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Izuu Nwankwo (Mainz / Igbariam)

## ‘Punch Up, Punch Down O! All I Know Is There Is Punch’: Jokes about Africa (ns) in Cross-Cultural Contexts

Jokes concurrently produce humour and offence owing largely to differences in cultural considerations of funniness and taboo. With growing diversity in audiences and online dissemination of live events, stand-up comics have increasingly come under scrutiny for ‘irreverent’ and offensive anecdotes. To ‘punch up’, which entails speaking from a position of weakness other than strength, has become an acceptable form of benign transgression. More so in cross-cultural contexts where differences heighten offence, whether it is ‘up’ or ‘down’, a punch is still a punch and jokes are not just told to make us laugh and be happy. They equally make us very uncomfortable especially in situations where the joke-teller is *different*.

I am drawing on four categories of African diaspora comedians, specifically from the stage acts of Andi Osho, Dave Davis, Urzilla Carlson, and Trevor Noah. Osho is British, born to Nigerian immigrants to the UK, and builds her jokes around being black, female, British. Davis was born in Uganda, came to Germany with his parents, and grew up in Cologne, the only place he calls ‘home’. He builds his jokes, presented in the German language, around being German and ‘black’, calling himself *der schwarze Deutsche*, a position that provides him with the latitude of insider/outsider view of the German society and tradition. Carlson moved to New Zealand in 2006, and her jokes centre on being female, lesbian, and African in Australasia, drawing largely on stereotypes about her native South Africa. For Noah also, being born in South Africa during the infamous apartheid era informs his understanding and expositions of race relations in the US, where he now lives.

In examining the acts of these jokesters, my talk x-rays cross-cultural joke presentation mechanics, themes, and performer-audience relations. It is guided by queries such as what performance specificities do jokesters enact to mitigate offence while dealing with sensitive/volatile subjects and a more diverse, PC-conscious audience? What is/are the relationship(s) between identity, cultural representations, and jokes? In answering these questions, the emphasis is on discussing how the selected comedians craftily erect pre-determined sets of values that establish the context(s) within which the offensiveness of their ‘punch(es)’ is/are mitigated.

**Izuu Nwankwo** is a Georg Forster postdoctoral research fellow at the Department of Anthropology and African Studies of the Johannes Gutenberg University, Germany. He is of the Department of Theatre Arts, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam, Nigeria. His research interests centre on African and African diaspora popular culture, performance, and literature. His present work is on taboo, self-censorship, and the limits of humour in the acts of African diaspora humourists. His upcoming book publications are *Yabbing and Wording: The Artistry of Nigerian Stand-up Comedy* (Makhanda: NISC Press, 2022); the edited volume, *Stand-up Comedy in Africa: Humour in Popular Languages and Media* (Stuttgart: Ibidem Verlag, 2022); and the co-authored book (with Daniel Hammett and Laura S. Martin), entitled *Beyond Resistance: Humour and Politics in Africa* (Bristol: Bristol University Press, 2022).

**Institutskolloquium Wintersemester 2021/22 (Leitung: Markus Verne)**

**Wann?** Dienstag, 26. Oktober 2021, 18:15–19:45 Uhr

**Wo?** HS 13 (in Präsenz, 3G)

**Weitere Informationen:** [www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de](http://www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de)