

No. 2 (2), June 2018

How researchers are reproducing stigmatization: A plea for more reflexivity within migration research.

Interview with Janine Dahinden

Author:

Dominika Pszczołkowska

Welcome to the second issue of CMR Spotlight, brought to you by an A+ category academic entity (as officially confirmed in early June in the Polish national ranking of academic entities). In this issue, please read a fascinating interview with Janine Dahinden from the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland on an issue all migration scholars should be thinking about.

Many of our team members are preparing for the IMISCOE conference in Barcelona. Please find the list of our presentations on the last page, we hope to see you there.



CENTRE OF
MIGRATION
RESEARCH

How researchers are reproducing stigmatization: A plea for more reflexivity within migration research

Interview with prof. [Janine Dahinden](#) from the University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland

Dominika Pszczółkowska: In your paper published in the [“Journal of Ethnic and Racial Studies”](#) you warn that migration scholars have - on the one hand - been trapped in categories created by states, such as the division between citizens and immigrants, and - on the other hand – are reinforcing these categories. What danger does this bring?

Janine Dahinden, Professor of Transnational Studies, MAPS and NCCR-on the move, University of Neuchâtel, Switzerland: We all know that the nation state is an important political structure today, and it produces a particular logic conducting to a complex system of inclusion and exclusion. If we reproduce these categories and this logic, we as researchers also reproduce particular categories of exclusion, without being conscious of it. This is a problem because we contribute to stigmatization and exclusion. We have a responsibility as researchers not to just reproduce the world view as we find it today.

In public discourse these days we often use national categories of who is a citizen and who is not, but also religious or cultural-religious categories. Are we falling into a new trap of dividing people into Muslims and non-Muslims?

In a way yes. There is this category of Islam, which is not that new, also historically we had this category. What we observe in Western Europe is the Islamisation of migrants, a kind



©Janine Dahinden

of change of categorization from cultural or nationality content to Islam. They are different regimes of categorization and exclusion, but I think they are entangled. It's not just Islam, it's Islam together with nationality, culture, education etc.

It's also true that a lot of migration researchers suddenly started to work on religion, which in practice means Islam. We just took over these normative categories, also because there were some research funds available for working on Islam. This all goes together. The only way we have to deal with these problems is to develop our reflexivity. I am not saying at all we shouldn't do this kind

of research, but we have to be reflexive about these issues when conducting research.

During a seminar we just held at CMR you gave us a fascinating presentation about your latest research on second-generation immigrants marrying spouses from their parents' home country. What have you found? Are we thinking of these marriages in a stereotypical way?

If you look at the discussions that are currently taking place in Switzerland and more broadly in Western European countries, these marriages of somebody who is born in Switzerland, Germany, the UK, but the parents came from a non-EU country, who is marrying somebody from the country of origin of their parents, are often interpreted as a sign of non-integration. These people are seen as patriarchal, problematic, the generalized suspicion is that it might be a forced marriage, it might be an arranged marriage. There is a whole body of normative categories surrounding these marriages. That's why we have been interested in understanding what is going on beyond these essentialized ideas of culture, or ethnicity or integration.

What we found is that in fact these marriages are not primarily about culture or ethnicity. Often we can understand them also as an identity strategy, a strategy to deal with exclusionary discourses in Switzerland, when these people are confronted with discrimination, stigmatization, being made different from the beginning of their life, or at least since they came to school. These cross-border marriages can give these persons a kind of positive identity in the country of origin, in this transnational field.

The marriage can also be a strategy to negotiate issues of gender, or a class strategy,

when they marry somebody from abroad who is well educated. They embed themselves in this discourse that integration is not a problem for those who are well educated, it's only a problem for everybody else.

To be better integrated in Switzerland and progress on the social ladder they marry an educated person from abroad?

Yes, exactly. Also because it would be difficult for them to marry an educated Swiss, for instance. The story is much more complicated than just reducing it to "they want to marry somebody from their own culture; their family wants them to marry there". Obviously we have this, but it's not the whole story, and we want to present the whole story, or at least a more complete, more nuanced story.

And women want to marry men from outside of the country to have a better balance of power in their marriage?

This can be the case, it's one among a lot of different configurations. If she is marrying somebody from abroad and he is coming in, then she obviously is in a situation of power in the couple's relation. She has education, his diplomas might not be recognized, she knows everybody, she has a network, she knows the language, he doesn't, he may have problems integrating into the labour market. This can cause problems in a relationship, not differently than in Swiss couples, but has advantages for her: the family in law is far away, she can negotiate her position better and continue her life the way she wants it. It's a paradox, totally differently presented in public discourse, but this is one configuration which is possible.

