Self-defence IT – Migrant Women and ICTs Strategies

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ABSTRACT

Information- and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are central in everyday life in (post-) industrial societies. However, the conditions of their availability and the practicalities relating to their use vary greatly: ICTs users focus on different social issues using "new media" and (re)produce power dynamics in different ways. From this perspective, ICTs are systems with complex inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms that run along intersections of class, gender, race, age etc.

The paper analyses the results of the research project *Self-defence IT*. *Self-defence IT* is an action research project initiated by the migrant women organisation *maiz*. Therein, women with migration biographies formulate a series of concerns in relation to ICTs that are relevant for both private and public spheres. It shows that the experience of migration changes and influences the way ICTs are used. Depending on context, ICTs may function as instruments to transcend national and social boundaries, as a platform for social control or as an opportunity for mobility in training and work.

Author Keywords

Transnational migrant women, Action Research, ICTs, anti-racism.

INTRODUCTION

Information- and Communications Technologies (ICTs) are taking on a central role in everyday life in (post-) industrial societies. The introduction of ICTs in everyday life has been accompanied by contradictory expectations. However, away from the euphoria around the progress and social meaning of ICTs, it becomes clear that the conditions of their availability and the practicalities relating to their use vary strongly. Therefore, participants focus on different social issues using ICTs, and also (re)produce power dynamics in different ways: ICTs involve in the re-organisation of the social, political and economic life both in private and in public space.

From this perspective, technologies are information systems with complex inclusionary and exclusionary mechanisms that run along intersections of class, gender, race, age etc. The research initiative Self-defence IT (SDIT) arose as a result of conversations with migrant women in the context of counselling services in Linz, Austria.[1] SDIT deals with the needs, objectives and everyday experience of migrant women in relation to the use of digital media. Theoretically an methodologically, the project is based in action research [1, 2]. Reflections on the concept of knowledge having its "own location" has been a core perspective of the project. In this, Ruth de Souza [3] agrees with Stuart Hall [4]: The particular location of speech as well as the author's experiences and culture of writing are relevant for the research process. In this case, research is localised at *maiz*, a migrant women's organisation "for and by migrant women" in Linz (Upper-Austria). Different biographies of women – primarily migrants themselves – influence the research concept. Within the context of the self- organisation of migrant women, the research focuses on the structures and social boundaries that co-determine the formulation of research questions, methodological decisions and the project's theoretical perspectives. Thus, the project incorporates aspects such as the way migration and migrant women are dealt with in Austria, the geopolitical location and the significance of ICTs.

By combining these aspects and insights, SDIT not only offers a dialogical approach in taking migrant women seriously as experts of their own experiences and aspirations, it also understands these experiences and aspirations as situated knowledge produced in a certain time at a specific geopolitical location. Moreover, SDIT consists in taking this insight in the co-construction of ICTs, globally entangled geopolitical localities and personal insight of the research participants as transnational migrants within transnational gender relations one step further and facilitating processes of self-empowerment and change in regard to fighting (structural) racism.

Processes of generating research questions and overview of the outcomes

Intensive group discussions were conducted regarding interaction with ICTs and the processes related to. In the run-up to the beginning of the project, two themes in particular emerged as being relevant to *maiz* clients: Firstly,

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[1] Self-defence IT was carried out from February 2011 to January 2013 in cooperation with an international research team with a total of twelve academic and local activist organisations in five European countries. See also www.self-defenceIT.eu

migrant women's ICTs skills should be supported; and secondly, that the scope for action should be presented in relation to supporting children and adolescents using ICTs responsibly. We focused on these questions in the first phase of the project. In the course of the second phase, we reacted to new questions that arose during workshops and further conversations. The project team undertook the implementation of the initial results through specific services – in the form of learning programs, workshops and counselling services.

During the second phase, participation in the services offered was open to all *maiz* clients regardless of whether they were mothers or women with childcare responsibilities. The catalyst for the change in target group was, on the one hand, the fact that the participants were not exclusively mothers, or they were not all bringing up children. On the other hand, supporting children and young people was no longer the primary focus, even for those women who did have children. One result was that the objectives of SDIT were formulated more broadly in the second phase. Transmitting ICTs skills from a critical perspective remained a focus. A further objective was to encourage processes that bolstered participants' self- confidence, and to demonstrate strategies for self- actualisation. Most of all, however, the primary focus was on the interface between ICTs and experiences of racism/sexism/homophobia. As will be elaborated on later, the participants and the research team developed in this context strategies to counteract racism in the context of ICTs as well as strategies to pursue aspirations for career and personal development, social and political concerns with regard to ICTs.

