



**Janine Dahinden (Project Leader),
Carolyn Fischer (PostDoc),
Anne Kristol and Joanna Menet (Doctoral
Students)**

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**Gender as a Boundary Marker in Migration,
Citizenship and Belonging: Case Studies
from Switzerland and Beyond**

University of Neuchâtel
Laboratory for the Study of 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 durable constructions of migrant “others” and promotes particular realities of exclusion. The central question asks: *How has gender been shaping politics of migration, citizenship regimes and experiences of being stigmatized as migrant other?* To address this overarching puzzle, the project encompasses three main fields of inquiry: A critical review of Swiss immigration history, an ethnographic analysis of naturalization processes and a multi-sited study on experiences of discrimination and positioning strategies of migrant descendants.

The project offers new analytical perspectives and empirical results. It contributes to a growing international scholarship that situates gender at the heart of studies on migration and mobility, boundary work, citizenship, nation state building and human agency. Our key research question breaks down into three sub-questions, each of which is linked to a distinct research module.

Module I

How does gender feature in Swiss admission policies and integration debates since the beginning of the 20th century until today?

Findings: In this module, we examined 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 calls for certain forms of immigration control and migrant incorporation. We identified four 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.

Module II

How do gendered perceptions of migrant “others” affect practices of actors in public and civic institutions?

The second project module examines how gender shapes Swiss naturalization procedures and the meanings attached to Swiss citizenship. Recent legal changes in Swiss Nationality Law and new discursive trends on gender equality and migrant integration have prompted a need for scientific research exploring the role of gender in this particular realm. This module offers empirical evidence to back the argument that gender continues to constitute a core principle of Swiss citizenship. Gender determines access to citizenship without being explicitly

mentioned in legislative texts. Based on an ethnography of naturalization procedures in two Swiss cantons and at the federal level, this study unpacks how gender works as a category of inclusion and exclusion. It examines the practices of state and non-state actors that are involved in the naturalization process, with a particular focus on decision-making procedures. Participant observation and interviews were 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 conditions of access to nationality and citizenship, this module sheds light on an almost unexplored dimension of the naturalization procedure.

Module III

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 examine how descendants of immigrants, the so-called second generation, interpret, appropriate and modify boundaries and experiences of discrimination in everyday life. Our main focus is on encounters and engagements with institutional and everyday ethnicization and otherness. Gender plays an important role in defining the criteria that are employed to judge who does or does not form part of “native” populations. Likewise, gender affects how descendants of migrants cope with stigmatization and how they position themselves vis-à-vis experiences of exclusion. Based on a qualitative case study, conducted in Zurich and Edinburgh we integrate different response strategies in a coherent theoretical framework, combining theories of structure and agency, boundary-work, constructions of the self and social positioning. Our study yields empirically informed theory on the strategies and positions of those often classified as others. It deepens our understanding of how immigrants and their descendants define and establish their own pathways into society.

Publication

- Fischer, Carolin and Janine Dahinden (2017). “Gender Representations in Politics of Belonging: An Analysis of Swiss Immigration Regulation from the 19th Century until Today.” *Ethnicities*, 17(4): 445–468.

In Progress

- Fischer, Carolin and Janine Dahinden. “Changing Encounters with Everyday Otherness: Gendered Responses to Boundaries among Second-Generation Immigrants.” (submitted as contribution to special issue of *Migration Studies*)
- Kristol, Anne and Janine Dahinden. “Citizenship and the Gendered Boundary of the Nation. Exploring the Legitimacy of Marital Unions in Facilitated Naturalization Procedures in Switzerland.”
- Carolin Fischer and Joëlle Moret. “Transnationality as Reactive Social Position? Examining Response Strategies of Second-Generation Adults to Stigmatizing Discourses in Switzerland.”

References

- Duemmler, Kerstin and Janine Dahinden (2016). “Gehören wir dazu? Grenzziehungsprozesse und Positionierungen der zweiten Generation im Vergleich zwischen Luzern und Neuchâtel.” *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie*, 42(2): 309–331.