

# Representing an “Authentic Ethnic Identity”: Experiences of Sub-Saharan African Musicians in an Eastern German City

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## **ABSTRACT**

This paper focuses on how Sub-Saharan Africans present themselves as musicians in Chemnitz, an Eastern German town of around 200,000 citizens that is situated on the periphery of existing immigrant musicians’ networks in Europe. Generally, immigration to Chemnitz has been rather limited; the quota of foreign nationals is 2.9 % for the whole city. I will explore what purposes Sub-Saharan African music and dance performances serve in this context both for the majority society as well as for the immigrants, individually and as a community. In so doing, I use a case study on the yearly local “intercultural festival” and analyze what kind of local power structures, institutional and informal, economic and political, influence the Nigerian cultural association’s festival performance. This analysis shows how immigrant networks or associations relate to expectations and ascriptions of “authenticity” in a small-scale city. With its focus on the local situation and its effects on the representation of immigrant groups, this paper builds on the work that Nina Glick Schiller and Ayse Caglar (2006, 2009) have done on the importance of locality for research on migration and immigrant incorporation.

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## INTRODUCTION

As the German discourse on migration and integration usually focuses on the situation in western Germany, the experiences of immigrants in eastern Germany have often been neglected (cf. Weiss, 2007). With this case study, I would like to give some insights into the special situation of immigrants in eastern Germany. The focus is on the self-presentation of Sub-Saharan Africans as musicians in Chemnitz, an eastern German town of around 200,000 inhabitants. In my analysis, I will show how music and dance presentations as cultural self-presentations are shaped by interaction processes of various groups, networks, institutions and individuals in a local social field of power.

The findings presented in this paper are based upon extensive ethnographic fieldwork and around 40 formal and numerous informal interviews with people involved in activities concerning immigration and integration in the city of Chemnitz. My fieldwork was conducted in the framework of the EU-funded Project “Searching for Neighbours” (Sefone) from 2007 to 2010 with a focus on three strands of research: 1. Physical borderlands of the New EU, 2.<sup>1</sup> Mental border experiences in multicultural EU regions and 3. Mental and physical border experiences in transnational networks. In the framework of the project we set out to explore the dynamics of socio-cultural and physical borders as experienced by people of culturally diverse backgrounds in several different research sites. In Chemnitz the focus was on mental border experiences in a rather un-typical research site concerning multicultural initiatives and experiences. Chemnitz is a city with only a small proportion of foreigners, on the periphery of international migration flows or existing transnational networks: a “down-scale city” as it can be positioned on the continuum introduced by Glick Schiller and Caglar (2009). The research project thus followed the lead of other scholars (Bommes and Radtke, 1996; Bretell, 2004; Glick Schiller, 2006; Pries, 2001) to take into consideration the local situation as well as transnational networks and connections when analysing immigrant integration processes.

One very important part of the Sefone project’s aims was also to look at local initiatives for neighbourhood building and better intercultural understanding and to analyze these with respect to their local, national and transnational embeddedness and their impact on processes of sustaining, creating or challenging mental borders, *e.g.*, people’s perception of self and other. It was in this context that the city’s annual intercultural festival with its music and dance performances became one focus of analysis: as an event aimed at fostering intercultural understanding at city level. To prepare the ground for a thorough analysis of this event and especially the Sub-Saharan Africans’ contribution to this festival I first of all draw up a conceptual framework in which to analyze mental borders such as ethnic and cultural divisions in a certain social field of power. Secondly, I will briefly present the specific situation of immigrants, especially Sub-Saharan African immigrants in Chemnitz. After that, I will move on to analyze the performance with its institutional, informal, political and

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<sup>1</sup> During the first year, Gerd Ulrich Bauer was responsible for the Sefone project in Chemnitz. I am very grateful to him for all his preparatory work, some interviews and his continuous support after I took over the project from him.

economic relations and power structures that shape the self-presentation of Sub-Saharan African immigrants at the annual intercultural festival. Finally, I provide a more generalized conclusion about the different functions of such cultural festival performances in small scale cities regarding immigrant incorporation.

## **THEORETICAL CONCEPTS FOR THE STUDY OF MENTAL BORDERS AT CITY LEVEL**

### **ETHNIC IDENTITIES**

There has been an extensive discussion about the constructed nature of ethnic identities and ethnic group boundaries in scholarly literature (Brubaker, 2004; Sollors, 1989). Different studies focus on political discourse, strategic essentialism and ethnopolitics (Beck-Gernsheim, 1999; Rothschild, 1981), the importance of everyday interaction and experiences of separation and segregation on a local level for the creation of group boundaries and ethnic styles (Keim, 2005) and questions of power and hierarchy in the process of ethnic group formation (Bukow and Llayora, 1998). Baumann (1999, p. 64) concludes:

Ethnic identities can be stressed or unstressed, enjoyed or resented, imposed or even denied, all depending on situation and context. [Ethnicity is thus a creation] of human minds, skills and plans - based on some natural ingredients, it is true, but far beyond anything that nature could ever do by itself.

