**"ImmigrAction" – An Applied Participant Research Project**

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Building upon the commonplace notion that feminist critical research not only sets out to describe people's lives and realities but also aims to actively improve them, this paper will touch upon some of the methodological difficulties related to the notion of empowerment in ethnographic research. Furthermore, and in interrelation with this, it will touch upon the issue of gendered research relationships. The position of female migrants as "othered" by origin and gender within entrepreneurial practices shall be analyzed and discussed. At the same time we will reflect upon the gendered dimensions of doing ethnography in the context of our project trying to reflect upon (a) issues that concern the interaction of the participating migrant women and gendered (male and female) researchers, (b) the gendered notion of entrepreneurship, and (c) the question how certain methods produce or reproduce gendered results.

While empowerment implies strategies and measures that raise the level of autonomy and self-determination of individuals and communities is based upon relationships of increased collaboration, greater interaction, and more open communication with research participants. A research design based on the principals of "equality" which is built upon the dynamics of friendship and friendliness (Kirsch 2002: 2164) poses a number of pitfalls. Trying to resolve the problem of asymmetrical research relationships, empowerment strategies themselves cannot avoid the "potential deceptiveness of egalitarian relationships" (Gorelick 1991:469). The power difference between researcher and researched cannot be completely eliminated and the attempt to create more equal relationships can ironically become exploitation and use (Acker, Barry and Esseveld 1996: 141). Empowerment strategies may themselves reintroduce some of the ethical dilemmas researchers had hoped to eliminate. As Addison and McGee state, these are the participants' sense of disappointment, alienation, and potential exploitation (1999). Gesa E. Kirsch points to the fact that a common thread seems to run through these warnings. While we as researchers strive for the benefits of close, interactive relations with participants we must simultaneously accept the concomitant risks. These risks may include the abrupt ending of relationships, participants feeling misunderstood or betrayed, particularly in instants when our priorities differ from those of our participants'. (2005: 2163).

Also commonplace knowledge is the feminist critique of androcentric science (Stanley and Wise 1983, Warren 1988, Oakley 1981) which for example challenges the implicit power inequalities found between male researchers and female informants. Les Back argues that

feminist criticism has resulted in the death of an academic discourse that has viewed male accounts of society as generic (1993: 217). There is no longer any use to be preoccupied with a type of reflection and textual analysis that acknowledges feminist theory as important while failing to grapple with its implications at the same time (Caplan 1988: 15). We as male ethnographers have been exposed. What we need to engage in now is an analysis of the relationship between our male gender and research. David Morgan (1981) hence stresses the importance of not merely trying to overcome the effects which the gender of the researcher has on particular field situations, but to explore how our gender identity becomes intertwined with the process of knowing - an integral part of the research project "ImmigrAction".

**"ImmigrAction"**

Before delving further into the above mentioned methodological issues, I will outline the "ImmigrAction" project that forms the framework of this paper and try to sketch some of the debates within the field of immigrant self-employment and ethnic entrepreneurship research. Since the replacement of standardized mass production (Fordism) by flexible production as the key feature of the contemporary organization of work, working methods that demand higher levels of self-organization from individual jobholders have been implemented. Employees are prompted to offer and market their manpower as a good (hence the term 'manpower entrepreneurs' (Arbeitskraftunternehmer) by Pongratz and Voss 2001). Concurrently flexible production in neo-liberal market economy increases the relative demand for skilled, highly paid workers and decreases the demand for unskilled, low-wage workers. These transformations have also had an important impact on immigrant workers as a great number of them have been mainly employed as low-skilled, low-wage workers. As not all of them are fit for the new positions, many lose their jobs or must find new strategies to earn a living. The need for a more secure fields of labor has fuelled rapid growth in immigrant's entrepreneurship/self-employment in many countries (for the US: Light 1972, 1979, Waldinger et al 1990, 1996, Portes 1985, 2002, for the UK: Phizacklea and Ram 1996, for France: Tarrius 1995, for Germany: Pütz 2003) where self-employment has become an important route for immigrants to improve their socioeconomic standing (Aldrich and Waldinger 1990; Light and Karageorgis 1994).