During the research process it became clear, that migrant women have extensive knowledge on the one hand, about their position within the community and society in general and on the other hand about ICTs. Their everyday activities differ according to environment, education, job or legal status. *maiz*-Participants use ICTs to maintain transnational contacts, to educate themselves or to deal with a range of everyday matters. Austria's geopolitical location has an influence on this: In comparison to other European countries, Austria has a very high rate of distribution and usage of ICTs in the home [5] and in public. However, the women's legal, economic and time-based resources restricted the field of activity around ICTs in everyday life. For this reason, the migrant women have formulated a series of concerns in order to obtain support in these areas. Together with technical assistance, one factor in high demand is that *maiz* supports migrant women with "cartography of the relevant", organising existing knowledge in order to recognise collective opportunities for action. At the same time, central concerns include gauging opportunities for participation, and developing strategies and "guerrilla tactics" against racist and patriarchal force.

The use of ICTs is regulated by immigration authorities [6]. Ways dealing with racism was an important topic for the participants. In this context, discussion touched on the necessity to take initiative and to deal with it in an assertive manner. It is a subject that demands not only knowledge, but also strategies. Therefore, it is important to discuss the results in this geopolitical context, and investigate the way in which structural racism influences interaction with ICTs. The responsibility of *maiz* as an organisation, then, was not only to deliver information, but also to contextualise this information, to legitimize it and to make it relevant.

This paper is structured into two main sections. First, we present the analysis of the theoretical considerations, methods and previous research findings on which SDIT relies, especially the approach of action research, transnationalism and the co-construction of gender relations and ICT. Connecting these three approaches in this paper shows the relevance of SDIT as an action research project with migrant women in Austria leading beyond policies of enhancing women's participation in ICTs so far. Second, we present and discuss part of the empirical results of our recently completed research project. By doing so, we focus on discussions about (anti-)racism in particular. Responding thereby to the topics the participants of the project brought in as the main obstacles for social participation with ICTs in their country of residence. Finally, we draw some first conclusions and point out a few questions for further research and strategic intervention. The ambivalence of ICTs in being part of both changing and reproducing power relations was one of the main findings. It has to undergo further analysis. Our conclusions are based on the perspective of *maiz*: How can participants be supported and how did SDIT changed or influenced collective goals in *maiz*?

THEORETICAL CONSIDERATIONS

SDIT was an action research project. The concept of *maiz* itself in both political and social terms was significant both in relation to the research as well as for the approach to the field. A research concept was required that combined collective practice, theory and methodology: "Action research aims to bring together theory, method, and practice as people work collaboratively towards practical outcomes and new forms of understanding. At its core, action research is about challenging and unsettling entrenched and sometimes invisible power arrangements and mechanisms that are enacted in everyday relationships, organizational and economic structures, cultural and institutional practices, large and small."[7 cf. 1: p: 13]

Further, Morten Levin [8] describes action research as the connection between action and reflection. In this he perceives – following Charles Wright Mills [9] – a difference to conventional social science practices: "Action has to be followed by reflection, as reflection has to be accompanied by action […] This dual perspective (action and reflection) distinguishes AR [action research] from

most conventional social science practices. These conformist social science practices are often rightly accused of engaging in disconnected empiricist work that lacks a relevant grounding in deep and genuine understanding of social relations in the field." [8: p. 133f.]

Action research is not only about researching a field, but also about implementing the results, in the form of interventions and concrete practical measures, which in turn provide a basis for further scientific reflection. In the SDIT research project, for example, the workshops and learning programs were adapted for the second phase, since the participants no longer focused on parenting or supervising children and youth in their interactions with ICTs. Instead, the questions we dealt with more intensively concerned media violence, structural as well as everyday racism, and the participants' transnational connections.

The significance of ICTs for creating and maintaining transnational connections – family relationships and friendships – was an important issue for participants in the first as well as the second project phase. Therefore, in the next section of this paper, we go into more detail about our approach to transnationalism before we explain more deeply in the following section how the existing research in gender and ICTs relates to studying the experience of migrant women with ICTs.