Baumann thus implies that the meanings and connotations of ethnic identities are fundamentally shaped by the social conditions that create them, *e.g.*, structural and institutional processes. Analysing these processes rather than any pre-defined ethnic identity is theoretically more rewarding (cf. Glick Schiller, *et al.*, 2006; Rätzsch, 2000).

### **AUTHENTICITY**

In public discourse on multiculturalism, it is often stressed that immigrant groups should not be required to give up the “authentic” identity they “brought along from their home country” or that different ethnic groups have certain “authentic”, *e.g.*, real and original characteristics. The contemporary idea of authenticity requires people to define and present themselves (and, accordingly, their ethnic group identity) in a way that is only true to their innermost self and their own originality (Taylor, 1991, p. 29-35). This idea of authenticity that is so deeply rooted in the discourse on multiculturalism has however been widely criticized. Bucholtz (2003, p. 400) believes that it is more of an ideology than an empirical fact: cultural identities and what is considered “authentic” change with the process of migration and incorporation, as they do with any process of social change. Knaller (2007, p. 7) observes that there is a socially and culturally produced desire for authenticity, while Stauth (1999, p. 47) observes that affirmative talk of authenticity with regard to originality also serves to exclude those cultures that are not confirmed as authentic. Taylor (1991, pp. 29-35) criticizes the contemporary culture of authenticity because it misses out on the fundamentally dialogical character of human life. Thus, instead of presupposing “the authentic” as an object to be discovered, I will use the notion of authenticity as the

outcome of symbolic practices of social actors, as Bucholtz (2003, pp. 398-399) has suggested for sociolinguistics. Doing this, I will follow Bucholtz's notion of "authentication" and use the terms she introduced for the analysis of practices and tactics of identity formation and presentation:

Where authenticity presupposes that identity is primordial, authentication views it as the outcome of constantly negotiated social practices. [...] It is the tactic of authentication that produces authenticity as its effect. Thus [researchers] should speak not of authenticity but more accurately of authenticity effects, achieved through the authenticating practices of [social actors]. This perspective does not deny the cultural force of authenticity as an ideology but emphasizes that authenticity is always achieved rather than given in social life. (Bucholtz, 2003, p. 408)

Authentication, according to this model, means the assertion of one's own or another's identity as genuine or credible. Genuineness and credibility evoke a generally positive evaluation as opposed to strategic or untruthful assertions of identity (Knaller, 2007, p. 8). By contrast, an identity can also be held up as inauthentic, unreal or non-credible, and these processes can be called denaturalization. Additionally, processes of authorization and illegitimation play a role in how identities emerge in a particular context. Authorization and illegitimation foreground the role of institutions in conferring or withholding structural power. Bucholtz (2003, p. 408, italics in the original) writes: "*Authorization* concerns the claiming or imparting of a culturally recognized powerful status, while *illegitimation* is the denial or rejection of such a claim."

## **SOCIAL FIELDS OF ACTION AND POWER**

As mentioned before, ethnic identities and their notion as "authentic" require certain social conditions to acquire specific meanings and connotations. These social conditions can be analyzed as social fields of action and power as Glick Schiller, Caglar and Guldbrandsen (2006, p. 614) have defined: "Social fields are networks of networks that may be locally situated or extend nationally or transnationally. Social fields are the aspect of social relations through which broader social forces enable, shape and constrain individual migrants and their networks." Glick Schiller and Caglar (2009, p. 180) add: "Most importantly, these networks are embedded in power asymmetries." Consequently, the analysis looks at the impact of social structures and global forces in shaping social fields as well (cf. Glick Schiller, 2006).

## **CITY SCALES, IMMIGRANT INCORPORATION AND CULTURAL EVENTS**

Part of the social structures and global forces that shape the situation of immigrants in specific cities have recently been analyzed within the framework of a theory of city scales. As Glick Schiller and others (2006, p. 615) have noted: "The term scale can be defined as the summary assessment of the differential positioning of cities determined by the flow and control of capital and structures of power as they are constituted within regions, states, and the globe." Suggested measures for marking the difference on the continuum between down-scale cities and top-scale cities include the size of finance and banking sectors, the amount of opportunities for university-educated

youth, the local tax base and the growth dynamics of sectors such as technology. It is important to note that immigrant incorporation processes in cities are shaped by the local situations, as they contain social capital and community building strategies that adapt to the abundance or scarcity of economic capital, commercial opportunities, or professional employment; but immigrants also contribute to the rescaling of cities (Glick Schiller, *et al.*, 2006). Immigrant incorporation can follow various pathways of incorporation (five of which were examined by Glick Schiller, *et al.*, 2004) and it must be noted that migrants are often incorporated within more than one nation-state simultaneously. The different pathways offer organized sets of practices, identities, social relations and institutions which situate migrants within Germany.

Focusing on festive events, Salzbrunn (2007, p. 6, italics in the original) has noted, allows us to observe the “emergence and dynamics of group building, the development of new hybrid references and we can observe the importance of *places*, namely the very local urban environment, to these social practices”. Salzbrunn (2007) analyzes cultural events in global cities (cf. Sassen, 1991) to show their complex interaction with translocal networks and their connection to the local situation in Paris and New York City. The analysis of cultural events in Chemnitz can serve as a contrast to this focus on the situation in large metropolitan cities and helps us understand the local creation of opportunities for immigrant incorporation through different public, private and institutional interests.

