

26.11.

18:15–19:45 Uhr
P 5
(Philosophicum)

ifeas

Institut für
Ethnologie und
Afrikastudien

2024

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Johannes Gutenberg-Universität Mainz

Distributing Afrobeats through dance and choreography



Noel Robinson
(r) & Dennis
Kyere (l)
dancing on
TikTok.

In our presentation, we want to give insights into the research design and fundamentals of our shared contribution to the BMBF funded project CEDITRAA – Cultural Entrepreneurship and Digital Transformation in Africa and Asia. During the first phase (2021-2024), which largely focused on the emergence of Nigeria and Korea as new centres of global popular culture, we studied the intersection of Afrobeats music and digital practices. The emphasis was on the production of cultural goods, thus we investigated among others the centrality of online memetic practices in the production of Afrobeats music.

In the second phase (2025-2027) we turn our attention to distribution practices, focusing on dance and dancers. The importance of Afro dance practices to the evolution and spread of Afrobeats music cannot be overstated. Social media dance challenges do not only accompany the release of songs to foster widespread memetic engagement, they also shape the production of songs to be TikTok dance challenge compatible. Owing to this influence, Afro dance workshops have sprung up both virtually and in physical locations across the world. Through these activities, bodies, movement, and choreography are documented or reconstructed and made available to transnational Afro dance audiences. Within this next phase of the project we look into the body as a medium for the distribution of popular music by drawing on theories that define the human body as an intrinsic part of cultural practices. We will look at the body as a conduit for affect in music, trying to ascertain how dancers embody Afrobeats music and interpret it in choreographies that inspire imitation. Drawing from previous research we will interrogate the consequences of the commercialisation of racialised/ethnic bodies and give a glimpse into future fieldwork in Berlin, Accra, and Lagos, through which we will seek to understand what it means for participants engaged in these practices to lend their bodies to these processes.

Bakar Abdul-Rashid Jeduah is currently a research fellow at the department of Anthropology and African Studies, JGU-Mainz. He recently received a PhD in Sociology and Methodology of Social Research from the Universities of Milan and Turin in Italy. His PhD research explored Afrobeats social Media cultures, investigating how the intersection of Afrobeats music and social media practices shapes transnational music distribution, the constitution of transnational affective publics, and the formation of new digital ethnic identities.

Tom Simmert is currently a research fellow at the research centre “Normative Orders” at Goethe University Frankfurt. He recently received a PhD in Anthropology from Johannes Gutenberg University Mainz. His dissertation “Afrobeats: Digital Music from Lagos to the World” explored the entrepreneurial spirit of Nigerian musicians, the construction and globalization of a digital music industry and the reversal of established hierarchies in transatlantic cultural flows.