

Migration from a gender-critical, postcolonial and interdisciplinary perspective

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Abstract The article introduces the special issue’s subject-matter. The intention of this volume is to overcome a number of major omissions and curtailed interests in the field of migration studies – deemphasizing gender and sexuality, ignoring the “intersectional” interplay of gender with other dimensions of inequality in migration societies, Eurocentric preoccupation, non-consideration of the agency of migrants and caught up in methodological nationalism.

The authors come from different institutional contexts and academic disciplines and address quite different questions. However, all the contributions share a methodologically transnational and postcolonial-feminist analytical perspective, the perception of migrants as subjects provided with agency and a critical attitude towards the prevailing policies with regard to migrants and refugees in Europe.

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Migration in geschlechterkritischer, postkolonialer und interdisziplinärer Perspektive

Zusammenfassung Der Beitrag führt in die Thematik des Sonderhefts ein. Ziel der Beiträge dieses Bandes ist es, einige folgenreiche Auslassungen und verkürzte Aufmerksamkeiten im heterogenen Forschungsfeld der Migrationsforschung – die Unterbelichtung von Geschlecht und Sexualität, die Vernachlässigung intersektionaler Ungleichheiten in Migrationsgesellschaften, eurozentrische Voreingenommenheit, die Ausblendung der Handlungsfähigkeit („agency“) von MigrantInnen und die Befangenheit im methodologischen Nationalismus – zu beseitigen.

Die AutorInnen der im Sonderheft versammelten Beiträge kommen aus unterschiedlichen institutionellen Kontexten und Fachdisziplinen und verhandeln verschiedene Fragen. Was sie jedoch verbindet, ist eine methodologisch transnationale und postkolonial-feministische Analyseperspektive, die Wahrnehmung von MigrantInnen als handlungsfähige AkteurInnen sowie eine geteilte kritische Haltung gegenüber dem aktuell dominanten politischen Umgang mit MigrantInnen in Europa.

Schlüsselwörter Migration · Geschlecht · Sexualität · Postkolonialismus · Transnationalität

When examined closely, migration research proves to be a heterogeneous field. It turns out to be a scene of pluralistic activities fed by different socio-theoretical backgrounds and orientations. From a gender- and migration-critical perspective, a number of momentous omissions and curtailed interests in the field of migration studies show themselves to this day. Right at the beginning, we want to mention some of them, i. e. those which we, as editors, consider to be particularly significant:

1. Migration research has long been characterised by a systematic tendency to ignore gender issues. Migration has been regarded as being “genderless” or has been viewed from an androcentric perspective, for example, in early studies on the “migration of guest workers.” “Guest workers” were considered to be male, although many women who were recruited for the care sector, the textile, food or food service industries, were part of the early guest worker generation of the 1950s and 60s. For a long time, the “daughters of departure” (Bez 2014) have not been regarded as important. Nowadays, already more than 50 % of all migrants are women (Lutz 2008). As early as in the mid-1970s, 40 % of all women migrants in Germany were in employment, which by far exceeded the employment rate of women born in Germany (Mattes 1999). This also applies to Austria: Almost 50 % of all people without Austrian citizenship are women (Statistik Austria 2016). This even pertains to “skilled” or “highly skilled” migration, respectively: A high percentage of migrants are women – almost 30 % of all holders of a Red-White-Red Card are women, and among graduates even 50 % (Biff and Bock-Schappelwein 2013). In spite of that, migrating women – caught

in the conventional male breadwinner/female caregiver-model have, for decades, been discursively constructed as being dependent on their migrating husbands: as those staying behind with the children and/or following their husbands later on in the context of “family reunion” (Westphal 2004).