To provide some information on the local context, the next section presents an introduction of the city of Chemnitz, its history and its situation with respect to cultural diversity as well as the situation of Sub-Saharan Africans in the city.

### **CHEMNITZ, IMMIGRATION AND CULTURAL DIVERSITY**

With 242,900 inhabitants in 2007, Chemnitz follows Leipzig and Dresden as the third largest city in the Federal State of Saxony in the south of eastern Germany. The city generally suffers from a rather pessimistic image, mainly as a result of the tremendous decline of its industrial structure after the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989 and the subsequent severe de-industrialisation of eastern Germany. To assess the city scale of Chemnitz, there are different issues at hand:

- An unfavourable demographic trend with severe out-migration between 1991 and 2002 (Stadt Chemnitz, 2002, p. 13) and an ageing population. It is generally assumed that Chemnitz and its surroundings will be the region with the highest median age of the total projected population in Europe by 2030 (Eurostat, 2010). Chemnitz faces tremendous challenges in dealing with this demographic change and will in the future be competing to attract more high-tech investment and young, talented so-called creative class citizens (cf. Florida, 2003) from outside the area.
- High measures of unemployment, even though it dropped to 15.1% in January 2009 (cf. Stadt Chemnitz, 2009). This may indicate that the transformation of the economic base towards a small-scale specialized

industrial structure has gained momentum, and that the current global economic crisis has not yet had disastrous effects on the local economy.

- A very low percentage of foreign nationals in the city (2.9 %, *cf.* Stadt Chemnitz, 2008, p. 18) which reflects the low rate of diversity and corresponds to the fact that many groups of foreigners in the city are quite small in number (around 5 to 20 people for many nationalities). At the same time, many migrants are moving away from Chemnitz, as they were only “allocated” to the city and have difficulties finding employment in the region.

Generally, Chemnitz can be classified as a down-scale city competing for a better position on the dynamic continuum of power relations. Glick-Schiller and Caglar (2009, p. 193) characterize down-scale cities as cities that have not yet succeeded in restructuring efforts but none-the-less have some global capital investment. Chemnitzers usually remember the “good old days” of the industrial revolution when their city was more powerful and prosperous - but at the same time many fear the diversity of opinions and life-styles, harsh realities and disorganization that larger cities have to face.

With regard to migration history, Chemnitz is quite typical for cities of comparable size in eastern Germany. Overall, the migration history of the new *Laender* is considerably briefer than that of western Germany. The first generation of immigrants began to arrive during the late 1970s, and not until today have a significant number of second-generation immigrant children begun to reach adulthood. This shorter migration history also means that in eastern Germany, initiatives regarding the integration and support of immigrants were introduced much sooner after the arrival of the first generation of immigrants than was the case in western Germany. Furthermore, the interval between the initial arrival of immigrants and the recognition of Germany as a “country of immigration” with the new *Zuwanderungsgesetz* (immigration law) was considerably shorter. According to the commissioner for foreign citizens (*Ausländerbeauftragte*), the possibility of “starting afresh” after 1990 and of learning lessons from the mistakes of the western German *Laender* and the GDR-policies of separation and segregation (Bade, 1996, p. 421; Berger, 2005, p. 514) are important positive factors for immigrant participation in local neighbourhood-building in Chemnitz.

In Chemnitz, it was the same people active in the institutionalized handling of immigration who were shocked by new waves of nationalism and racist violence in the eastern part of Germany after 1990 and saw the “intercultural week” as one way to lobby against nationalism and for the acceptance of diversity. An “intercultural scene” thus soon developed through various city-funded organisations and clubs organising projects, programmes and events that supported positive contacts and intercultural understanding between natives and immigrants. It is important to note that it was the city’s social welfare department that took over the role of defining problems of immigrant integration as well as problems of racism and discrimination (*cf.* Bommers, 2007, p. 147).

