaining cleanliness by setting their own effort of "successful integration" to Switzerland as a benchmark for upcoming migration. Referring to Switzerland as the leading culture to which migrants should "assimilate" to, they thus lay the basis for restrictive migration and naturalization policies. This joins Micheloud's observation, according to whom the "effort of conformity is understood as a norm, in the sense that it is the model that every migrant, or descendant of a migrant, must follow in order to merit to be perceived as Swiss" (2017, 98, our translation).

Positioning themselves at the "top of the moral pyramid" (Wimmer 2013, 132), interviewees emphasize their individual biographies related to work and "successful integration" and

consider themselves part of an established migration that has shown its compliance with the Swiss social and cultural order. This self-identification as a "deserving minority" is asserted through clear demarcations from newcomers, depicted as culturally distant people who do not adapt to "Swissness". Advocating for restrictive migration policies and holding on to certain social and cultural norms is a way for SVP / UDC activists to acquire social mobility, secure their own position by avoiding (economic) competition and pursue their need of demarcation in the hope of avoiding exclusion. Finally, defending the "code of order" is a way to stand up for "Swissness", a claim which leads them to join the SVP / UDC, considered to be the party that best protects Switzerland from external influences which contribute to the degradation of Swiss society. This "suspicion towards foreigners" is consistent with the preoccupations of other SVP / UDC activists without MB (Gottraux and Péchu 2011, 276) and general illiberal sentiments such as the protection of "us" (Holmes 2021).

Protecting the Swiss Success Model

Interviewees' engagement at the SVP / UDC is informed by their experiences in countries of origin which trigger the wish to protect what is considered to be the Swiss success model. SVP / UDC activists create a political discourse that takes inspiration and legitimacy from these migration-related experiences. This allows them to provide political inputs, to take on a key bridging role and to give weight to SVP / UDC proposals, and to create a counter-image of the SVP / UDC as a non-racist party.

Comparing countries of origin with Switzerland frequently leads SVP / UDC activists to have a very positive image of Switzerland linked to features such as the beauty of its countryside, and to characteristics such as its democracy. Mobilizing their life paths represents a way of protecting Swiss people from the destiny they themselves have suffered from. Bashkim, who arrived in the late 1990s from the Balkans, grew up in a country "with a lot of conflicts," where "every single thing, even little ones of everyday, could lead to political conflict and to prison." He thus considers that his awareness of political freedom is particularly strong, making connections between democratic values and pro-army sentiments. Here is how he makes sense of it:

I grew up with this thirst for democracy. And that forges us, I think. And that makes us very patriotic and very much right-wing people [...] often, people here they don't know this value. And I think I bring, from my experience, I can explain that it is very important, for example to have a strong army in Switzerland.

Bashkim's political socialization is strongly marked by authoritarian regimes. Transferring what he calls his "thirst for democracy" to the Swiss context makes him consider that he is particularly farsighted on the importance of the protection and self-determination of a nation state. His discourse on the protection of the national community is influenced by illiberal sentiments that can be found in various regions, including Eastern Europe (Krastev and Holmes 2018). Ivan, who grew up in former socialist Yugoslavia and remembers his child-

hood as a life of "deprivations," similarly explains his rejection of left-wing political ideas by stating that: "if you know it a little, then you know that socialism has nothing to do with justice. [...] Justice and socialism do not match up. And I can say that from experiences."

Ivan's first memories of Switzerland are characterized by the "abundance of everything," which leads him to defend the prosperity he encountered in Switzerland. This necessity to defend what is depicted as the Swiss success model characterized by stability, security and prosperity is reinforced by participants' "sense of degradation of the world" (Micheloud 2017), a feeling of growing insecurity often associated to immigration, which is shared by SVP / UDC activists without migration background (Gottraux and Péchu 2011, 268).

Other interviewees build on their experiences to emphasize the need to recognize and defend Switzerland's specificities such as its independence from the European Union (EU). The fact that the SVP / UDC openly politicizes against the EU and thus protects Swiss constitutive features such as its independence represents an important reason to choose this exact party. Denis, who always identified as conservative, describes his expertise and contribution to the SVP / UDC as follows:

> When we talk about Europe, I speak as an insider because I come from [a country in] the European Union. I therefore know what it is, compared to other people who have never been insiders, so I can bring examples of the European Union's fiasco [...] that's what you bring: a way of saying things differently because I can say things that they cannot say without being called racists or "integrists."