2. Earlier works discussing gender within the framework of migration show a bias towards heteronormative ideas: for instance, a reification of gender dichotomies and a normalisation of heterosexual desire. People who identify themselves beyond the heterosexual matrix and whose realities of life and survival strategies assert themselves beyond “starting a family and family reunion” are rarely found in traditional migration research (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2009).
3. Several studies which finally began addressing gender and/or sexuality in the context of migration more explicitly did not systematically consider their/its interplay with other dimensions of inequality such as class, ethnicity or people’s cultural-religious background. Thus, cumulative effects like multiple discrimination (e. g. of women of colour from the South in lower-class positions), but also status inconsistencies (e. g. the privileged position of upper-class women from the South) do not come into focus (Crenshaw 1989; Hooks 2000).
4. To this day, the hegemonic discourse of migration is still marked by an explicitly Eurocentric stance and a specifically postcolonial arrogance (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2015): This includes the idea of the West or the Global North to have an exclusive, absolute monopoly on “civilisation” and “emancipation” and to therefore serve as a model and a guideline for the East or the Global South, respectively. Related to the above matter is the mission to civilise and emancipate the East and the Global South as well as the people migrating from the East or the Global South to the West or the Global North; this includes the idea that the woman of colour needs rescuing from the barbaric man of colour (Spivak 2008). As the racist appropriation of feminist concerns with regard to the so-called New Year’s Eve attacks in Cologne has shown, gender relations are put in place in the implementation and legitimisation of restrictive migration and asylum policies to focus on contrasts and differences between the majority and minority societies. The self-image of a society, which claims to have long since achieved gender equality, is confronted with a threatening outside/r: the misogynistic stranger from whom the White woman needs to be protected. Sexualised violence against women is redirected towards an ethnicised and racialised outside/r (Messerschmidt 2016). Migration research has taken note of the works of Critical Men’s Studies comparatively late – even if this trend has presently become increasingly pronounced; researchers in the field of Masculinity Studies have, in turn, also begun to deal with questions of migration as well as with the construction of the male Other, with concepts of ethnicised masculinities and with a gendered migratory subjectivisation (Spindler 2006; Musch et al. 2007; Scheibelhofer 2011; Spies 2012).
5. An idea that is also closely linked to the four characteristics of a hegemonic migration discourse, outlined under 4. (cf. above), is that migrants are only passive objects and merely victims of external circumstances (wars, disasters, economic hardships) or mafia-like networks run by unscrupulous “human traffickers” or “refugee smugglers.” What is being overlooked here is that migrants are also

agents and subjects capable of acting. The concept of “the autonomy of migration” (Bojadžijev and Karakayalı 2007; Mezzadra 2010) takes this into account. Amongst other things, it emphasises migrants’ self-initiated contribution to action in the migration process; it interprets migration as a rational project of departure and shows the agents of migration to be creative-tactical everyday cosmopolitans. Until now, these designations have only comparatively seldom been extended to female subjects in a consistent manner.

6. Up to the present day, migration research has continued to be frequently tied to methodological nationalism (Wimmer and Glick Schiller 2002; Beck and Grande 2004; Transit-Migration 2007): It is based on the assumption of the autonomy, unity and internal homogeneity of national societies and their heterogeneity towards other nations, from which they are separated by virtually natural borders. From this perspective, migration appears to be an exceptional case where the border is crossed more or less finally and permanently. In this way, transnational projects and biographies often go unrecognised. In a long-standing “postnational constellation” (Habermas 1998), the requirements for national affiliation have become largely untenable. Society is in many ways a global society: cross-border migration has become the norm and the – still nationally constituted – sub-societies are now more than ever socially diverse and culturally hybrid migration societies. In postnational migration societies, migration is not the exception but the rule. As the recent (re-)erection of border fences and the reintroduction of border controls within the EU and along the Balkan route in the autumn and winter of 2015/16 have drastically shown once again, it is only the national rule of territorialisation – the organisational matrix which strives for the national standardisation of space, society and culture – and the resulting border and migration regimes which make migration and national border-crossing a problem (Mecheril et al. 2013). Critical migration research is increasingly taking this condition into account.
7. Especially in European societies, which are in denial of the fact of migration and – according to their own self-conception – are not countries of immigration, migration has also long gone unnoticed in historical research and cultures of remembrance, a fact which has left corresponding gaps in the collective memory. To this day, migration in general and female migration in particular have hardly played any role in the classical science of history as well as in the memory reservoirs of chronicles and archives (Hahn 2012; Rupnow 2013).