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## SUB-SAHARAN AFRICANS AND THEIR NETWORKS IN CHEMNITZ

According to the city of Chemnitz (Stadt Chemnitz, 2008), the largest groups of Sub-Saharan Africans in Chemnitz include Mozambicans (35 people) and Angolans (18 people), who are largely male former contract workers and have married German women and thus been able to legally remain in Germany after the fall of the Berlin wall. Furthermore there are Congolese (Congo Kinshasa) citizens (18 people) who usually came as refugees, as well as Cameroonians and Nigerians (9 people each). The Cameroonians are mostly students at the university; the Nigerians came to Chemnitz both as asylum seekers and as students. These figures, however, show only those Chemnitzers with a foreign passport. German citizens of Sub-Saharan African descent do not figure in these numbers. In particular, the Angolan and Mozambican communities, including naturalized citizens and second-generation immigrants, are actually larger in number. I would estimate from my research that one could double or even triple the numbers presented above. As indicated with the Mozambicans and Angolans, the gender ratio among the Sub-Saharan Africans in Chemnitz reflects the migration history - men by far outnumber women amongst former contract workers and also the groups made up of students and asylum seekers include more men than women. All in all, women make up only one fifth of the Sub-Saharan Africans in Chemnitz. Most Sub-Saharan Africans have founded families in Chemnitz, usually marrying German citizens, who are often deeply rooted into local family and work-related ties. In many families, the spouse's reluctance to move anywhere else is the reason for the African partner to maintain ties with Chemnitz after having found employment in the more prosperous South-West of Germany. Thus, the above mentioned numbers of Sub-Saharan African residents in Chemnitz also include a significant number of commuting shift-workers who only come home every second weekend to see their families. This impedes network building, the development of strong ethnic organisations and related activities in Chemnitz, just as it has been observed for other down-scale cities: "There are neither sufficient local public, corporate or charitable resources, nor a stratum of migrant professionals to sustain [stable] ethnic organising." (Glick Schiller and Caglar, 2009, p. 193)

But even in spite of these difficulties, there are several local immigrant associations that unite people from Sub-Saharan Africa: The Angolan, the Mozambican, the Esperanca and the Nigerian association. Some of these organizations have a rather long history. The Angolan and Mozambican associations were set up with the support of the city's commissioner for foreign citizens in the early 1990s, to unite those former contract workers that were able to stay in Chemnitz according to their nationalities. Both associations, and more recently, one new club based on a fraction of the Mozambican association (Esperanca), operate clubs where people can meet on Friday and Saturday evenings to dance and to socialize. These locations serve as "safe spaces" that are operated by the migrants themselves, whereas other night-clubs can be non-inviting or even dangerous for Black people. Thus, the importance to create spaces of comfort and relaxation in an otherwise rather harsh environment can be seen as the main reason for the existence and persistence of these associations in spite of many (financial, organisational and personal) difficulties. The Nigerian association

does not own such a location and its members usually attend the existing clubs, while now and then there are plans to get a place for itself. The different associations can afford to operate these clubs by collecting entrance fees and by selling drinks on their night club events, although there is constant rumour about the clubs being indebted or behind with their rent. Landlords seem to accept this situation in Chemnitz because of the difficulty of renting out their premises at all in a city with a shrinking population. Based on these financial difficulties, the associations also compete for local and regional government funding to be able to carry out more projects and to have a more secure financial standing. Plans that come up every few years, and are often initiated by newcomers or non-Africans, calling for a unification of clubs to secure a more solid membership base as well as financial strength, have until now never been able to succeed.

One prominent Sub-Saharan African person is the only Ghanaian in Chemnitz, Mr. Ampah,<sup>2</sup> a professional drummer and dancer trained in Ghana. He came to Chemnitz because of his German wife whom he first met when she travelled to Ghana. He has a large professional musician's network extending to Ghana as well as to Berlin, Amsterdam and Paris. He has been in Chemnitz since 1997 and has remained there in spite of the comments from his friends in bigger cities expressing fear of the racism and xenophobia they view as predominant in provincial areas of eastern Germany. He sees himself as the person "who started everything for Africans here" and says: "When I came to Chemnitz, who knew about Africans? All of them were hiding somewhere. They were afraid to come out. One could not see them. Then I came here, started my thing, the newspapers started talking about me. I went to all the schools, kindergartens, institutes." (Interview with Mr. Ampah, Chemnitz, 17.09.2009, English original) He thus sees himself as an important public figure concerning the image of Africans and the awareness of the local public about Africans in Chemnitz. Using his professional competence as a drumming and dancing teacher, he also gave the local intercultural scene an idea of how "African culture" could be used for manifestations of multiculturalism. Today, most of the Sub-Saharan African associations can provide one or two people who are ready to drum and dance when they are asked to perform in a show or to join some (inter)cultural event in an institution. The Nigerian association has organized a team of three core-members to form a musical group, using drums, other instruments and clothes that they brought directly from Ghana and Nigeria for this purpose. Whenever they are called for a performance, other people usually join them to support the group as dancers or additional drummers.

Having provided an introduction to the situation in Chemnitz and the existing networks of Sub-Saharan Africans in the city, I will continue with a case study and provide a detailed analysis of the above mentioned yearly local intercultural festival and the related festival performance of the Nigerian association. This will help us to retrace the embeddedness of ethnic identity construction and immigrant incorporation into social fields of power.

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<sup>2</sup> All personal names are pseudonyms.



## CASE STUDY: THE YEARLY INTERCULTURAL FESTIVAL IN CHEMNITZ

The opening ceremony of the intercultural weeks, a yearly intercultural festival, has been taking place on the main city marketplace since 2005 on a Saturday afternoon in late September. Before, it used to take place indoors in different locations. The move of the festival to the local market place was made possible by the local foreign nationals' advisory council and the commissioner for foreign citizens, who campaigned for such a move with local authorities. The main arguments for locating the festival in the market place were the importance of making cultural diversity visible in a city where inhabitants hardly have any contact with foreign nationals on a daily basis and the possibility of attracting passers-by. (Mrs. Hansen, activist of the local foreign nationals' advisory council, at a Sefone-event, Chemnitz, 24.09.2009)

The festival is organized by the local commissioner for foreign citizens and includes a stage performance and a host of little market stalls run by ethnic associations and NGOs involved in intercultural activities. At these market stalls, visitors can get information about local activities, buy souvenirs or food and children can paint or play. The afternoon-long stage performance figures a "trip around the world" over all the continents of the earth. The organisational leadership of this performance lies with a local women's centre and the stage decoration showing paintings of typical landscapes and buildings from the different continents is provided by a local initiative for training unemployed people, which supports an unemployed artist in her career.