Denis, like other interviewees from EU countries, is conscious of the influence he can exert when defending positions against the EU, bringing legitimacy to the SVP's / UDC's political position.

Some MB citizens become politically active at the time of SVP / UDC migration-related initiatives. These initiatives treat topics related to these citizens' own migration experiences and represent political opportunities as MB citizens can make an important contribution, giving weight to arguments through the mobilization of personal experience. In this way, Joseph explains that due to the discrimination he experienced as a Christian in the Middle East – he saw engagement in the SVP / UDC initiative against minarets as a way to make an important contribution against "unstoppable Islamization:"

> I thought: Now, you have a chance to make a difference. I saw how we were oppressed, how we were almost thrown out of the Middle East. And then I said: Yes, now I must take the chance and stand up for the ban on minarets.

This quote shows how migration narrative can be used by migrants as a way to take revenge on their country of origin and their political system perceived as unfair (Mastrangelo 2018). Similarly, the debate on foreigners' voting rights represented an opportunity for Joseph to become well-known as a politician and to be recognized as a "deserving minority." Here is how Joseph depicts his speech at the legislative assembly: "I gave a speech at the legislative assembly, against the right to vote for foreigners. [...] after my speech I received a

round of applause. Although applause at the assembly is actually forbidden. But still, people applauded."

Building on this example, we assume that migration-related political debates provide MB citizens with an opportunity to gain political visibility. There is nevertheless a risk for these politicians to get stuck in their role as migration experts. They might face difficulties in achieving visibility on other topics and be instrumentalized by their party.

Tokenism (Grant 2017) as a political tool can be identified, in some cases where interviewees' migration-related engagement is guided by the party's attempt to reach out to MB citizens. Many SVP / UDC activists were encouraged to become politically involved in the SVP / UDC, in some cases, by (high-ranking) SVP / UDC politicians. Shafer depicts how the party gave him the opportunity to "create an evening" under the SVP / UDC logo in order to speak about the initiative against minarets. He then participated in several presentations on Islam based on his experiences as a Christian in the Middle East. The mobilization of migration experiences enables MB citizens to play a key (bridging) role for incorporating MB citizens into the SVP / UDC and in disproving accusations of racism in the SVP / UDC. This is the case of Denis, who states that SVP / UDC delegates accepted him "despite his skin color" and reacts to accusations of racism as follows:

> *In my family, we have all skin colors. We sit at the same table. There are whites, Indians, Chinese, and you come tell me that I am racist, racist of what? Because I am at SVP? [...] We must stop the hypocrisy, the people whom I know at SVP, I would notice if they were racist.*

This quote demonstrates the need interviewees feel to counterbalance the external ascription of a racist etiquette frequently attributed to their party. As explained by Gottraux and Péchu, this reinforces attachment to the party:

> *The negative representation associated with the party leads to the confirmation and the strengthening of militants' sense of belonging to an organization that is unique in the Swiss political field and unfairly criticized. It cements the identification [to SVP / UDC] and [may lead SVP activists] to stand together against criticism despite disagreements or ideological discrepancies.* (Gottraux and Péchu 2011, 277; our translation)

In conclusion, we can see that the "defensive attachment to Switzerland" (Gottraux and Péchu 2011, 276) leading MB citizens to engage in the SVP / UDC are to a large extent similar to other SVP / UDC activists. According to interviewees, Switzerland's success must be protected against degradation, from the European Union or unwanted immigration. However, unlike other SVP / UDC activists, MB citizens' need to defend what they depict as the Swiss success model arises from migration-related experiences.