It was the aim of the conference “Gender Relations in Migration Societies: Representations – Criticism – Difference” – preceding this publication and held from 11 to 13 December 2014 – to take up the challenges of migration research listed under points 1–7; to apply various academic and practical approaches to them; to exchange views across different disciplines and to define the position of gender-critical migration research. The conference was organised by the research group of the same name, i. e. Gender Relations in Migration Societies; it was organised as part of the interfaculty research platform “Gender Research: Discourses, Transformations, Identities” and in close cooperation with the Innsbruck interfaculty MA programme “Gender, Culture and Social Change”. Special thanks go to all those members

of the above-named research group who were involved in the organisation of the conference alongside the editors of the present volume: Marcel Amoser (Gender Studies), Elisabeth Grabner-Niel (Office for Gender Equality and Gender Studies), Yeşim Kasap Çetingök (Education Studies), Ulrich Pallua (English Studies), Gloria Tauber (Gender Studies) and Julia Tschuggnall (Education Studies).

The conference focused on selected aspects of gender and intersectional inequality in migration societies – from a methodologically transnational and postcolonial-feminist perspective and with an interdisciplinary approach to the subject. A basic overview of the establishment of difference and practices of resistance in migration societies (Innsbruck Gender Lecture and first introductory panel) was followed by the second panel with the title “Border Regime and Refugee Movements.” It dealt with the contradictory relations between the social normality of border-crossing on the one hand, and the increasingly restrictive demarcation and sealing-off of nation states against migrants and refugees on the other. The third panel with the heading “Ethnicisation and Genderisation of Employment and Education Relationships” addressed educational careers, experiences of discrimination at school and the work relations of migrants in Austria. The fourth panel endeavoured to make gaps in the collective memory of migration societies visible and surmountable, on the basis of historical and biographical sources. The panel “(Labour) Migration: Memories, Experiences, Narratives” aimed at overcoming the predominantly androcentric as well as ethnocentric approach to (labour) migration in historical works and at closing the gaps in the historical tradition. More specifically, it attempted to correct beliefs that it was men in particular who immigrated temporarily as “guests”; the panel also suggested to no longer restrict migrants to their status as “the Other” or to remain completely quiet about them but to view them as part of the collective and therefore also as part of the collective memory. The last panel shed light on the discursive construction of migrant identities in literature and politics. The panel “Speaking and Remaining Silent: Discourses, Positionings, Identity (De-)Constructions” revolved around the constructions of migrant identities in literature and film. The speakers paid special attention to the gender perspective of the examined writers and filmmakers as well as to their depiction of identity as self-perception or self-positioning, respectively, as against external perception. The second focal point of the panel placed special emphasis on the political discourse on language and integration, which still rests on the concept of a monolingually-constituted nation state and on the Eurocentric premises of the Western emancipation discourse.

The present collection of essays now documents central contributions to the conference. For publication, the papers were revised and refined in response to the double-blind peer review process, and they were brought up to date, as far as necessary and appropriate, in the aftermath of the most recent political events, i. e. the crisis of Europe’s refugee policy in 2015/16. As this publication is going to be released as a special issue of a sociological journal, the relevance and connectivity of the contributions for the sociological specialist discourse on migration have been a major concern to us.

The authors of this volume come from different institutional contexts (universities and NGOs) and disciplines (Education Studies, Historical Studies, Literary Studies, Political Science, Sociology). However, what unites all the contributions is

a broader approach, which endeavours to cover the aforementioned research gaps and challenges, and a shared critical attitude towards the dominant political dealings with migrants and refugees in Europe. The editors and authors mean to pay particular attention to the following principles:

