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# BEYOND VICTIMHOOD AND STIGMATIZATION

Trauma, Ruptured Memories and Agency  
in the Context of Global Migration

## Producing/ dealing with Victimhood in the Field of Refugees-Support-Work

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### Subject / Abstract

In my PhD research project titled *New boom of refugees support work. Between Welcome Culture and Refugees Welcome. An ethnographic and genealogical investigation.* I investigate the shifts in the power / knowledge constellations around the concepts of Welcome Culture and Refugees Welcome in Germany with a critical view on racism.

In this workshop I am going to use an example from my field diary to address how refugees with their flight experiences are not staged as active actors, but rather as victims and objects of compassion. Using this specific example from the field, I would like to show how various actors, such as activists, supporters, Refugees and myself as a researcher, dealt with the topic of depicting the flight history of Refugees in the city center. On the one hand I am going to show how the white-German 'helpers' with their 'helpfulness' in the self-image (consciously or unconsciously) construct themselves as complete and without fundamental deficiencies while viewing Refugees as helpless, needy and weak victims. On the other hand I am going to show how the refugees cope and react within this framing and how this situation affects me in my role as a female researcher of colour.

### Theoretical approach

In the analysis of self- and external images of white-German actors \* (both with leftist as well as with apolitical self-conceptions) in the context of their own auxiliary activities, I refer to theories about critical whiteness in connection with a postcolonial perspective. In relation to this workshop I address victimhood in connection with Orientalism and Eurocentrism (cf. Said and Chakrabarty) in order to investigate to what extent the 'helpers' with their 'helpfulness' construct themselves (consciously or unconsciously) as complete and without fundamental defects while they see asylum seekers as helpless, needy and weak "others".



### (Research) Questions with regard to migration

- Which othering processes are taking place in the field of refugees support work after the summer 2015?
- (How) do these othering processes change / develop in a power-structured field with different actors and corpuses of knowledge?

### Methods

I conducted two years of field research and participatory observation. To better understand mechanisms and concerns I had become a very active member of a welcome initiative and have taken much responsibilities. The openness of this method very often surprised me with insights and enabled me to reflect on some prejudices as well as my role as a researcher. I did many narrative interviews with activists (with or without flight experience) and volunteers (with or without flight experience).

### Motivation

This Workshop gives me the opportunity to present a part of one chapter in my dissertation and receive feedback on my concept of post-colonial Focus against the background of empirical research and ethnography.

Additionally, the lectures will be helpful to better understand and use the current discourse around the concept of victimhood in critical migration studies, to get feedback, learn new topical issues and hopefully be able to contribute bringing in my own experiences and perspectives.

### Observations

In my field, I have understood that the white German volunteers want to 'help' due to integration of the refugees. This one-sided desire of white German volunteers often is the basis of their 'help' offers. It is not based on the desires of refugees themselves. Parts of their 'help' are legal advice, medical consultations, offers of translation and more. While all these activities are necessary because of institutional racism they bring Germans in a position of power over the helpless 'others'. I observed how the white-German volunteers put themselves into 'helper' roles where an othering process and a colonial identity is reinforced by everyday and by institutional racism. But as a group member I also made a development, showing me how to change the situation and create inclusion instead of pursuing integration.



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### Bio

Khorshid Khodabakhshreshad is writing her thesis titled *New boom of refugee support. Between Welcome Culture and Refugees Welcome* at the supervision of Prof. Dr. Sabine Hess, at the Institute for Cultural Anthropology / European Ethnology of the Georg-August-University Göttingen. 2017-2020 she was a member of the doctoral program "Migrationsgesellschaftliche Grenzformationen" (Oldenburg, Göttingen, Osnabrück).