Object of Research – Methodological and Methodical Implications of Empirical Research on Body Presentations of Young Migrant Women

Even though the human body can only be captured in its social appearance, its allegedly 'natural' materiality seems to function as evidence of social division. Concerning migration, the body plays an important role in the question of cultural, ethnical, and national belonging. In this area, there appears to be a gap between the importance of the body in the interaction of every day life and the research done on 'body and migration' in the social sciences. My research focuses on gaining more information about this topic by analyzing body presentations of subjects placed in the center of bodily ascriptions of supposed belonging and non-belonging: young migrant woman.

In order to grasp the verbal and gestural notions of the body and bodily experiences (connected to migration), I combined biographical interviews on the body with photographic self-portraits of twelve young migrant women. Based on the Grounded Theory methodology, the verbal and visual data was triangulated in a circular process of data collection and analysis. Hence, questions on how and when to combine text and visual data in the research process were of great importance for the empirical work: Based on the concept of symbolic meaning, there are different symbolic modes in text and picture. Therefore different methods for interview- and photo-analysis were used to reconstruct the specific logic of the material. The research conceptualizes the perception, exposure, and presentation of the own body of young migrant women as a 'space of opportunities' in the context of migration. The condition of this space is structured by movements along the dimensions of relevance, hierarchy, and expansion of constructions and deconstructions of the body in terms of cultural belonging.

Keywords: body, migration, visual qualitative research, triangulation