In Switzerland however, the situation for immigrants is somewhat different. Here immigrants were conveniently used as a "buffer" to the economic cycle; employed as seasonal migrants in times of economic growth to be sent home in times or recession. Self-employment for immigrants was not part of the labor market policy of Switzerland and self-employment of

immigrants is still seen as something out of the ordinary. In addition to the restrictive labor market policies we find a "glass ceiling effect" inhibiting the integration of (male and female) migrants. The path to self-employment is a promising alternative for migrants in Switzerland. Self-employment offers a chance to gain autonomy and social upward mobility outside the designated and restricted roads (Suter et al. 2006). Traditionally, research on immigrants has mainly focused on their role as providers of cheap labor and has been explained in terms of the global market economy (Sassen 1988). Migration has largely been discussed in terms of labor market problems and welfare state issues. It has been overlooked that immigrants are also found in other social spaces not merely being employees. By being self-employed immigrants partake in new roles in their host societies. Not only do immigrants create their own basis of work and thus circumvent structural barriers of the labor market. When successful they create jobs and thus exchange their traditional role as "buffers" with that of the entrepreneur, switching from the demand to the supply side. While "ethnic entrepreneurs" contribute to the welfare of their host societies (contributions to social insurance, GNP), immigrants can also function as a "hinge" between minority and receiving society, taking over the role of mediator between ethnic social capital and networks of the host society, opening the door in both directions.

Despite its positive contribution to society, self-employment of immigrants has barely been noticed, let alone been encouraged in Switzerland. Compared to percentage of Swiss nationals that are self-employed (15%) only 7.6% (SAKE, 2008) have a migration background. It can be assumed that a considerable entrepreneurship potential lays bare in the immigrant community, a community that constitutes about 20% of Switzerland's population. Our research project "ImmigrAction", that started in November 2008 and is scheduled to be finished by November 2010 would like to raise awareness to this issue by replacing the often deficit oriented mindset concerning migration phenomena with a resource oriented approach. The project is funded by the Swiss Federal Office for Professional Education and Technology (OPET) within the research program 'Equal Opportunities'. 'ImmigrAction' is looking into how opportunity structures interact with gender, social capital, and biographical experience during the process of women's self-employment in Switzerland. The importance of self-employed women migrants for Switzerland is being researched and practical vocational as well as political measures for start-ups in Switzerland shall be compiled. Hereby the following research questions are central: Which opportunity structures (institutional framework, forms of capital etc.) define steps towards self-employment? How do paths of women businesses evolve? Which factors support and which hinder immigrant women in

their self-employment projects? The project shall contribute to the recognition of innovation potentials of future self-employment projects by supplying background information and consulting, tutoring, workshops and when indicated develop future policy recommendations.

**Immigrant Business / Ethnic Entrepreneurship: a brief overview**

Since Ivan Light's (1972) research on the higher rates of self-employment in immigrant groups compared to the native born, research on ethnic entrepreneurs, immigrant self-employment and minority businesses has produced a broad body of literature. While Light focused on how culture contributes to the development of enterprises (1972), Wilson and Portes (1980) tried to follow the trajectory into entrepreneurship of certain ethnic groups (ethnic enclave theory). Bonacich and Modell (1980) worked with middleman theory while Waldinger, Aldrich and Ward (1990) developed the interactive model which tries to explain how the structure of a host society influences entrepreneurship of ethnic groups or immigrants. Trying to include structural components, Kloosterman and Rath (2001) expanded the interactive model by pointing to the importance of including the role of institutions in comparative research (mixed embeddedness). Light (1993), as well as Portes and Bach (1985), show the importance of ethnic family networks for entrepreneurial activities and in the 1990s, taking feminist critique in to account, Dallalfar (1994), Hillmann (1999), Morokosavic (1988) and Strüder (2003) show the importance of gender. Apitzsch (2003) and Kupferberg (2003) include the biographical experience of immigrants in their studies.

