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Struggling for Creativity and Greatness

Young bands from Accra, Ghana, and their local and translocal relational spaces

Abstract

Africa's growing youth, an increasingly important social factor, has mainly been studied as a marginalized group, and most recently as being in "waithood" (Honwana 2012). Research on youth in Africa has paid less attention to young people's creative participation, for instance, in the field of expressive culture. In Ghana's fast growing and globally intertwined capital Accra, youth plays a particularly important role in music production of various genres (Collins 2002, 2012). Against this backdrop, I propose an ethnographic study of young band musicians of different genres (Gospel-Highlife, Afrofunk, [Afro-]Pop, Brass Band, Neo-Traditional) in their activities of creating music, which I aim to investigate with respect to their role for "being young" and youths' transition to adulthood. More specifically, I focus on creating music as a relational process producing spaces, and I am interested in diverse relations of the young music makers (to their musician colleagues, teachers, students, mentors, patrons, idols, and audience) in their – sometimes more hidden, sometimes more public – places.

Methodologically, the thesis is based on several field researches, amounting to seven months in Accra over a period of three years in total. I propose to combine extensive participant observation with multiple instruments of documentation, such as audio and video recordings, ethnographic and biographic interviews, photographs, and extracts from social media. This material will be interpreted with respect to postcolonial and psychoanalytic space theories (potential space, third space, translocality) that assume specific relations to be crucial for creativity, adolescence, and social participation. I will analyze transformations of the musician's relational spaces and their meanings for the young actors, emphasizing the role of structural factors and the context of increasing global mobility.

Shedding light on linkages between music production and coming of age, the thesis aims to contribute to research interests of different disciplines: to the debate on youth and participation, to (ethno-)musicological case studies of music transmission and production in understudied informal settings and, by capturing interplays of local and translocal aspects in micro-processes of cultural creativity, to broader cultural studies' interests.