To be very short: if we think of these marriages just as a sign of non-integration, of culture, we really miss a lot of social processes going on in our society. Our

societies have to take responsibility for discriminating, exclusionary discourses, because they can push people to go look for recognition somewhere else. We also have some responsibilities and have to think about these issues.

Is the danger of reproducing state or religious categories an obstacle in your research?

Of course, for example we try not to use the term “second generation”, because there you have the entire logic of the nation state. Just by telling people you are second generation you indicate they are somehow different, they are not from here, even if they have Swiss citizenship. But then we also obviously need categories in our research. When I say “I am looking for people born in Switzerland, whom I can interview” I am also using these categories. I think we just need to be reflexive about what effect this can have. Also, I think we really have to distinguish between the way people use these categories, they have every right to use them in a normative way, but as researchers we need to use analytic categories. This is really an important distinction. People use “culture”, “tradition”, all these notions, and they have every right. But as a researcher I cannot just reproduce the discourses of the people I am working with, I have to analyse them. This is our empirical material. I need analytical categories to make sense of why people are all the time talking about “culture”, what they mean when they say “I want to marry somebody with my culture”. What exactly does this implicate? Who is the “other”? This distinction is very important and it’s exactly a conflation of categories of practice, of common sense and analytical categories which is responsible for the fact that we

reproduce these normative political discourses.

Do you think we are able to influence the public discourse as well regarding these categories?

I do think so, yes. It’s always tricky, you want the wider society to recognize what you are doing, to inform them, to produce some research which can be useful for society, which is easier when speaking about generally used categories. But I think we also can bring politicians or other stakeholders to think about these issues of categorization and exclusion. It’s not easy, but in my experience it is possible. One needs to have concrete handy examples to make people understand, but it’s never easy to transmit information to the larger public in this field.

Obviously here in Central Europe, in Poland, we are at a very different stage of the migration cycle. We are just beginning to have significant numbers of immigrants. Regarding the categories and terms we use, how should we researchers speak of this phenomenon to avoid some of the traps that Western Europe discourse has fallen into?

I think you cannot avoid the “trap” as you call it, but you can analyse the issue and develop reflexivity. You can try to understand how Polish society is reproduced by closing the borders to certain categories of persons. What are the discourses? What are the normative categories here in this country? Who are the desired migrants and what does this tell us about Polish society? Who are those which Polish society does not wish? These are things you can analyse.

IMISCOE

15th Annual Conference

2 - 4 July 2018 / Barcelona

**"Europe,
migrations and
the Mediterranean:
human mobilities
and intercultural
challenges"**



Please join us for the following presentations of CMR members at the IMISCOE Annual Conference:

Panel 8: Agata Gorny and Pawel Kaczmarczyk: A temporary solution with structural consequences? Ukrainian workers on the Polish labour market

Panel 14: Anita Brzozowska: Inter-marriage, integration and patterns of socioeconomic mobility: the case of Ukrainian migrants with a native partner in Poland

Panel 51: Magdalena Lesinska: Reactive policies to the needs of citizens abroad: the case of Poland

Panel 69: Izabela Grabowska: Social remittances: Channels of diffusion

Panel 84: Karolina Sobczak-Szelc and Krzysztof Skocki: Environmentally motivated or economical migration – the example of Mhamid (Morocco) and El Faouar (Tunisia) oases

Panel 98: Kamila Fiałkowska, Michał P. Garapich, Elżbieta Mirga-Wotowicz: "Who needs family if you have the money" – kinship and ethnic boundaries impact on migration networks and practices: case study of Roma migrants from Poland to the UK

Panel 119: Marcin Gońda and Karolina Podgórska: In(ter)dependent policies? Expert survey findings on relations between immigration and integration policies in selected EU member states

Panel 133: Justyna Sarnowska, Dominika Winogrodzka and Izabela Grabowska: Peer groups and migration from middle towns in Poland: The social sequences of transitions from education to domestic and foreign labour markets

Suggested citation: Pszczołkowska, Dominika, 2018. How researchers are reproducing stigmatization: A plea for more reflexivity within migration research. Interview with Janine Dahinden. *CMR Spotlight* 2 (2).

Editors of *CMR Spotlight*: Michał Nowosielski, Dominika Pszczołkowska

© 2018 Centre of Migration Research



**CENTRE OF
MIGRATION
RESEARCH**

Pasteura street 7
02-093 Warsaw
Tel/fax +48 22 55 46 770
e-mail: migration.cmr@uw.edu.pl
www.migracje.uw.edu.pl/en/



**ANNIVERSARY
CENTRE OF MIGRATION RESEARCH**