Common to all these studies is a confusion regarding the terminology used within the different theoretical frameworks and approaches, and it is often unclear what kinds of groups are being observed (Hettlage 2007). In her overview of 35 years of research on self-employed immigrants Hettlage points to the fact that in the term "ethnic entrepreneur" no emphasis on the notion of innovation or entrepreneurship is being made. Instead, "ethnic entrepreneur" includes all who are self-employed, not working for wages, and are not part of the majority population (ibid.: 3). Often in these studies it is not distinguished between immigrant, minority and ethnic entrepreneurs, and by treating them the same no further differentiation is made between the underlying categories of these groups. While European scholars tend to use the term "immigrant entrepreneur" to refer to a migration background the term "ethnic entrepreneur" used more in US American studies, points to the allegedly shared geographic origin of the entrepreneurs. But as Fredric Barth has shown "ethnicity" can be understood as a "continuing ascription which classifies a person in terms of their most general and inclusive identity, presumptively determined by origin and background" (1969: 13). Barth's

constructivist approach shows us that reducing "ethnicity" to geographical boundaries is basically essentialist and neglects the dialectics of the subjective and objective in the process of ethnic identity formation and therefore the notion of "ethnic entrepreneur" can suggest commonalities that do not exist in reality. The boundaries of the above mentioned categories "ethnic", "immigrant" and "minority entrepreneur" overlap frequently: self-employed immigrants, by ascription (self or other), belong to a certain ethnic group and can be members of a minority. In summary the terminology used reflects the different theoretical approaches to self-employed women and men with a migrant background.

**Self-Employment: From androcentric to gendered approaches**

As Lee (2006) shows, research on entrepreneurship among immigrant women has been rather scarce. When included, the role of women has been portrayed as supporting male-owned businesses. When working in family businesses, women have had the status of "family workers", even though frequently being co-owners. Their substantial contributions to these businesses have been concealed by labeling these women as "family laborers" and as Lee (2006) also shows, further underscored the already obscure status of immigrant women entrepreneurs. As Anthias (1992) has pointed out, the exploitation of female kinship labor is today seen as one of the "building blocks" of immigrant economies, "unpaid family labor" hereby understood as a distinctive feature of in explaining the success of immigrant enterprises. Due to feminist critique in the social sciences woman entrepreneurs gradually became the focus of researchers in the 1990s (Hettlage 2007). Dallalfar (1994) for example shows how immigrant women not only rely on ethnic and class resources (Light and Karageorgis 1994) but also on gender. Hillman (1998) further argues that immigrant women tend to realize their self-employment without relying on tight ethnic networks. Hillmann not only questions one of the central hypotheses of immigrant self-employment scholarship, namely that ethnic social networks constitute a key business resource, she also states that "ethnic business" is a male concept because female entrepreneurs tend to have weaker connections to their respective ethnic communities than their male counterparts. So while men "dominate the ethnic economy" (Hillmann 1999: 280) women must often leave these constraining networks to achieve economic advancement. While male entrepreneurs may exploit their ethnic social networks to support their businesses the same networks may hinder females in their projects. To account for these differences, scholars have been working with the concept of "intersectionality" (Anthias 2003, Essers 2007). Crenshaw (1991) defined the term "intersectionality" to explain how different socially and culturally constructed categories

like class, gender, ethnicity, religion etc. interweave and create a system of oppression in society. Put in a nutshell, research in the field of female immigrant entrepreneurship must take in account the fact that "class, ethnicity and gender intersect in different ways in different ethnic groups in different places over time" (Hettlage, 2007: 28). Thus, decisions of immigrant women to go into business are influenced by gender, ethnicity, class and immigration, and embedded in the social structure of a community, of marital relationships and of family responsibilities (Low 2003).