Generally, the organizers view the event as an opportunity to educate the general public about the existing cultural diversity, the "colourful reality" (German: *bunte Realität*: Mrs. Berger-Kolo, at the opening of the Exhibition "Black-White-Colourful: Intercultural Weeks in Chemnitz". German: *Schwarz-Weiß-Bunt: Interkulturelle Wochen in Chemnitz*, Chemnitz, 22.06.2010) in Chemnitz. As it was made clear in different interviews (Mrs. König 04.09.2007, Mrs. Schulz 22.11.2007, Mr. Kuntze 14.04.2008, all Chemnitz) and during my participant observation of the preparatory meetings in 2009, they hope to fight racism and xenophobia through the event by attracting and educating members of the majority society who are basically indifferent towards foreigners and cultural diversity in Chemnitz. As the number of foreigners in Chemnitz is so small, and the indigenous population comparatively large, it is expected that a fear of foreigners would exist due to a lack of contact, or out of ignorance, but not on the basis of a fixed right-wing political opinion. Thus, to attract passers-by and people who are generally not associated with foreigners, the performances on stage have to be exotic and colourful and show aspects of foreignness that people will generally expect and like, but that will at the same time be quite unusual. The enjoyment caused by the show is expected to alleviate fears and to create a more positive outlook on the presence of foreigners in the city.

These arguments reflect the broader discourse on intercultural activities in eastern Germany, as Glaser (2006, pp. 57-59) demonstrates. She stresses that music and art from "exotic" places are used to create curiosity about "foreigners" in general and to help open up institutions or individuals for activities on more serious topics like stereotypes, racist prejudice or discrimination. She stresses that projects directly

aiming at these topics without the addition of some “exciting and non-threatening” elements like music, dance or other performances usually face strong opposition. In German public discourse, racism is often regarded as a typical eastern German problem and serves to stigmatize people from this part of the country (Hörschelmann 2005, pp. 140-141). Thus, the above mentioned interview partners stressed that it was necessary to find non-stigmatising ways to fight racism, and that music and arts performances by foreigners were a great opportunity to do this. Mr. Kuntze (Interview 14.04.2008, Chemnitz) stresses that education on tolerance has to take place “without any finger-wagging” (German: *ohne den erhobenen Zeigefinger*).

To summarize, in this specific social context with its focus on integration and anti-racist discourses, the music and dance performances as well as the paintings representing the various parts of the world are used by the organizers 1. to attract people that would otherwise not be interested in topics of migration, integration or intercultural issues, 2. to add “foreignness” to the experiences of ordinary people in a controlled and enjoyable way, whereby the positive emotions connected with enjoying “foreign” music, dance or food are expected to have a generally positive impact on the attitudes towards foreign nationals, 3. to avoid stigmatizing native German people as prejudiced or racist, rather the public is seen to be “potentially interested in what foreigners can do and what they perform”, and 4. to avoid more confrontational methods of challenging prejudices and discrimination. The first two aims were often voiced during the preparatory meetings of the organizing committee that I attended where there was some discussion about how to attract and please more people. The latter two points were more often mentioned in the interviews and informal talks that I held with organizers and stakeholders.

Thus, the festival serves both to thematize issues of multiculturalism and diversity as well as to de-thematize a more confrontational discourse of racism or xenophobia. On the level of city marketing and official representations of the city, this kind of festival can be used to market the city as a multicultural, open and diverse place that is welcoming to newcomers. Immigrants performing in this festival stressed that they used the festival performances to “show that we actually exist, that we are here in Chemnitz, that we can contribute something” (German: *Wir können zeigen, dass wir auch da sind, hier in Chemnitz, und auch was wir beitragen können*. Mrs. Hansen, activist of the local foreign nationals’ advisory council, at a Sefone-event, Chemnitz, 24.09.2009). Consequently, the location of the festival in the central city market place became a symbol for accepting immigrants and their festival as a core part of the city population and as something one can “show off” publicly and be proud of.

