



**Janine Dahinden (Project Leader),
Carolyn Fischer (PostDoc),
Anne Kristol (doctoral student)**

—
**Gender as a Boundary Marker in
Migration and Mobility:
Case Studies from Switzerland**

University of Neuchâtel
Laboratory of Transnational Studies and Social Processes and Center for the
Understanding of Social Processes, Rue A.-L. Bréguet 1, 2000 Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Contact: Carolyn Fischer, carolin.fischer@unine.ch, T +41 32 718 14 51

In this project we examine how gender affects politics, institutional practices, discourses and experiences of migrant inclusion and exclusion. We aim at identifying the mechanisms through which gender shapes durable constructions of migrant ‘others’ and promotes particular realities of exclusion. This multi-level case study of Switzerland presents new analytical perspectives and empirical results. It contributes to a burgeoning international scholarship that situates gender at the heart of studies on migration and mobility, citizenship, nation state building and human agency.

The central question of this project asks: How has gender been shaping politics and experiences of migrant admission and exclusion in Switzerland? It is divided into three sub-questions each of which is linked to a distinct research module.

How Does Gender Feature in Swiss Admission Policies and Integration Debates since the Beginning of the 20th Century until Today?

It is pivotal to examine the implications of historical developments to situate and understand current debates revolving around gender in the context of migrant admission and integration in Switzerland. Based on the analysis of secondary literature, legal documents and expert interviews we show that gendered representations of migrants are mobilized by different state and non-state actors to advance their claims and call for certain forms of immigration control and migrant incorporation. We identified important turning points with regard to immigrant flows and the political regulation of immigrant admission and incorporation in Switzerland since the beginning of the late 19th century. Our historical approach allows us to unpack how the mobilization of gendered representations of migrants has been coupled with changing economic,

political and cultural concerns. These concerns are – at least initially – articulated by specific governmental and non-governmental actors. Studying such developments from a gender perspective enables us to specify the mechanisms that shape changing dynamics and connotations of migrant inclusion and exclusion in recent Swiss history.

How Do Gendered Perceptions of Migrant ‘Others’ Affect Practices of Actors in Public and Civic Institutions?

The second project module examines how gender is reflected in a specific institutional dimension of migrant inclusion and exclusion. It highlights the role of gender in Swiss naturalization procedures and in representations of citizenship. Recent legal changes in the Nationality Law as well as new discursive trends on gender equality and gendered integration substantiate the need for scientific research exploring the role of gender in this particular realm. This module therefore provides empirical evidence to back the argument that gender continues to constitute a core principle of Swiss citizenship. As such gender determines access to naturalization, even though it is not any more explicitly mentioned in the legislation. Based on

an ethnography of naturalization procedures in three Swiss municipalities, this study unpacks the way gender works as inclusion or exclusion category. Particular attention is paid to the practices and representation of state and non-state actors that are involved in the naturalization process. Participant observation and interviews are conducted to establish how Swiss citizens and those entitled to Swiss citizenship are constructed and distinguished from 'others' who remain exempt from the imagined community of citizens. Focusing on gendered criteria of access to nationality and citizenship, this module sheds light on an almost unexplored dimension of the naturalization procedure, in Switzerland and beyond.

How Are Public and Political Constructions of 'Gendered Others' Appropriated, Interpreted and Modified by Migrant Actors in Their Everyday Lives?

In the third project module we shift the focus from the emergence and implementation of state policies to the experiences of groups within Switzerland's migrant population. We are particularly interested to explore the long-term effects generated by the gendered stigmatization of perceived others. For this reason we limit our focus to post-migrant groups, most notably so-called second generation immigrants. Although they were born and grew up in Switzerland, young people of migrant origin frequently experience exclusion and a sense of not being fully accepted members of the Swiss society. Gender plays an important role in defining the criteria that are employed to judge who does or does not form part of a 'genuine Swiss population'. Ideas of how men and women should appear, dress and behave in society function as a filter, separating those conforming with essential criteria of Swiss nationhood from those who do not. Yet, it remains unclear how gendered perceptions of otherness affect those concerned. How they cope with stigmatization? And how they position themselves with regard to experiences of gendered exclusion? Following an in-depth qualitative approach we examine the variety of strategies second generation immigrants adopt to contest the gendered identities to which they have been subjected. This deepens our understanding of how immigrants and their descendants define and establish their own pathways into society.

Publication

- Fischer, Carolin, and Janine Dahinden. "The Changing Role of Gender in Politics of Belonging. Historical Insights from Switzerland." To be submitted (2015).

References

- Anthias, Floya, Yuval-Davis, Nira, and Harriet Cain. *Racialized Boundaries : Race, Nation, Gender, Colour and Class and the Anti-Racist Struggle*. London and New York: Routledge, 1992.
- Dahinden, Janine, Duemmler, Kerstin, and Joëlle Moret. "Disentangling Religious, Ethnic and Gendered Contents in Boundary Work: How Young Adults Create the Figure of 'The Oppressed Muslim Woman'", *Journal of Intercultural Studies* Vol. 35, Issue 4 (2014): 329–48.
- Duemmler, Kerstin, and Janine Dahinden. "Gehören wir dazu? Grenzziehungsprozesse und Positionierungen der zweiten Generation im Vergleich zwischen Luzern und Neuchâtel." *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* (Forthcoming)
- Kofman, Eleonore, Saharso, Sawitri, and Elena Vacchelli. "Gendered Perspectives on Integration Discourses and Measures." *International Migration* Vol. 53, Issue 4, (2015): 77–89.
- Mahler, Sarah J., and Patricia R. Pessar. "Gender Matters: Ethnographers Bring Gender from the Periphery toward the Core of Migration Studies." *International Migration Review* Vol. 40 Issue 1, (2006): 27–63.
- Schrover, Marlou, and Willem Schinkel. "Introduction: The Language of Inclusion and Exclusion in the Context of Immigration and Integration." *Ethnic and Racial Studies* Vol. 36, Issue 7, (2013): 1123–41.