**Gendered notions of entrepreneurship**

Historically, entrepreneurship research primarily describes the reality of men and can be read as an expression of a symbolic meaning of masculinity (Bruni et al. 2004: 407-408). Yeager (1999), by way of example, shows that as late as the 1950's American men were estimated to own nearly 97% of the businesses in the United States, while women owned 3%. In 1985 the figure had changed to 28% and Carland and Carland (1991) estimated that the figure would reach 40-50% by the year 2000. In Switzerland 30% of the business owners were female in 2008 (SAKE, 2008). Up to the 1970's entrepreneurship research was heavily involved in its core phenomenon, but women due to the ruling gender blindness, seemed not to be part of that reality. Thus, masculine connotations such as "risk-taking" and an "expansive, growth oriented business strategy", or as Conell (2000) puts it, "hegemonic masculinity" became symbolically connected to entrepreneurship. In her article Andrea Bührmann (2005) shows that the typical entrepreneurial role model in Germany is male, German, 25-54 years old, possesses an adequate amount of economic, cultural and social capital, has no ulterior responsibilities and displays an "entrepreneurial personality". The creation of his enterprise is planed, the course of founding is resource oriented and strategically, and of course, the expansion of the enterprise is strong and fast. To sum it up, the construction of entrepreneurship as a form of masculinity in the literature is expressed by the description of entrepreneurial qualities such as risk-taking, leadership and rational planning as "typical" male qualities (Bruni et al. 2004: 409). Stereotypes of what is "typically" male and female are thus further perpetuated built upon evolutionist notions of women as family oriented "homemakers" and males as outside oriented "breadwinners". One consequence of this construction has been the establishment of a relation between these qualities and a model of male rationality (Mulholand 1996). This biased construct leads to a constant "othering" of women and migrant as entrepreneurs.

**Equal opportunities: working as a male researcher in a female oriented research project**

Having shown that gender interrelates with other socially and culturally constructed categories to form systems of oppression in society and that these intersections must be included in research, I will now try to demonstrate that this not only shapes immigrant women's decision to go into business but also influences research as such and why both men and women should necessarily be involved in reforms of gender inequality.

Working as a male research assistant in government funded equal opportunity project that aims to empower women with a migrant history on the road to self-employment puts the gender, class and ethnicity issue right up there in the spotlight. As a married Swiss social anthropologist, coming from a middle class background, conscious of the feminist criticism of our discipline as well as being a member of the male minority as a student, all the above mentioned constructs have shaped and influenced my biography. Sensitive to feminist issues, I am also aware of the danger of becoming a "proto-female" and as Les Back puts it "so possessing the ground of virtue in a vicarious way" (1995: 218). How then do I integrate feminist insights into my research without "constructing a hierarchy of 'liberated' versus 'conservative' men which itself is the expression of a form of masculine competition"? (Back 1995:217). Knowing that there is no "easy way out" of this dilemma, I suggest acknowledging the simple fact that our gender *does* influence our participation and exploring exactly how this *gendered participation* (Back 1995) influences our research projects. Hereby interview situations between male researcher and female informants serve as intersectional spaces *per se*. Male academics tend to react to the feminist critique of asymmetrical relationships in interview situations between male researchers and female informants in two ways. Either they find it difficult to get access to women's world of social experience or it is stated to be politically inappropriate for men to do such work (Back 1995: 222). Both of these responses run danger of perpetuating the idea that sexual symmetry between researchers and researched are to be established. These responses, I think, are outdated and my own research experience questions them. Working with married women between the ages of 35 to 55 has up to date not led to problems. This does not mean that gender is unimportant. From the beginning of the project I have aimed to meet my participant's partners and husbands to explain the nature of our research project and my role as a researcher to avoid misunderstandings. Taking up a junior position with regard to the project participants has been in line with the wider structuring of gender relations within society. I agree with Back, who through his own research experience comes to the conclusion that "the age of the women with whom I was working seemed closely linked to the nature of the impact that my gender

had on our relationships, and this had a profound effect on the situations in which we could meet and talk" (1995: 226). I would add that not only the *age* of the research participants I am working with, but also the research *topic* influence the impact of my gender on our relationships.

