

Gendered Narratives of Migration: Preferred Criminals and Victims, Dehumanized Masses and Calls for Equality

This talk traces preferred models for representing refugees in Germany, particularly since 1 January 2016, after the so-called “Ereignis in Köln” (the event in Cologne). I argue that images of *Flüchtlingsfrauen* (refugee women) tend to depict them as in isolation from other people. They are represented as mothers, who are burdened by carrying infants, and as Muslims: they are typically shown wearing head scarves. These positively connoted images, similar to those of children, work to reify the status of the depicted persons as victims who are in need of succor. Negatively connoted images of refugee men, by contrast, depict them as criminally disposed, due either to their hyper-masculinity and inclination to acts of sexual violence or to their predisposition to committing terrorist acts. Alternatively, refugee men (and less often women) are represented as masses or waves of undifferentiated bodies, who are waiting to swarm or wash across the borders of Germany and Europe.

Less common images of refugees and immigrants depict them as holders of Human Rights, who have legitimate claims to recognition, equality, and legal address. Through an exact analysis of the forms that these images take and the functions they have, my effort shall be to name and confront the cultural and ideological work that dominant images of migration do.