1. *Inclusion of the gender perspective and the overcoming of heteronormativity:* Migration, migration policy and the border regime are crucially determined by gender relations and have repetitive, deconstructive or mobilising and transformative repercussions on them. By applying a gender-critical perspective, we try to take account of this fact throughout.
2. *Adoption of an intersectional perspective:* By means of adopting an *intersectional analytical perspective* whenever possible (Crenshaw 1991), we attempt to deal with the fact that, apart from gender, also other categories of difference – for instance, class, skin colour, global context of origin, culture/religion, body – have a significant influence in a migration context.
3. *Overcoming Eurocentric attitudes and postcolonial arrogance:* The Eurocentric, Orientalist premises of exotic but barbaric migrants who need civilising; of the sexually violent migrant driven by instinct who needs disciplining; and of the female migrant who needs “emancipating” and “rescuing” from the barbaric man have to be deconstructed and made available for critical revision. However, while doing so, gender hierarchies and gender violence in the diaspora of migrants from the South must not be forgotten. Here we build on corresponding concepts from feminist postcolonial studies (Castro Varela and Dhawan 2015; Reuter and Villa 2010).
4. *Strengthening of the subject perspective and consideration of subject formation processes under conditions of migration:* Migrants have to be conceptualised as subjects holding the power of interpretation and capable of acting (Apitsch and Jansen 2003). They have to be made visible in their subject status, and the societal conditions and symbolic orders due to which people are assigned or denied a specific subject status have to be taken into account critically (Butler 2010).
5. *Extensive acknowledgment of the fact of migration and its present manifestations:* In today’s “postnational constellation”, migration should be considered the rule in every society, which does neither have to be a single nor a permanent occurrence and which – in a world which has shrunk to a “global village” through electronic mass communication and the accelerated movement of people – does not have to involve a cessation of social contacts and cultural affiliations to one’s country of origin. Several concepts which take this fact into account – with different focuses – have become available in the meantime; for instance, the concepts of the “*migration society*” (Mecheril 2011), the “*post-migrant perspective*” (Yildiz 2015), “*transmigration*” (Pries 2010, 2013) and “*transnationalisation*” (Pries 2010) or also “*transculturality*” (Welsch 1997) and “*cultural hybridity*” (Ha 2004).
6. *Consideration of migration and border regimes as organisation systems, which problematise migration in a specific way:* Attempts to maintain national borders by means of managing them to that effect and to selectively control migration processes in the interest of the Global North deserve increased attention in a world

which has actually become globalised through cross-border economic, technical, social and cultural mechanisms and processes. Here we take up the critical analyses of European “migration and border regimes” (Hess and Kasparek 2010, Heimeshoff et al. 2014).

7. Departure from the premise of the cultural homogeneity of national societies, from assimilative integration concepts and monistic and essentialist ascriptions of identity.
8. *Uncovering suppressed migration flows in historiography*: Given the facticity of the migration society, the omission of migration and its gender dimension in the collective memory must be reversed and the gender history of migration must be explicitly addressed in historical research (Hahn 2012).

The volume is subdivided into four sections: the introductory “Theoretical Orientations” and three subject-related sections. The introductory orientations reflect on migration from a feminist postcolonial perspective and a post-migrant diversity-theoretical perspective. In their paper “*Rescuing the Female Migrant!? On the Tricky Relation between Gendered Violence, Racism and Agency*”, Nikita Dhawan and María do Mar Castro Varela deal with how migrant women are positioned socially in Western debates on migration. The victimisation of the Other woman has a long tradition in the West – since colonial times already, the West has deemed the gender relations of the Others as a symbol of the backwardness and barbarism of the colonised. This is quite functional, as the women of the Others serve as a foil against which the European-Christian woman and society can set themselves apart as exceptionally emancipated. Dhawan and Castro Varela also point to the dilemmas which arise in the debates on gender justice, colonialism, racism and migration and raise the question how gender violence in migrant communities can be made a subject of discussion without monopolising the right to talk about gender violence or denying the actual existence of gender violence. In his paper “*The Strategic Meshwork of Migration, Ethnicity and Gender*”, Erol Yıldız re/deconstructs the increasing ethnicisation and transformation of migration in the course of its discursification in the Social and Education Sciences from a postcolonial and diversity-oriented perspective. He pleads for a “contrapuntal view” (Said 2009), which brings up the contradictions, ambivalences and ambiguities of culture, society and the subjects of the migration society.

The first subject-related section (Section I) then deals with “Border Regimes and Refugee Movements.” In her paper “*The Illegitimate. Border and Migration Regimes from a Bio-political Perspective*”, Michaela Ralser approaches the problem of racist and sexist border demarcation from the macro-perspective of state biopolitics and by means of applying a poststructuralist Foucauldian governmentality analysis. It examines relevant examples of biopolitical border demarcation practices which use biopolitical procedures, such as the biometric age identification of juvenile refugees in Austria, DNA analyses in the case of family reunions in France, or the use of psychiatric reports in Germany if homosexuality is claimed as the reason for fleeing. Elisabeth Scheibelhofer and Sabrina Luimpöck, in turn, approach the question of border-crossing from a micro-perspective from below and by using the means of empirical social research in their paper “*Manufacturing Structural Inequalities*

and the Creation of Action Spaces. A Qualitative Pilot Study on the Situation of Recognized Refugees in Peripheral Spaces”. They report on the life situation and living environments of refugees in Austria who have been recognised as refugees in accordance with the Geneva Convention on Refugees or who have been granted subsidiary protection status in the context of an asylum procedure. Among other things, they examine which role intersectional categories of difference play in this context and to what extent refugees succeed in presenting themselves as strategic agents capable of acting.

