



– Institute’s Colloquium –

Dr. Uroš Kovač
(Universität zu Köln)

**The Precarity of Masculinity: Football, Pentecostalism,
and Transnational Aspirations in Cameroon**

For young men in Cameroon, the future is uncertain. The 1980s economic crisis hampered young people’s transition to adulthood and subsequent neoliberal structural adjustment programs failed to reboot the economy. In the 1990s, the commercialization of global football and the expansion of the global market for football players seemed to offer young men the hope of not only achieving adulthood but doing so in style – by migrating abroad, playing the beautiful game, and enjoying the superstar status that comes with it. Yet flashy football “careers” are elusive, even unlikely, and new forms of uncertainty have emerged. Many footballers turn to Pentecostal Christian churches and Men of God for advice on dealing with the “cruel optimism” that transnational professional football produces and feeds on.

This talk focuses on young Cameroonian men in precarious conditions who increasingly harbor anxieties of becoming “useless” in the eyes of their kin, anxieties that are not exclusive to Cameroon but are commonplace throughout the Global South. Their aspirations to migrate abroad and play football for a living are central to the analysis of masculinities in post-structural-adjustment West Africa. Moreover, the athletic aspirations of young Cameroonians and their propensity to consult with Pentecostal Men of God offer new insights about the nature of social mobility in the neoliberal age. The intersection of football aspirations and Pentecostalism suggests that the areas of life grounded in neoliberalism rely on the production of magical possibilities of extraordinary success, but also on the faith that self-discipline, focus, and moral decency will bring social mobility, despite unlikely odds. The trouble is that this might be a leap of faith few are able to survive.

Wednesday, May 22nd 2019
4-6 p.m.
Institute of Ethnology
Stuttstraße 21, Raum STU 105 (2.10)

Everybody is welcome!