Holter (1997), Walby (1997) and Connell (2002) show that gender inequalities are embedded in a multidimensional structure which operates at every level of human experience: from economic arrangements, culture, to the state of interpersonal relationships and individual emotions. Thus, changing this multidimensional structure must involve profound institutional changes as well as changes in everyday life and personal conduct, which calls for widespread social support, including significant support from men and boys (Connell 2005). Yet, men are significant gatekeepers for gender equality because men (often group specific men like politicians, CEOs) control most of the resources required to implement women's claims for justice (ibid. 1802). So the question arises why men should give up this "comfortable" position? In relation to the gendered division of labour it can be shown that while men collectively receive the bulk of income in the money economy and occupy most of the managerial positions, they also provide the workforce for the most dangerous occupations, are under heavier social pressure to remain employed and suffer most industrial injuries (ibid: 1808). Interestingly, it seems that the disadvantages listed are the conditions of the advantages and the men who receive most of the benefits and the men who pay most of the costs are not the same individuals (ibid. 1809). Just like the category "women", class, race, ethnicity and generational differences cross-cut the category "men". If we as men are interested in creating a more equal society, we as gatekeepers have the responsibility to engage in and support gender equality. Connell lists four substantial reasons for men to support change (ibid. 1812-14). First, men should have relational interests in gender equality: we as men are not isolated individuals. As social beings we live in relationships with mothers, wives, partners etc. The quality of our life depends to large extent on the quality of these relationships. Secondly, Connell shows that men should have health interests in gender equality: research has shown that the attempts to assert a tough dominant masculinity pose a health risk (Sabo and Gordon 1995, Hurrelmann and Kolip 2002.) The third reason is that a movement away from tough masculinities helps to adopt styles of non-violent negotiation and conflict resolution (Zalewski and Papart 1998, Cockburn 2003). Finally, the political and ethical principles that we hold may support gender equality.

**The "Field"**

As Lund Thomsen correctly states in her dissertation by referring to Bourdieu (1998): "Entrepreneurial activities like other types of activities, derive from the relationship between the disposition of the individual and the structural limitations of the field at the given time" (2005: 36). This leads to the notion that the concept of field is central to the analysis and to the understanding of the coherence between dialectic relationships of agent and structure – the migrant entrepreneur and the Swiss labour market. Subsequently this "macro field" is structured by an unequal distribution of economic, social, and cultural capital of the diverse actors competing in the field. Cultural capital encompasses immaterial institutionalised (degrees, diplomas), embodied (long-lasting dispositions of the mind and body) and objectified (cultural goods) forms of capital. Social capital, immaterial as well, encompasses connections and social networks. Economic capital is material and can directly be converted into money while social capital and cultural capital, under certain conditions, be converted into economic capital (Bourdieu 1983).

Bourdieu (2000) shows us that the competition in the field, the struggle to obtain capital, is the route to accessing social recognition. Immigrants, in the societies in which they settle down, are faced with structural limitations and barriers such as the non-recognition of diplomas they have obtained in their homelands. Immigrants thus search for alternative routes to accumulate social capital and thereby accomplish social recognition. As Hettlage (2007) and Lund Thomsen (2005) note this transformative process causes changes in both individuals and society. Self-employed women may liberate themselves from constriction kinship networks and different ethnic businesses thereby altering market relations and consumer behaviour.

My selection of the "field" has taken place within a frame guided and structured by Institutions such as Federal Funding (OPET) and the Kalaidos University of Applied Sciences in Zürich, which conceived the project as well as my personal interest and academic goals. In this context, working with 10 different female migrant entrepreneurs in the German part of Switzerland between the cities of Basel, Bern, Zürich, Zug and Luzern came to be the 'field site'. Business ideas range from consulting firms, offering language trips to Australia for women 45+ to establishing a Thai fast food stall. Nationalities range from Philippine to Ghanaian.

**Methodology**

As mentioned above, I am aiming to reflect the lived experiences of self-employed migrant women with a problem-based and action driven approach by accompanying 10 migrant women through their business-founding-process, on the one hand by doing ethnographic fieldwork, on the other by empowering them through trainee programs and individual support. The aim is a reciprocal relationship between researchers and participants, involving both parties at every stage of the research process.