Section II is concerned with “(Labour) Migration: Memories, Experiences, Narratives.” With the aim of “conquering” blank spaces in the collective memory, the recollections and experiences of migrants become the centre of attention, with migrants acting as contemporary witnesses and, apart from that, as sources on the subject of migration. The intention here is to construct new historical narratives, which do not just include previously unconsidered topics, but which also reveal the suppression and selectivity inherent in the conventional representation of the past. In her paper “‘Türkenliebchen.’ A Gender-sensitive Glance at Contemporary Sources of the City Archives in Hall in Tirol”, Verena Sauermann embarks on a discourse-analytical search for clues. Based on sources on the (labour) migration of the 1960s and 1970s in Austria, she expounds the problems of rare and selective records on migration and shows that their textual configuration results in the ethnisation, sexualisation and exoticification of migrants as well as in paternalism vis-à-vis migrants. In their essay “About Empty Spaces, Migration and Gender. A Workshop Report”, Christina Hollomey-Gasser, Gerhard Hetfleisch and Marcel Amoser are also concerned with the migration history of Tyrol. In light of the blank spaces and distortions in official primary sources, but also in grey literature, the NGO “Centre for Migrants in Tyrol (ZEMIT)” initiated the research project “Cultures of Remembrance” in 2014, which collects and documents various perspectives on Tyrolean migration history by means of a “history from below”, i. e. in interviews with different agents (contemporary witnesses, chroniclers) in three specific locations in Tyrol (Innsbruck, Jenbach and Fulpmes). Again, experiences of marginalisation, but also examples of “agency”, solidarisation and self-empowerment, have become visible.

The third and last subject-related section then focuses on “Speaking and Remaining Silent: Discourses, Positionings, Identity (De-)Constructions” in highly diverse fields of discourse. In their contribution “Dichotomies in Discourses about Sex Work: Uncoverings and Problematisations from the Perspective of a Migrant Women’s* Self-Organisation”, Maiz – the Autonomous Centre by and for Migrants (Linz; Upper Austria) – deal with current discourses on sex work. Maiz deconstruct so-called (neo-)abolitionist positions, which are based on a stereotypical construction of migrant sex workers as passive victims and which are informed by postcolonial and heteronormative premises; Maiz plead for a position which recognises sex workers as autonomous subjects capable of acting. In her paper “Representation and Parody of Male Violence in *La Haine* and *Allah Superstar*”, Laura Fuchs-Eisner discusses the film *LaHaine* (1995) by Matthieu Kassovitz and the novel *Allah Superstar* (2003) by Yassir Benmiloud, which both fall into the category of the banlieue-novel/film, i. e. a genre which has increasingly often been in the focus of critical

attention since the 1990s. This genre addresses the “malaise des banlieues”, the problem of co-existence and the lack of prospects in those French suburbs. Whereas female identity problems have meanwhile been examined extensively, particularly for the related “*beur-novel*”, only relatively few analyses of the representation of masculinity in this context exist. That is why the two “texts” are scrutinised as regards the images of masculinity enacted by them. In the process, special emphasis is placed on the role of parody as a subversive element in the representation of popular, heavily clichéd images of masculinity and the representation of male propensity to violence within the French migration society. In her contribution “*On the Possibilities for Transforming Secularly- and Islamically-shaped Feminist Discourses and the Subject Positions of Muslim Women*”, Yeşim Kasap Çetingök finally discusses the specifics and differences of the secular and Islamic emancipation discourses and the related specific subject-constituting configurations of interpellation. She carves out the different and conflicting concepts of emancipation in the two discourses and, following N. Fraser, refers to the possibility of overcoming these differences and contradictions by means of shifting the debate from cultural questions of recognition to economic questions of distribution.

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