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**Gender as a Boundary Marker in  
Migration, Citizenship and Belonging**

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**Migration prompts confrontations with questions of belonging among both migrants and those considered native citizens. Often, migrants experience ethnic and cultural boundaries, which exclude them from the majority society. As a result, they have become symbols of ‘the other’. In this project we examine how gender affects constructions of migrant others and promotes particular realities of exclusion and non-belonging. We show that our society reproduces forms of exclusion over generations, which is incompatible with the principles of a liberal democracy.**

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**Messages for Decision-Makers**

- **Gender contributes to determining how people are excluded and classified as non-belongers. Political and administrative practice needs to be grounded in better knowledge of the effects of gendered representations.**
- **The construction of migrant descendants as others is a symbolic misrecognition and promotes processes of disintegration. A liberal, modern, democratic society needs to take responsibility for all its members and combat such forms of exclusion.**

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Gender equality has become a key feature of an ‘imagined Swissness’. As a result, migrant women are represented as being in need of emancipation. Conversely, with respect to native Swiss women, gender equality is widely considered as the norm and daily reality. Such unequal representations of migrant and non-migrant women yield a strong impact on laws, politics and individual experiences of everyday exclusion. At the same time, such representations hide a more complex reality and promote particular forms of migrant exclusions.

This project encompasses three fields of inquiry: A critical review of Swiss immigration history, an ethnographic analysis of naturalization processes, and a study on experiences of and reactions to discrimination among migrant descendants in Zürich and Edinburgh.

**Gender Has Played an Important Role in Shaping the Social Representations of Migrants since the Early Days of Swiss Immigration History**

Our historical analysis shows that gender affects how migrants are represented by state and non-state actors. Gendered representations not only influence public perceptions of migrants and immigration politics. They also radically change over time. From the late 19th century onwards, we observe a shift from a classical gender image of the economic migrant as a male breadwinner to a culturalized, post-colonial interpretation of gender roles. Representations of male foreigners as being sexually aggressive and a threat to Swiss women exemplify this. Since the turn of the millennium, we witness a transition towards the normative framing of gender equality as part of emerging debates and policies relating to integration. By addressing specific migrant groups such as Muslims, ideas and practical approaches to integration promote the ethnicization of female subordination and male chauvinism. While women were largely absent from early migration

debates and legislation, recent emphases on integration move migrant women to the centre stage. We find that the representation of Swiss women also changes over time. The classical image of the good housewife and spouse of a breadwinning man gradually gives way to an emphasis on emancipation and equality. This way, gender equality has become a key feature of an imagined native Swiss community to which immigrant others are juxtaposed. These developments seem detached from a more complex reality. National statistics demonstrate that Switzerland is far from being a gender equal society. Labor market participation and unequal salaries are only some examples.

### **Gender Affects Constructions of Foreigners as More or Less Eligible for Swiss Citizenship**

The principle of gender equality is assumed to be integral to Swiss society. It affects naturalization procedures and shapes the meanings attached to Swiss citizenship. State representatives apply certain criteria of integration as a precondition to accessing citizenship: we observe that the discretionary power they exercise, and the resulting decision-making processes, are fundamentally gendered. Gender shapes expectations relating to professional and social activities of the candidates, as well as the roles they play in their family. For instance, foreign women are expected to join the labor force while their husbands should lend them a helping hand at home. Such divisions of tasks are framed as corresponding to Swiss values of gender equality, even though the reality of many native citizens does not correspond to these idealized representations of gender equal households. Still, such expectations form the basis for decision-making as to whether or not someone is eligible for Swiss citizenship. Thus, gender determines access to citizenship without being explicitly mentioned in legislative texts. In addition, we find that state bureaucrats define Swissness based on normative ideas about gender roles, and a patriarchal vision of citizenship as far as the right to transmission is concerned. For example, the legitimacy for Swiss men to transmit their citizenship to a foreign wife remains largely unquestioned. Conversely, foreign husbands of Swiss women are often suspected of marrying only to get a Swiss passport. Our analysis of gendered conditions of access to nationality and citizenship addresses an almost unexplored dimension of the naturalization procedure.

### **Descendants of Migrants Continue to Experience Boundaries to Which They React in Different Ways**

In our third field of inquiry, we shift the focus to individual experiences of boundaries and examine how descendants of immigrants, the so-called second generation, experience and respond to otherness, stigmatization and discrimination in everyday life. We primarily scrutinize how gender impacts on people's encounters and engagements with otherness. Our study reveals that migrant descendants find themselves classified as others at various life stages. Gendered, ethnicized, racialized, culturalized and class-based classifications are employed to distinguish between those considered as genuinely belonging to the national community and those regarded as outsiders. As an additional finding, our study shows that experiences of being classified as other have serious effects. They often lead to lasting perceptions of non-belonging, regardless of whether or not people are native citizens. Those classified as others develop a wide range of strategies to cope with exclusion. However, the strategies adopted to counter experiences of non-belonging can further exacerbate exclusion, disintegration or segregation. In extreme cases, reactions to exclusive boundaries can lead people to withdraw to confined social groups or to promote different forms of fundamentalism. Likewise, if the strategies are formulated as claims of belonging, they often remain unrecognized and ignored by decision-makers and the wider society. In sum, this study deepens our understanding of how immigrant descendants define and establish their own pathways into society.

### **Key Publications**

- Dahinden, Janine (2016). „A plea for the ‘de-migrantization’ of research on migration and integration.“ *Ethnic and Racial Studies* 39, no. 13 (2016): 2207-25.
- Dahinden, Janine, Kerstin Duemmler, 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* 35 no. 4 (2014): 329-348.
- Duemmler, Kerstin, and Janine Dahinden. “Gehören wir dazu? Grenzziehungsprozesse und Positionierungen der zweiten Generation im Vergleich zwischen Luzern und Neuchâtel.” *Schweizerische Zeitschrift für Soziologie* 42 no. 2 (2016): 309-331.
- Fischer, Carolin, and Janine Dahinden. “Gender Representations in Politics of Belonging: An Analysis of Swiss Immigration Regulation from the 19th Century until Today.” *Ethnicities* 17, no. 4 (2017): 445-68.
- Fischer, Carolin, and Janine Dahinden. “Using pragmatism to approach ‘diaspora’, its meanings and political implications” In *The Routledge Handbook of Diaspora Studies*, edited by Robin Cohen and Carolin Fischer. Routledge: London and New York, Forthcoming.