

## **– Departmental Colloquium – Summer Semester 2021 – “Refugees: Constructions of displacement, loss and healing”**



**The Department of Social and Cultural Anthropology  
of the Westfälische Wilhelms-Universität  
is glad to welcome**

**Karim Zafer (University of Cologne)**

**Wednesday, June 23th 2021, 4-6 p.m.**

Unaccompanied minor and youth refugees making a family and a future

In this presentation I give some insights from my dissertation project. Over a period of almost five years, I have been working and following several unaccompanied minor and refugee youth in their daily life in Germany. During this period, two main concerns for them were and still are impacting and shaping their lives and trajectories, namely their family and their future.

Consequently, three research questions are guiding the research. Firstly, what are their experiences and perspectives of changing family structures? Secondly, what are their strategies to overcome the absence of their natal family left behind?

Thirdly, what are their dreams and plans for the future and how these are influenced and shaped by circumstances? By examining both topics, family and future, the whole research project could be conceptualized under the rubric of the agency and structure dichotomy. Their experiences and the analysis, however, come to solidify Samuli Schielke's (2020) quest for not focusing on structure and agency as opposites but instead seeing them as working together to produce a meaningful account of their lives. By following this view, I have tried in the analysis to avoid fetishizing the many structural constraints unaccompanied minor and refugee youth may face and showing them mainly as vulnerable victims. Additionally, I have also tried to avoid romanticizing their agency and consequently minimizing the effects of the many structures. Indeed, for the research participants, this also applies for non-refugees by the way, one acts in a world that is not fully of one's own making.

Life, including family relations and making a future, is rather constructed through action, in a back-and-forth process between actors and their environments (Pelican & Heiss 2014) and/or structures.

The Departmental Colloquium Series will take place online. Information about online access will be announced in due course.

**Everybody is welcome!**