For the field work, a qualitative participatory action based research methodology is being applied using ethnographic techniques (narrative interviews, participant observation, and network analysis). Narrative interviews help to typify the relevancy of migration experiences, education titles, residence titles and frameworks (Kluge 2000). The interviews shall also shed light on how gender as a structural category influences ones biography and thus the entrepreneurship of immigrant women. Participant observation is a field method that simultaneously combines participation, introspection and interviews (Malinowski 1922). Applying participant observation, the structures of meaning of the entrepreneurs will be laid open by collecting data about participants living environments and the specific meaning of their actions and values. To collect data on how migrant women deploy social capital and its meaning and to answer the question which resources the women hold and what kind of resources may be developed in female networks, qualitative network cards (Hollstein and Straus 2006) will be put to use to show the meaning and transformation (pre-post) of social capital. Data will be collected over a two-year period. The participants were identified through personal contacts, business registration agencies ("Handelsregister"), professional associations of entrepreneurs and migrant associations, representing a wide range of ages, family structures, and types of entrepreneurial endeavors. Trainee programs will be carried out by an associated business school, offering classes and tutoring to the women entrepreneurs by taking into account the specific intersectional setting (as women, as immigrants and as unskilled or de-skilled workers) the women entrepreneurs find themselves in. The classes and tutoring sessions taking place between trainees and professors will be analyzed in regard to how gender influences these interactions.

We aim to explore and understand entrepreneurship embedded in everyday life so that features like gender, class and ethnicity within entrepreneurial actions can be analyzed in terms of their structuring moments, so that they must not be reconstructed in retrospect. Through this research design we hope to establish relationships based on mutual trust, a key element when it comes to document processes of self-employment. Often, the entrepreneurial

process is accentuated or simplified ex-post, be it intentionally or unintentionally (Hettlage 2005). Research subjects may not remember details or certain particulars do not fit in to the "narrated story of the self" and are therefore because of *'Gestaltschliessungszwängen'*, the constraint to close the textual forms, (Schütze 1984) blended out, while at the same time, others are emphasized. Participant observation has the advantage to recognize and note obstacles and opportunities in self-employment processes as they are perceived *in praxi.*

**Interactions**

I shall now come back to the above mentioned ethical dilemmas that arise from implementing participant research. One of these dilemmas that arise out of the numerous interactions with research participants is as Kirsch (2005) notes the dynamics of friendship and friendliness. Especially in the context of interviews, I quickly noticed how seemingly "neutral" questions can prompt very personal responses from interviewees. Interviews are distinct social phenomenons that only simulate the context of relationships in which people get to know one another (Kirsch 2005: 2165). In this context, the flow of information is usually still one-sided and the interaction stays asymmetrical: I as the party with institutional power ask the questions while the interviewee answers. Of course this does not exclude the possibility of developing a relationship over time that is built on reciprocal trust and sharing of information, which in my view defines friendship, but nonetheless, the interview situation stays highly ambivalent. Pointing to the ambivalence of the interview situation Pamela Cotteril reminds us that "close friends do not usually arrive with a tape-recorder, listen carefully and sympathetically to what you have to say and then disappear" (1992: 559). Giving undivided attention, showing genuine sincere interest and warmth helped me to establish close relationships to the women I am working with. This often leads to participants sharing intimate details about their lives. While this trust that is put in me is fundamental to obtaining reliable qualitative data and facilitates research, it also puts the researcher in a moral dilemma: Will the participants later regret having shared these personal accounts with me? Are they aware, that the information being shared will be analysed (and in some form published) later? I also have to reflect upon my own role again and again: Am I being (mis)used as a therapist or is our relation one based upon the common interest in the research project? One way of dealing with these issues, I have found, is to address them directly and discuss them openly. This helps as Kirsch writes: "to constantly delineate clear boundaries between the researcher and participants so that neither party unwittingly compromises expectations of friendship, confidentiality, and trust (2005: 2166). This 'negotiation of

borders', in addition to using "contracts of consent" which state the rights of interviewees and the way their information is used by the researcher, helps to establish trustful relationships.