Transnationalism
The experience of migration influences the way that migrant women interact with ICTs. The significance of
ICTs in everyday life is particularly visible in relation to maintaining transnational networks. It is important to note in this context, that resent research has emphasized, that in many cases, migration is (no longer) a one-way route which implies the complete rupture with the social ties to the place of origin. Instead, migrant women in particular, with the help of ICTs, maintain important social relations and connections to their place of origin. Linda Basch and Nina Glick Schiller [10] define transmigrants as migrants "[…] whose daily lives depend on multiple and constant interconnections across international borders and whose public identities are configured in relationship to more than one nation-state" [10: p. 48]. Accordingly, transnationalism is the "process by which transmigrants, through their daily activities, forge and sustain multi-stranded social, economic and political relations that link together their societies of origin and settlement, and through which they create transnational social fields that cross national borders" [11: p. 6].

Migrant women often actively and intensively implement a transnational approach in their everyday lives. Private as well as public communication – for example, using satellite programs – makes transnational processes visible. Experiences and actions are now increasingly carried out using ICTs, whilst the frequency of face-to-face interactions has declined in comparison. Strangely, the ever-present nature of media in discussions of transnationalism and

globalisation leads simultaneously to a marginalisation of their analysis. Rather than regarding media as the initiating power for the emergence of transnational spaces and fields, Glick Schiller and Basch point out that, although the media influences migrant women's areas of social power, it in no way produces them by itself. [10: p. 51f.] ICTs enable and simplify connections regardless of distance. For this reason, they represent the core of transnationalism and the establishment of sustainable trans-border connections. One consequence may be that citizenship rituals, rights and lack of rights, racism and discrimination lead to a questioning of both essentialist approaches and the status quo. Through transgressing borders, migrant women discover the fragility of national, gendered and cultural identities in a variety of ways. Because of this, they can fundamentally question their normative appeals [12: p. 31].

The transnational approach, with its euphoric view of social movements, is accused of neglecting to consider migrant women's social framework as well as their concrete living conditions: "For the rest, real people give way to flows, images and virtual connections, agency to the intersection of 'things' and 'desires'" [13: p. 391]. Accordingly, analytical interventions are sought that regard participants in the context of economic globalisation: "Capitalism, they say, is everywhere breaking through the boundaries of states and localities to create a global economy and therefore a global society." [14] Michael Mann criticises this argument, establishing that "globalisation does not sweep away national, regional or other local differences, but it partially operates through them." [14 cf. 13: p. 391] Transnational use of ICTs does not mean per se that it will have subversive consequences for our understanding of society.

Collective actions and processes like SDIT are more likely to frame transnational experiences with ICTs in order to counteract the neoliberal governance of the private and of the public. SDIT has been an effort to reflect on the interweavedness of transnational citizenships [15] located both in the global conditions of capitalism and neoliberalism and in the specific realities of the participating women. Situated knowledge [16] in this context rather means that the specific transnational and gendered situatedness of the participants and the situation in which the action research has taken place leads to a collective production of knowledge that is not hegemonial and that often contradicts dominant discourses.This corresponds with the meaning of social   cosmopolitanism ("gesellschaftlicherKosmopolitanismus"), which Elisabeth Conradi[17] develops in discussion of different theories of cosmopolitanism, in order to understand the relevance of collective political action by groups of the civil society .

Gender, Migrant women and ICTs
Migrant women use ICTs independently. They supplement their often sparse networks in their place of residence with global networks. ICTs enable women who are not part of

financial elites – women from social classes who do not respond to the demands of a cosmopolitan way of life in the traditional sense – to maintain relationships in various countries. Cosmopolitanism in Conradi's sense is defined in relation to successful collective political action and therefore relying on the enabling effects of community building and organising of, in our case, individual migrant women. On this way, ICTs may become a means in the support of a global democratic society where transnational actors can participate and overcome obstacles as sexism, racism and classism. In the context of intensive use of ICTs, participants are drawn to a variety of technological formats, through inexpensive offers and the selection of ICTs available: "Studies of migrant workers in different parts of the world indicate that they employ a wide range of ICT devices and services in their communications, whether local or transnational, with different ICTs dominant for particular regions or communities. […]This ability to avail of different communication services can be gratifying and empowering for migrant workers." [18] On the other hand, transnational use of ICTs may be limited if the services available are not suited to the needs of migrant women in terms of price. Minu Thomas and Sun Sun Lim refer in this context to the "technological divide between the home and host countries of migrant workers mean that communication is not always seamless and problem- free."[18]

