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18:15–19:45 Uhr
Hörsaal P4
(Philosophicum)

ifeas

Institut für
Ethnologie und
Afrikastudien

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Tübingen

Tales of „Good Indian hair“: Africa-India migrations, hair, and urbanism in Delhi



Hair Factory in
Delhi in 2017

Foto: Bani Gill

This paper explores contemporary trends of migration from the African continent to India through a focus on hair and hair salons as significant to emerging mobility dynamics in Delhi. Practices and expressions of bodily transformations – intimately linked to questions of values and valuing, beauty and desire, the senses and sensuality – are embedded in varied local cosmologies as well as global capitalist flows. To this extent, this paper explores how African hair salons in Delhi and the business in human hair constitute new contact zones that connect postcolonial subjects in corporeal and material ways; hair, as organic molecular matter produced by the human body, not only informs meaning-making as a sociocultural bodily signifier, but once disembodied, is also a highly globalized and specialized commodity used for weaves, extensions, wigs and toupees. Several African migrants arrive in India today for the purpose of doing business in Indian hair, with people from diverse countries such as Nigeria, Cameroon and Uganda involved in informal transnational trade or informal service provision such as hairstyling in Delhi. ‘Indian’ hair, procured through a range of sites such as temples and hair salons in India, is especially desired as a luxury commodity for use in hair weaves and extensions by African women. Based upon ethnographic research conducted with West African migrants since 2015, the paper explores how ‘new’ constellations such as African hair salons are significant to gauging contemporary processes of urbanism in Delhi. The paper further considers how the consumption and trade in Indian hair by African migrant women ascribes anew racialised values of beauty, ‘blackness’ and ‘Indianness’ through bodily and material encounters.

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Weitere Informationen: www.ifeas.uni-mainz.de