During the interviews and our numerous discussions it became clear that the participants also from time to time wish to discuss why I would want to hear about a certain topic, when they deemed it of little personal relevance. Why would I, for example, want to know details about their biography, when they themselves are interested in becoming self-employed? Participants want to make sense of the relationship between myself and what I am researching, questioning what I am looking to "gain" from our interviews. So participants' ideas of why we, as researchers, research certain subjects is therefore of key importance when considering who we interview, and why they might want to be interviewed (Riach 2009: 363). These questions constantly force me to reflect upon my research interests, agenda and objectives and to discuss them with the participants. In my interactions I also learned, that opposed to my initial concerns, gender issues have not posed a problem for my research up to date. As a male researcher I have succeeded in recruiting female migrant women as project participants and tapping in to migrant women's associations. How gender will have influenced my research as such must be a central part of the upcoming analysis of the collected data. What can presently be stated though, is that gender does influence our interactions as such. As a male researcher interacting solely with migrant women on their paths to self-employment, I must constantly reflect upon my gender role. Am I enacting "hegemonic masculinity" concerning my own notion of entrepreneurship through the questions I ask? Am I myself open to ideas of "mainstreamed entrepreneurship"? Neither shall immigrant women entrepreneurship be romanticized or treated marginally. Rather, it is important to me to recognize the problems these women face concerning their gender, ethnicity and class but also to point to their potentials and resources. Concerning biographical interviews I became to be especially attentive to what Kathleen Riach terms "sticky moments": participant-induced reflexivity, to present the temporary suspension of conventional dialogues that affects the structure and subsequent production of data (2009: 361). These "sticky moments" where often triggered by questions relating to the participants history of migration or the "embodied nature of the research interaction" where gender and ethnicity was interpreted by participants as "visibly written on the researcher's body in a way that contradicted their expectations or preconceptions concerning the research interaction" (Riach 2009: 361). By example, one of the participants, a Ghanaian woman, doubted if a white, middle class Swiss male could comprehend what exactly it means to be a Ghanaian woman in Switzerland, what it means to give birth or to have to leave children behind when

migrating. When a Thai woman described how painful it was for her to feel to be obliged to have sexual intercourse with her Swiss husband-to-be in her second night in Switzerland, I seriously questioned what it means to be "male" and what I represent as a male member of the "species" in an instance like that. In these moments either my interview partner or I step outside the interview protocol, meaning my question is accompanied by a long silence or one of us is talking over the other. Whilst these moments can be discomforting, they also offer the chance for clarification and resolution.

Hovering over and connected to these issues of research rapport is the possibility of disappointing the expectations of the participants. The "ImmigrAction" project, as has been described, aims to empower migrant women on their path to self-employment, hereby working reciprocal, resource oriented and problem based. The "material" resources of the project are limited in the sense that no start-up financing can be offered and often time that can be shared with individuals is limited as well. One of the participants became increasingly frustrated when she began to realize that our project could provide help and assistance in the form of knowledge but not the sought-after financial resources. Therefore, a constant negotiation of the level of project involvement is necessary to avoid disappointments. I soon became to realize that collaborative efforts do not always work out as planned. As Kirsch states: "[…] factors, such as time constraints, diverging interests, values, and different commitment levels, can all inhibit or restrict the collaborative ideal we hope to achieve" (2005: 2169). It must be kept in mind that these factors operate reciprocal; on the side of the participants as well as the researcher. By developing more realistic expectations together with our participants, by discussing the fine line that separates "friendship from friendliness" (Cotteril 1992: 595), by respectively planning subsequent research steps together, we may be able to reduce the level of disappointment that is possibly caused.

