1. Gender, Identities and Networks

New forms of migration and their gendered dynamism suggest fundamental changes around the turn of the millennium. New flexible forms of migration are increasing and transnationalism is becoming a marked trend. Female migration is no longer invisible but recognised as an important phenomenon in scholarly research and in policy making. The high percentages of women in labour, refugee, educational or marriage migration are believed to constitute a new trend. While this is a flawed view because women have always participated in migration movements, the focus on the gender dynamics of these developments is indeed new. Gender relations are now seen as fluid and changing: In the past, female migrants have been portrayed as symbols of national or traditional culture, expressed in clothes and body postures, or as representatives of different moral norms and life-styles, of chastity or communalism. However, in transnational communities young women and men are nowadays developing new flexible and syncretistic identities. Over the last years scholarly debates have redrawn the boundaries around the andocentric and national understanding of migration and have integrated gender as a core concept. Scholarly work shifted from describing women as passive objects or victims of migration structures to viewing them as social actors who conceive and follow strategies of their own in often difficult and complex situations. In short: Gender is interwoven with migration and gendered migration is on the move.

Contemporary feminist theory is marked by efforts to reflect on the links between gender, ethnicity and subjectivity in this new socio-political space. The metaphor of ‘nomadic subjects’ describes a way of thinking as well as living. Women are seen as moving between different worlds, languages, jobs and places without being bound to a fixed location (cf. Braidotti, 1994). This metaphor is attractive for feminist as well as for gender discourses. It promises a switching and exchanging of places marred by the experience of racism and sexism with new locations and a search for new options. To be on the move might be a strategy to avoid racism and sexism. Gender researchers have also
wondered whether many people have turned into ‘gender migrants’ in modern Western societies. They experiment or play with gender mixed identities, with queer or androgynous roles, with their individual gender designs and emancipation. It appears as if people can now choose their gender. However, these metaphors have their limits. „Having no passport or having many of them” (Braidotti, 1994, 33) are two totally different situations. Without a passport and other resources, one is not a voluntary nomad. Rather, celebrating mobility is only possible under certain circumstances. The apparent disappearance of borders and boundaries has its flip side: increasingly restrictive refugee and migration laws in many industrialised nations, the new ‘Fortress Europe’, the emergence of new forms of nationalism, the growth of racism, the repulsion of refugees as well as the denial of political and social rights for migrants. For many male and female migrants mobility is not a matter of choice, but the only way out of poverty, war, social pressure and other adverse conditions. In situations of sexual violence or rigid gender norms, e.g. considering childcare or public roles, the image of gender migrants is an illusion.

2. Conceptualising the Project Area ‘Migration’

During the preparation for the ifu semester one of the German lecturers invited to take part in the project area migration sent an urgent mail, asking whether she would need to link her lecture on international feminist networking to the topic of migration. With her question the colleague unknowingly brought up the same difficulties the curriculum working group members had been confronted with in their effort to name the project area adequately.

The process of conceptualising the ifu project area migration had started about two years before the actual ifu semester began, and the debates about the content are still reflected in the final title „Migration: People, Identities and Cultures in Process”. The aim was to outline a project area which reflects the connection and interaction of different segments and processes in a globalising world: the gender dimension of regional and international migration movements and the reconfigurations of borders, meanings and identities which emerge in the conditionings of national borders and images, space as a realm and an „ob-

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1 This is the argument of Hirschauer (1993, p. 351) from an ethnomethodological constructivist perspective.

2 The curriculum working group developed the curriculum of the first ifu semester on migration and invited colleagues from all over the world to present their research findings and describe their activism. Standing members were Mirjana Morokvasic (International Dean), Astrid Albrecht-Heide (Local Dean), Ilse Lenz, Helma Lutz, Maja Nadig, and Claudia Schöning-Kalender.