Let us now have a closer look at the festival performance of the Nigerian association that took place on the 19<sup>th</sup> of September 2009 and how it is influenced by local social structures and processes. As in all the other continent performances, first of all, the stage was decorated with large pictures representing the continent: a lonely Massai herder, a leopard, and three straw huts traditionally associated with African villages. Then, the performers for “Africa” (from Nigeria, Mozambique, Angola, DR Congo and Germany) entered the stage together and first of all stayed at the back of

the stage, while a theatre group entered the stage after them, pretending to be a group of world travellers coming to Africa and looking around in amazement. Then, the performances started, with the people at the back of the stage cheering for those performing. After four other performances, the Nigerian association came forward. They consisted of a group of six men, five of them playing instruments (three Djembes, one Udu, and one Ekwe)<sup>3</sup> and one of them coming in as a dancer. Three of the instrumentalists were dressed in traditional chief gowns of South Eastern Nigeria with jeans underneath and without any facial paintings. The two other instrumentalists were wearing partly improvised, partly imported Atilogwu dance dresses, one of them together with shining white sneakers, and had their faces, arms and upper bodies painted with stripes and dots of white. The dancer wore a wrapper (a piece of cloth wrapped around his hips), a crown and a traditional beads top from Benin City on a naked upper body.

The rhythm they chose to perform was a traditional South Eastern Nigerian rhythm, while the dancer, who grew up in Ajegule, a very poor and multi-ethnic area in Lagos, performed a dance called “Ajegule dance”, a hybrid and modern form of dance typical for this Lagos area that is said to have been invented by a street kid in the 1980s (Interview with Mr. Ukwu, Chemnitz, 19.07.2010). Furthermore, the group performed a song called “Love thy neighbour as thyself” while other members of the group danced along.

The final part of the performance consisted of an increase in speed of the rhythm chosen in the beginning and the Ajegule dancer performing more and more rapid movements. At the end of the performance, people from the audience were invited to come on stage and to follow the dance movements of the performers, while all the other performers for the African continent as well as the “world travellers” joined in the dance. As the Nigerian association’s performance was the last one for the African continent, all the performers left the stage after this highlight.

I am arguing here that the performers used several ways to make the performance look and sound “exotic” and “colourful” for the audience according to the aims associated with the event that I described above. The reasoning goes that the more “exotic” the performance seems, the more it is considered authentic or traditional by the organizers and the audience and the more effective it is in attracting passers-by. Aiming at authenticity in representing Africanness in the eyes of the German public, the group used different authenticating practices that were learned over the years of becoming used to the expectations of the audience. First of all, the costumes and body paintings were an important element of authenticating the group as a “real” African musical group. It is important to note that the two instrumentalists performing in the - more “exotic” - Atilogwu dance dresses with facial and body paintings were part of the core musical group of the Chemnitz Nigerian association consisting of three members, as mentioned earlier. The three instrumentalists wearing traditional South Eastern Nigerian chieftaincy clothing with jeans were Nigerians

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<sup>3</sup> A Djembe is a skin-covered hand drum shaped like a large goblet, an Udu is shaped like a water jug with an additional hole and an Ekwe is a tree trunk with rectangular cavity slits. Djembes are widely used throughout West Africa, while the other two instruments are traditional Igbo instruments from South Eastern Nigeria.

from other cities in Saxony who had been asked spontaneously to join the show. This shows that by gradually assembling experience and information about expectations of the German audience the core members of the musical group have adapted and made their clothes more “exotic” by importing part of the costumes from Nigeria and making parts of them themselves. Also, to fit into the expectations in Chemnitz, some of the performers have only learnt how to drum in workshops and classes in Germany, whereas they would never tell anyone about that because otherwise they would lose the air of authenticity that they are producing by labelling their performance as “originally African” (Interview with Mr. Okeke, Chemnitz, 18.04.2009).

All these strategies show that the performance is highly “staged” and dependent on the local context, and in no way a natural or self-evident way to present “Africa” or even “Nigeria” to native Germans. A lot of the performers actually would not dress, drum or dance this way in Nigeria. For some of them, their Pentecostal Christian religion stands against traditional Nigerian drumming and dancing associated with small spirits and traditional gods. Others just find the performances embarrassing, because they associate them with a kind of “backward traditional village life”, odd costumes and wild dance, while the performers come from large cities and strive for modern life. Some comments were suggesting that the performance is potentially ridiculous or embarrassing, especially in front of their friends or academic colleagues (Interview with Mr. Okeke, Chemnitz, 19.09.2009). Performing in such a show is thus not always just a cultural resource, a pride or an asset for all of the performers, but something that can also have adverse effects, especially because of the potential exoticism, embarrassment and backwardness associated with it - both by other Africans and the native German audience (Informal Interview with Mr. Okafor, 20.09.2009).

If this is so - what then are the social processes and power structures that make the members of the Nigerian association perform this way in the yearly intercultural festival and also at other events?

Looking at economic power structures, the first suggestion would be that they are being paid some money for their performance. But this is not the case at the yearly intercultural festival – a fact that is often criticized by the Nigerian association, because a lot of the group members see the drumming and dancing performances as a chance to make some additional money, and usually the group is paid when it performs in events or festivals. Thus, the shows are partly seen as a business opportunity rather than a proud or original representation of cultural heritage or an educational event for majority Germans, as the organizers view it. This shows a highly divergent framing of the event in the eyes of the different people involved and I could observe that this divergence led to severe frictions and problems during the phase of planning the stage performances. The Nigerian association tried to argue for payment and the chief organizers became angry at the Nigerians for being “so avaricious”. In the end, the Nigerian association accepted to drum and dance without payment at the intercultural festival. But they did not give up the business motivation. They later told me that they saw the event as a kind of “investment”, as a possibility to “advertise” their group and then hope for paid jobs later.