Numerous studies [19-23] have shown just how intensively migrant women use ICTs. "Are migrant women then the protagonists of cyberfeminism, the heroines of Information and Communications Technologies (ICT)?" Waltraud Ernst [24]asks whether this position is justified, or whether it is, rather, a "cyberfeminist vision"[25]. Ernst also points out that the borders between public and private are altered: "Cyberspace offers not only the chance to think femaleness in a mobile manner, but also offers mobile women the opportunity to experience (and/or live) a common area and a more or less private space." [24] On the level of globalization of political activities and community building, the pioneer of feminist technology studies Judy Wajcman[26] sees a great advantage of ICTs: "Cyberspace makes it possible for even small or poorly resourced nongovernmental organizations to connect with each other and engage in global social efforts. These political activities are an enormous advance for women who were formerly isolated from larger public spheres and crossnational social initiatives." [26: p. 94]Following Wajcman, ICTs offer opportunities with enabling effects for the political participation of women, either connecting them beyond borders or serving as a means to stay connected in migration processes, at least in principle. In the SDIT research project, the perspective from public and the private spheres nevertheless – or perhaps further – indicates how mechanisms of exclusion function and which strategies counteract them. The working environment of migrant women often makes visible structural racism: There were

frequent reports from participants that they were – if they were granted a work permit at all – urged by the Public Employment Service (AMS) into care jobs although they had worked for a long time in positions closely related to ICTs. In the private sphere, or "private space" [24], however, the overwhelming majority of participants use ICTs intensively. Although there were no women participating in our group whose children live in their country of origin, using ICTs to intensify the private sphere was an important part of everyday life.

The role of ICTs in transnational families, however, represents an important part of the research, with a particular focus on the parent-child relationship. Many results nevertheless focus on the broad palette of different ICTs, and the targeted way in which they can be implemented for particular situations.

Email helped to improve the quality and quantity of communication while cheap and instantaneous communication via phone, fax and email enabled them to participate in their family members' lives. The study also found that while ICTs help to mediate a sense of togetherness, it paradoxically intensified the feeling of distance because the intimacy of long-distance contact made the lack of face-to-face contact even more palpable.
[20 cf. 17]

During this process, differences between fathers and mothers appeared in their use of ICTs and in text content. RhacelParrenas[27] reports that mothers use ICTs with the objective of creating more intimacy between themselves and their children. Fathers, however, used communication more for instruction. Gender differences in the use of ICTs more generally represent a comprehensive research area. But a recent comprehensive study shows, that there is a problematic focus on gender differences in ICTs in many studies [28]. Following Sørensen, Faulkner and Rommes, much of the work on gender in ICTs since the 1980s reinforces gender stereotypes by applying a notion of gender narrowed down to a normative binary. In an attempt to overcome this, the authors thrive to understand gender as a structural social category which produces a variety of gender norms, gender identities and gendered practices and results in diverse gendered exclusions from information and communication technologies. They ask if interactive websites targeted at women have an impact on the co-construction of gender and ICTs. They draw on empirical analyses of two non-commercial websites of volunteer sector initiatives from 1996 and four commercial websites in the private sector, launched between 1998 and 2001. The results of this European study for more equal rights in the development and use of ICTs are unambiguous: It became clear that websites by no means have to feature content and designs oriented towards feminine stereotypes to be attractive to women on a massive scale. Rather, the relevance of the content is the decisive factor for special interest groups. Moreover, seen through the co-production

framework, interactive features and processes changed gender and technology in terms of increasing numbers of technologically competent women and increasing the number of features of interactive internet frameworks which led to a change in discussion culture on the Internet.