**Conclusion**

As I have tried to show, the social sciences are complicated by the problem of us as researchers attempting to know and understand the social world we inhabit. The definition of our objects of analysis reflect our taken-for-granted assumptions or as Bourdieu would say our "own primary experience of the world" (2000: 286). When, for instance, considering gender and ethnicity within social science as attributes of 'the others' I must "avoid forgetting what I know perfectly well besides, but only in *practical mode,* namely, that they do not all have the project of understanding and explaining which is mine as researcher; and consequently, to avoid putting into their heads, as it were, the problematic that I construct

about them and the theory that I elaborate to answer it" (Bourdieu 2000: 288). I must be aware of the fact, that political values can affect the purpose and character of my research and that my personal experiences are often involved implicitly therein.

Just as my research is enacted situated practice, gender, immigrant status and entrepreneurship can be understood as such. Immigrant women on their path to self-employment are reflective agents choosing appropriate actions within a set of given opportunity structures. To stress this fact, Apitzsch and Kontos (2003) as well as Kupferberg (2003) employ a biographical perspective. On a "micro-level" immigrant self-employment can be explained as a dynamic process related to individual agency from this perspective (Kontos 2003). Individuals have the potential for innovation and going beyond the limited possibilities open to them (Apitzsch 2001). While the women participating in our research project face structural barriers like the non-recognition of cultural capital (diplomas), personal difficulties like limited language skills and scarce economic capital, it should be kept in mind that these women also open up new opportunities for themselves. So far the "ImmigrAction" project has pointed to the fact that these women from different ethno-cultural groups act within different ethno-national frameworks. The reasons for wanting to become self-employed are as manifold as their backgrounds and biographies. The actors on these paths are individuals making decisions. These individuals can be described by demographic characteristics such as gender, marital status, and age; by biographical capitals such as the ability to experience agency within a certain set of structures, by cultural capital components such as level of education, work experience, specific language literacy, cultural knowledge etc., and by social capital such as access to resources, trustworthy networks, as well as relatives and friends ready to support the individual (Hettlage 2007: 20). From the individual level we can move on to the "meso-level", or the "social sphere", where the same individual is part of a community. Her (ethnic or immigrant) community may serve as a supplier of social capital encompassing resources such as economic capital, information and labour resources. Immigrant entrepreneur's social capital is simultaneously a group and individual resource being dependent upon a community's social and financial capital and the size of one's network, as well as by the individual resources of the people within the network.

Moving up to the "macro-level" it must be taken into consideration that all individuals act within a certain set of opportunity structures. Individuals take decisions to engage in self-employment during a certain phase in life. These decisions are influenced by the current prevalent labour market and existing market opportunity structures. These coexist and are interwoven with political and economic institutional frameworks, often regulated by national

laws which may stimulate or hinder entrepreneurial activities of immigrants. National frameworks themselves are influenced by the worldwide neo-liberal market-economy, influencing global flows of migration, commodities and capital. Individual factors like gender interact with all these levels. Individuals act, react to, as well as oppose global, national and local hierarchies of power to develop a certain strategy. As Hettlage puts it, these strategies evolve "within agency and opportunity structures, and relative to the very specific context in which self-employed immigrants find themselves, it can be transnational, ethnic or non-ethnic, family-oriented or individual, cosmopolitan, hybrid or local, innovative or conservative" (2007: 21).

"ImmigrAction" has so far shown me that many factors influence the experiences I as a researcher have in the settings I work in, and on the strategies that I adopt therein. At the end of the day, my sex is only one among many different factors. Through my research experience I also come to the conclusion that it is more productive if we take a broader view of the dynamics involved in qualitative research processes than just "male versus female". Various factors like physical traits such as age, ethnicity, physical capabilities, appearance, sex; psychological ones like temperament, political and other ideological orientations, gender orientations, sexual orientations etc. influence the research we carry out. Additionally external factors like specific personality types of our interviewees, the methods used and the length of time we spend with participants should also be taken into consideration. I would like to close this article with Barbara J. Rismans' appeal "that we cannot study gender in isolation from other inequalities nor only study inequalities' intersection and ignore the historical and contextual specificity that distinguishes the mechanisms that produce inequality by different categorical divisions, whether gender, race, ethnicity, nationality, sexuality, or class" (Risman 2004: 443).

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