Then, we may ask: why is the money paid for drumming and dancing shows of such an importance to the Nigerian association and its members? There are several reasons which are intertwined: performing in shows is a legal opportunity for asylum seekers (who are usually not allowed to work), students (who are otherwise only allowed to work a limited number of hours) and people receiving social security benefits to make some extra money, where other opportunities are closed to them. In this situation, the motivation to do drumming and dancing shows for money is quite high. To estimate the net income of Nigerians in Chemnitz, one will also have to consider that they are usually expected to remit money to their extended families in Nigeria because of global income inequalities, just like other immigrants from Sub Saharan Africa (cf. Nieswand, 2005). Thus, the money they earn is not exclusively meant for them and their immediate family in Germany, but serves also to assist people in Nigeria. Moreover, the needs of relatives in Nigeria, where there is a high reliance on the extended family for mutual support, tend to be high and unpredictable because Nigeria does not have a state social security system as well as health insurance system. Global structures of inequality and power thus influence the strategies of self-presentation of Sub Saharan Africans in Chemnitz by increasing the motivation to constantly look for opportunities to make additional money. At the same time, among the various possible options to earn money, drumming and dancing is one of the more favourable ones from a moral standpoint: it is enjoyable and pleases the general public, while other highly stereotypical “Nigerian” activities for making money abroad are often illicit and condemned by my Nigerian interviewees. Other avenues for making money that are considered morally favourable include opening up one’s own shop or business, and thus providing employment opportunities for other people and fighting unemployment in the city. In this discourse of cultural events or other business activities as avenues to fight negative stereotypes, risks of exoticization and othering are seen as a purely academic problem.

After highlighting the importance of making money for individual Nigerians in Chemnitz, it is important to consider the different levels of accessibility, *e.g.*, the barriers to entry of different careers for Sub Saharan African immigrants. Drumming and dancing shows are one of the few things in which Sub Saharan Africans are considered as “natural experts”. This fact opens up opportunities to anyone who is ready to adapt to the expectations of the majority society, whereas a career as, *e.g.*, mechanic, electrician, or violinist, will not be considered as “natural” for Sub Saharan Africans. This racist stereotyping by the majority society is a fact that individuals of Sub Saharan African descent have to deal with - either following expectations to make their own gains or working against it in another career. Some of the established performers in the Nigerian group told me that there had been a time when they themselves did not think about drumming, but a German person came up to them asking them if they would drum for some event. At the time of my research though, newcomers were usually very quickly incorporated into the group upon arrival in Chemnitz; the older Nigerian members took them along to teach them “what to do to make money” in Chemnitz (participant observation, 10.06.2010).

Furthermore, power structures involving financial calculations do not only work on an individual level, but also at the level of the Nigerian association - and this time they are embedded into local political and institutional power structures. As I have mentioned earlier on, the Nigerian association is one of many ethnic or so-called “national” immigrant associations in Chemnitz and one of four associations representing the African continent competing for public funding of projects or events. By performing as expected, and with no payment, in the opening ceremony of the intercultural weeks, the association shows its good will towards the authorities, it shows that it is ready to serve the community in Chemnitz and to follow the aims as well as the rules and regulations set out by the organizers of the festival. In a small city like Chemnitz, with a strong network structure of people working with issues of immigration and integration, this will not go unnoticed. A good performance increases their chances of getting public funding for their projects and activities later on, because the city administration will know them as reliable and trustworthy partners that are ready to work voluntarily, without payment as well. Generally, getting funding for projects is something that is always considered a matter of competition among the different associations and at the same time it is vital for the continuation of the associations, because most of them are in precarious financial situations. Since there are several African associations in Chemnitz, the Nigerian association is also motivated to perform in the festival because they feel that if they do not perform, the organizers would surely find another African group to perform in their place – and thus reap the associated benefits instead of them. Furthermore, the group has already invested time, money and energy over the years: in getting the instruments and the costumes, as well as drumming practice. Thus, all things are set and prepared and there is a long-standing tradition of staging the performance the way it is.

Finally, I consider informal power structures in the intercultural scene as an important element explaining the performance of the Nigerian association and other associations on stage. As mentioned earlier, there is a strong network structure of people working on issues of immigration, integration and anti-racist campaigning in Chemnitz. Usually, it is the commissioner for foreign citizens and the integration network members that help immigrants with residence permit problems, housing or job opportunities as well as organizing the intercultural festival. Thus, it is the same people that are involved in “integration structures” and active in the “intercultural scene”. If an immigrant has been helped with a vitally important issue by one of the organizers of the intercultural festival, he or she will surely accept if asked to perform in the festival based on a sense of reciprocity or a feeling of obligation.

The social processes and power structures - both local and global - that I presented above influence the performances at the yearly intercultural festival. But even though these power structures produce seemingly happy conformity, as Akinyosoye (2009) and Kübler (2009) also state, I observed some instances of resistance or opposition against the structures or against the expectations that are implicitly or explicitly voiced towards the performers. In the following section, I analyze several small elements that de-naturalize the performance as “traditional” or add either irony or

anger to the performance. I interpret these elements as instances of opposition against expectations and demands by the majority society.