Building a Sense of Belonging

Whilst all research participants possess a Swiss passport, there seems to be a general tendency of self-identifying as "non-Swiss," that probably results from the internalization of external ascriptions as foreigners. Lydia mentions being "never completely here and never completely there," echoing Sayad's classic work on the double absence of migrants (1999). This feeling of in-betweenness is commonly expressed by interviewees and is sometimes reinforced by the interplay of multiple belongings and exclusion experiences (e.g., being perceived as a foreign woman). Some MB citizens mention a strong sense of belonging to Switzerland, of being part of the established population, as they were born and raised in the country or because they became Swiss when they went through the naturalization process. However, interviewees link Swissness to descent, not solely to legal status, and therefore distance themselves from the "real" Swiss. Ivan, for example, says:

> *I cannot be Swiss. I cannot change it. I see myself as a tree, my roots are in* the Balkans *and the fruits are* here *thanks to the fact that I am in Switzerland.*

Being categorized as foreigners and living exclusionary experiences thus lead to a dichotomy between belonging and non-belonging to Switzerland which in turn initiates a quest for belonging that requires interviewees to correspond to the majority's societal norms (Cretton 2018). Swissness being unattainable or only after the passing of generations, SVP/UDC activists with a migration background rather aim at being accepted as "deserving minorities". This corresponds to interviewees' illiberal worldviews that lead them to be suspicious towards opening countries' doors to "tightly knit alien communities" (Holmes 2021, 11) which do not prove faithful to receiving countries. Becoming part of a network such as the SVP/UDC, within which MB citizens are viewed as workers who contribute to the Swiss economy, provides them a sense of social recognition. The fact that the SVP/UDC is referred to as a "family" where "real Swissness" is lived out through ceremonies and traditions by several interviewees further strengthens the sense of belonging to Switzerland.

Conclusions: Political Engagement As An Act of Boundary-making

The support for (radical) right wing political parties by people with a migration background may seem unlikely considering parties' agendas aiming at the restriction of migration. By focusing on SVP/UDC activists' self-understanding of their engagement, this study allows us to analyze party affiliations beyond a form of contradiction. Drawing on Mazzarella's work, we contribute to "the situated integrity of political practices that other social scientists too often dismiss as corrupt, cynical, or entirely instrumental" (Mazzarella 2019, 49). Our biographical approach focusses on narratives. It shows the importance of understanding political commitment within individuals' wider biographies and in relation to their multiple senses of belonging in order to grasp its complexity.

Applying a holistic approach, it becomes clear that SVP activists' do not engage with the populist radical right-wing party despite their migration background, but in relation with it. Although preoccupations such as a "defensive attachment to Switzerland" and the "suspicion towards foreigners" are similar to those of other SVP / UDC activists (Gottraux and Péchu 2011, 276), the decisive reasons to commit for this political party are, in the case of citizens with a migration background, strongly informed by migration-related experiences.

These experiences lead interviewees to emphasize the stability, security and prosperity of the Swiss society. They refer to it as a success model that has to be defended against external influences, such as the European Union or unwanted immigration. Joining the SVP / UDC and promoting its political agenda in restricting immigration and limiting Swiss-EU relations becomes an opportunity to stand up for Switzerland.

SVP / UDC activists with a migration background seek to escape from stereotypes and discriminations by drawing boundaries with migrants who, according to them, do not deserve to be in Switzerland. Their "meritocratic representation of the world" (Micheloud 2017) leads them to deny broader social inequalities, such as the existence of structural racial discrimination, and to internalize "a negative conception of what it means to be an immigrant" (Killian and Johnson 2006, 76). They adopt dominant perspectives strongly inscribed in a socio-legal framework of exclusionary migration policies that are part of a "highly politicized process" (Sandoz 2019, 237).

The SVP / UDC strategy of targeting specific populations and interviewees' interests sometimes converge. The political engagement of these activists in the framework of actions such as the initiative against "criminal foreigners" needs to be understood as an act of boundary-making to protect their position as a "deserving minority" (Lamont and Bail 2005). SVP / UDC activists' political involvement must thus be situated in a wider context of social mobility and protection of one's own established position (Elias and Scotson 1965) rooted in a quest for belonging to the Swiss society.[5]

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[5] In future research steps, we will compare the cases of MB citizens at SVP / UDC with citizens without migration background at SVP / UDC and with MB citizens in the Social-Democratic party.

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