Drawing on this analysis of gendered interaction with ICTs and their analysis, Ernst suggests not to focus on contrasting migrant women and non-migrant women in the research frame: "It's not a matter of positioning migrant women as being particularly needy or discriminated against in relation to Information and Communications Technologies, and so to subject them again to processes of 'othering'. It seems, however, to be just as problematic to anoint migrant women as the new heroes of cyberspace. Rather, it seems appropriate not to recognise migrant women as a homogenous group, but as a diverse group of fellow citizens with equal rights, to allow them – with their specific expertise and requirements – to speak, and to value them." [29: p. 16]

The dilemma in this situation is that there is a social script for what a migrant woman "is" or "should be" and that every activity involving migrant women is open to the accusation of "othering". This social script is the social response to criticism relating to how to deal with social groups and women: The economic and political system includes these identities but allocates them particular places in order to maintain the status quo and retain control over them. The role allocation in this social script is not fixed, but offers different positions: from the particularly needy woman to the threatening foreigner. Migrant women rarely occupy the role of the "heroine" in the media, for example. For this reason, "migrant woman" is a political concept and not an essentialist one. [30] This is why the self-organisation of migrant women is so significant for the struggles of migration. What brings these women together is not the homogeneity of the group, but (political) concerns. Work within *maiz* rests on this assumption, to develop collective negotiation, critical perspectives and shared strategies.

METHODOLOGICAL APPROACH

At the beginning the methodological objective was to understand the processes at work between social agents, ICTs and social structures. Therefore, the first phase of SDIT started with group interviews. Group interviews offer a way to collectively communicate and exchange experiences, opinions and practices. Statements about individual discussion participants are only possible to a limited extent, as their everyday experience and environment do not actively belong in the research process, in contrast, for example, to participatory observation. At the same time, group dynamics influence the content of the discussion.

At the beginning of the project we invited in particular those migrant women to participate who addressed ICTs-issues during the counselling services of *maiz*. Three group interviews with 15 participants in total were carried out: In two of them, only migrant women took part. In the third group interview, adolescents with a migrant experience or migrant background were invited. The inclusion of migrant adolescents in the research concept was important to us: The adolescents' perspectives were contrasted and associated with the discussions of the adults. The process of interpretation included the hermeneutical sociology of knowledge as well as Grounded Theory. The interpretation of the transcribed interviews took place in groups. Participants included project staff from the Daphne Project as well as experts from relevant fields. In the context of the interpretation, the discussion returned repeatedly to the role of the person interpreting. We tried to reflect on the social location of the interpreters and to incorporate the questions asked into the analysis: "The interpreter, the interpretation, and the objects of interpretation are embedded in milieus, history, and communities of interpretation. Thus analysis should take into account, and reconstruct, the symbolic 'whole' of human forms of action, orientation, and knowledge."[31: p. 10]

During the second phase of the project we registered 50 participations for the various workshops and learning programs in total. Many participants took advantage of multiple courses, some only attended one. The actions of SDIT such as workshops and learning programs were integrated into the German courses, that *maiz* offers since many years.

The second phase of the project did not differ from the first in terms of its fundamental methodological understanding. The second phase, as an intervention, implementation and evaluation phase, demanded a combination of methodical tools and practice in order to a) conduct activities and b) to be able to reflect on these activities. On one hand, the activities that we conducted were conceived as learning spaces. We tried to put into practice the theoretical knowledge from the first phase. In order to do this, we developed workshops, learning programs (tools) and advisory services. On the other hand, during many interventions, we implemented participatory observation as the overarching social science methodology in order to supply text for reflection after the activities. In parallel, there was also a series of written products (cards, evaluations, responses etc.), along with the video produced together with *maiz* participants, which also flowed into the analysis. As a further result *maiz* established counselling services in the area of ICTs.

The framework curriculum of the SDIT workshop series included the following implicit aspects:

- Power relations/empowerment strategies: Workshops/tools provided space to highlight and address power dynamics in order to facilitate the development of empowerment strategies.

- Relevance: Workshops/tools provided space to facilitate migrant women's active participation in this project and thus generate relevance.

- Collective processes: Workshops/tools provided space to organise existing knowledge in order to recognise collective opportunities for action.

- To promote the creative and participatory potential of ICTs, their value as entertainment and for playful interaction. (i.e. the "fun-factor")

In addition to the above-mentioned implicit aspects – and hence goals – of the workshop series, the following objectives were also pursued:

- To provide space and to facilitate raising awareness of already-existing strategies among the participants

- To provide space and to facilitate the strengthening of the participants' self-confidence in dealing with ICTs

- To encourage participants to take a critical look at ICTs

- To prepare the appropriate material and documents in a form and language corresponding to the needs of the participants

- To make materials and documents available and accessible for further use

Implementing ideas and positions from part one led the project to a "pedagogical" phase. Concepts for the learning programs and workshops are oriented towards the theoretical framework and practice of critical pedagogy. [32, 33]