As for the specific music and dance that was performed, it is important to note that the Ajegule dance that in Nigeria serves as a symbol for a hybrid, multi-ethnic area of the megacity Lagos, in this context serves as a representation of an African dance that is viewed as part of traditional African village life and unchanged across time and space. Furthermore, the performance of the song “Love thy neighbour as thyself”, with its text based on the Christian commandment, shows the hybridity of a performance that was supposed to represent a traditional, exotic Africa far away from any European influence.

Furthermore, one of the performers did a dance that looked “wild”, with a lot of jumps and harsh moves, quite often making rapid movements towards the audience. His face was painted white and he shouted “boo!” to try to scare people away from the stage. Overdoing and overemphasizing the “dangerousness” of black people is thus used to ridicule the stereotypes and even fears that majority Germans have towards Africans. The irony, though, is only understood by spectators and co-performers who realize that part of the performance is mockery. As I learnt in a later informal interview, the audience was not expected to understand the sending-up of the fear of black people that the performer sometimes experienced in daily life. Rather the performers used these exaggerations to protect themselves from the feeling of total submission to the stereotypical expectations of the audience, thus as a strategy of resistance that was to go un-noticed by others, with the fun and laughter remaining on the side of the performers.

Thirdly, the western clothes that the performers wear alongside traditional costumes (jeans or shining white sneakers) seem to disturb the image of an authentic traditional performance. Quite simply, the performers explained to me that it is usually too cold in late September to wear only the chieftaincy clothes or to walk barefoot in the late afternoon. So, for this pragmatic reason, some of the performers decided that they would not be willing to wear only their dancing costumes.

As a fourth point, ethnic group boundaries are highly contested when it comes to determining who has the right to perform on stage representing the African continent. Some members of the association feel that the only precondition to enter the stage (in the eyes of the general public) is to be “black and beat the drum - that is what makes people happy” (Interview with Mr. Okeke 19.04.2010, Chemnitz). They feel that the expectations and stereotypes they are confronted with are highly racialized and based on skin colour alone; and they have learnt to use this situation for their own purposes of making money or gaining recognition, as mentioned above. However, the white German chief organizer of the performances representing the African continent was reluctant to allow two black performers that were unknown to her to enter the stage with the Nigerian association after they had (falsely) claimed that they were from the United States. One can see this claim as a test as to what would really matter in the authorization of a performance. Skin colour, nationality, musical abilities (which could not be determined by the organizer previously) or trust

in the ability of the Nigerian association to recruit able musicians? The false claim of being from the United States can thus be interpreted as an indirect form of critique, with which the performers wanted to lay open the hidden racialized images and say: “If, in effect, it only matters that we are black, why do you even ask us about our nationality and make a fuss of it if we are not from Nigeria?”

These practices can be seen as de-authenticating, since they break the view of realness and bring to light the playfulness and flexibility with which expectations of the audience are followed and at the same time ridiculed.

### SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

If a person or a group does not depend on others in society, continuous self-presentation is not necessary. But in competitive situations, be it for finance, public recognition or private acknowledgement, there is an enhanced need for self-presentation, and this presentation is guided by social standards (Holly, 2010). The weaker the power position of the person or the group in question, the more he/she or they must conform to the expectations of society. In this way, the stereotypical image of the “born African Musician” is strengthened and the instances of resistance to this image that have been discussed in this article remain more or less hidden.

I have shown that music and dance performances are highly dependent on the local context, and local as well as global power structures. The music and dance performances change their meaning and purpose when they are used by migrants in the context of arrival: in this case, music and dance helps the Nigerian association’s members to integrate themselves into the local intercultural scene and to conform to the expectations of the majority society. However, this integration does not happen in such a way that they are no more recognizable as foreigners. Rather, to integrate and to become a recognized part of the city’s population, they celebrate and even increase their foreignness by making a performance of it: in this case, they used an African music and dance performance, the Ajegule dance that celebrates unity in a situation of ethnic diversity in its context of origin. In the context of the intercultural festival, it changes to emphasize the otherness, the Africanness of the performers. The music and dance performances thus make it possible for the Nigerian association’s members to act as “public foreigners” (Glick Schiller, *et al.*, 2004), portraying foreigners as culturally different from Germans. Cultural difference thus becomes an important aspect of incorporation.

Considering the city scale of Chemnitz, it can be concluded that one social position available for Sub Saharan African immigrants is that of the performer in an exotic cultural show. Chemnitz is a city with a very limited number of immigrants, little every-day contact between different groups and at the same time an interest in marketing itself as open-minded and modern as well as in fighting xenophobia. In this context, the pathway of incorporation as a “public foreigner” or as a “showcase-foreigner” (German: *Vorzeigeausländer*, Interview with Mrs. Mboro, 05.03.2008, Chemnitz), is available for a few people with the necessary skills, while pathways of upward social mobility often imply relocation to other more prosperous and more cosmopolitan western German cities.





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