STRATEGIES, (ANTIR)RACISM AND ICTs

In this chapter we focus on the core category of racism as emerged mainly in the actions and feedbacks during the workshop series in the second phase of the project. The subject of (structural) racism was repeated in the discussions. "They don't want us here." Which strategies are possible here? Where can ICTs be used? During the course of the workshops and learning programs, participants discussed and exchanged knowledge and experiences as well as different strategies and positions in dealing with racism. In the workshops, it was easy to recognise that extensive reflection about racism had taken place. As a result, the migrant women had not only experiential knowledge, but they were also involved in theory work about the structures of racism. After comments like "Racism is stronger in Austria and Germany because they are post-Nazi societies" discussions emerged in order

to locate racism not only in economic globalization processes but also in the historic continuities of our location. Their "place in the community" has been a category that the participants already dealt with in everyday life. Together, both trainers and participants, not only discussed individual strategies in dealing with racism, but they also discussed the significance of groups – "not being alone" was referred to here on numerous occasions. Discussions were often very intense and emotional. Links between sexism and racism also formed part of the exchanges, along with the discrimination against various social groups – not only migrant women.

During the forum theatre workshop, plays engaged intensively with forms of everyday racism, which related to the use of ICTs. Four women played a scene where the situation was represented in which a migrant woman and her children were treated condescendingly by an Austrian neighbour because of their use of private computers. It became clear from further participants' reactions that this scene – being rebuked by members of a majority group – represented a variety of own experiences. In this representation, the existence of class interests was highlighted, which use engagement with ICTs to allocate people to classes and categories. In the representation of the situation, the condescending actions ("Our children are doing better. They go to the mountains and to concerts and aren't always playing on the computer") are countered with an invitation for the neighbour to show the "migrant woman" exactly how it should be done. No or few emotions were invested in this staged racist encounter – rather, an invitation was extended to take on responsibility, to get actively involved rather than just to devalue. During the discussion contradictory positions regarding the content and outcomes of this strategy emerged. However, the play demonstrated how the use of ICTs in the context of migration is used as vehicle for dominant discourses of social "whiteness" and superiority.

In contrast, strategies of insulting racism have been discussed in depth because of their intense energy and emotional investment. A number of strategies was presented for discussion. In this case ICTs have been approached because of the number of possibilities they offer to counteract racist encounters either in cyberspace or in everyday life. According to the discussions during the workshops, "insults" do not have to be made in German, but can also occur in another or the first language of the participant. This also allows concerns relating to the written form to be overcome. This tactic we adopted for designing at first a photo story against racism and further a mobile video based on the photo story.

The participants designed the photo story as an anti-racism intervention. The starting point was participants' stories about racist conditions in a meat processing plant in Upper Austria. Migrant women who had worked there repeatedly described their experiences with this employer. For this

reason, an e-action was considered to create more publicity for the conditions there. The objective was to warn other migrant women. The script envisaged that a hacker would gain access to the website of the business. The hacker should be particularly active on the page where the business is presented as a fair employer and invites applications. Through the interventions, the link to applications should lead to a forum where active and former employees describe the conditions there. This action was conceived as a blueprint for collective anti-racist work. Further action was carried out in the form of a mobile video with the help of an artist. The group set down ideas, strategies and suggestions in writing after the discussion about racism and ICTs, and filmed them for the video production. The video production took into account the desire of the participants to remain anonymous.

Besides the broad interest of the participants in implementing the own ideas and experiences in media formats the strategy of insulting racism was objected to on the grounds that it is a negative strategy, which takes away a lot of energy. The desire for more constructive dialogue with other nationalities was expressed in this context. Resignation also became apparent: "It feels good (to defend myself against racism), but it doesn't change anything."

Fighting racism through the media or ICTs represents an important but complex strategy for the participating women. The desire was expressed to bring one's own vision and perspective into the media and to represent oneself positively on the Internet. Media expertise was required in order to represent oneself competently. At the same time, however, the diffuse nature of the media – who is my audience, what will be the effect of my text, what can happen to me after a critical publication – was regarded as a problem for carrying out individual actions. The power dynamic in the realm of the ICTs contents is so unequal that concerns are justified about what could constitute meaningful actions that do not harm individuals. From this, we can read a need to be supported, or to delegate media campaigns and their coordination to organisations that have built up resources and expertise in this area.

A completely different strategy in engaging with ICTs and structural racism was discussed in the context of the learning programs. One participant explained that she didn't have an email account or a computer. The reason for this was not that she would not have enough knowledge and skill in relation to ICTs. Rather, it was her strategy for not coming into conflict with Austrian asylum law. The participant in question explained that she had been illegally separated from her husband. Despite being on hunger strike in detention, he was deported after one month in jail. Although she is also an asylum seeker, the authorities categorised her marriage as a sham marriage entered into so that her husband could seek asylum. The authorities could simply not believe that a woman with her nationality could be married to someone from the region from which her

husband came. At the time of the learning program, they had been separated for more than a year. They had made contact over the phone and using public computers and Internet hotspots. The participant was in the process of fighting so that her mother would not also be deported. Her trust in the authorities and in her rights had become so limited that she had organised her life accordingly.

Further participants reported also that asylum seekers must justify how they can finance a computer. The authorities regard gifts suspiciously. Only asylum seekers whose husbands had received positive asylum decisions and through this Austrian citizenship could justify their media ownership to authorities without any problem. In light of efforts to introduce data retention in Austria, asylum seekers regard ICTs as a further way for immigration police to monitor their private lives. For these reasons, the decision to own neither a computer nor an email account is a strategy for dealing with structural racism. SDIT has reacted to this and offers free Internet access in the city. Resistance to surveillance of migrant women through ICTs is, however, an important topic for the future. But as implemented in the mobile video: "Us migrant women, we're like cats. We stand on four legs and resist."

In this regard, elaborating strategies to resist racism, the participants of the project raised issues of simplification. An important discussion arises out of the position that taking action against racism means taking action against "Austria". Reporting about racism in the countries of origin during the workshops has contributed to an understanding of racism as a distribution problem rather than a "national characteristic" and stereotype. Dealing with one's own racisms appeared to be an important step towards formulating anti-racist positions in Austria and carrying out anti-racist actions. In this way the action research project developed processes of self-reflection and self-positioning that went far beyond simplified victimisation but enabled the participants and research team to develop a complex picture of how migrant women can make use of ICTs in order to defend themselves and their families against racism and to participate more fully as active citizens in both their new and their departed place of residence.

CONCLUSION

The research project SDIT used the methodological and theoretical framework of action research in order to deal with transnationalism and gender research in ICTs. The empirical research was pursued with participants of *maiz*, the autonomous centre of migrant women in Linz, Upper Austria. Women with migration biographies formulated a series of concerns in relation to ICTs that are relevant for both private and public spheres. One of the main results is that the experience of migration changes and influences the way ICTs are used. Depending on context, ICTs may function as instruments to transcend national and social boundaries, as a platform for social control or resistance, or as an opportunity for mobility in training and work.

Access to ICTs has either changed or reproduced power relations and hierarchies in the relationships of *maiz* participants. However, they experience little support in their attempts to keep up with developments in the branch: ICTs plays a secondary role in their work environment. Most of the participating women have to deal with vocational disqualification through the state and the social conditions. They know a lot about ICTs and get involved with it, even if they themselves do not use all of the technological opportunities available, either because they cannot use all the functions, because they do not have enough free time or because the written form of ICTs represents a challenge.

What are the conclusions for a migrant self organisation like *maiz*? In relation to improving living standards through ICTs, it is not only skills that are sought-after, but also social practices and a cartography of the relevant. What are the tools, what are the concepts that the women want to acquire and adopt? The social practices apply to a series of factors that can limit the freedom of migrant women on the Internet. When the issue is "fear" – sexism, racism, risks related to legal status in Austria – there is often no explicit way to overcome them other than acting as a collective. Alternative strategies for action that are relevant for migrant women living here are in demand. In the discussions, a series of social practices were made explicit and were reflected upon together. The strategies used by the migrant women to deal with economic pressures, racism, legal force, patriarchal structures etc. flowed into the accounts.

For *maiz*, the next step in this process is to continue in a new context. How can collectivization processes be demonstrated and used? How do ICTs affect existing power relations? The workshops led to lively discussions between the participating women about strategies and tactics. At the same time, discussing was often about reassurance that the women are "not alone". Implementing collectivism in practice and through campaigns was a significant part of the work for this project. It will also be an important strategy for further discussions in this field.

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