

# **Digitizing Performance in Africa: Politics, Aesthetics, and Historical Continuities in the Circulation of Music**

**International Workshop  
MSH Mondes, Université Paris Nanterre  
19-20 January 2023**

## **Call for proposals**

The aim of this conference is to bring together anthropologists, historians, and ethnomusicologists to discuss the ways that communication devices have continued, reinforced or altered how African people are sharing sounds and images of performance.

The practice of exchanging and circulating music, dance, poetry or rituals among African societies has existed for centuries through travel or direct contact and has shifted to include use of new technologies over time. During the latter half of the twentieth century, the radio and analog audio recorder were key tools used during African self-liberation movements to disseminate information, propaganda, poetry, and music (as shown by Chikowero 2014, Lekgoathi *et al* 2020). Since the end of the 2000s, the widespread use of cell phones and media file sharing applications on the African continent has impacted not only urban areas, but also rural areas (see Archambaud 2016, Debsu *et al* 2016, Brinkman *et al* 2017). Excerpts from ritual musical performances, funerals, weddings or even military events and other activities are shared and circulated via SD cards, Bluetooth connections or social networks on the continent and on a transnational scale.

These communication and storage technologies have introduced into people's daily life a new object, the music file, which any person in possession of a cell phone is likely to produce, manipulate and share. The music file exists at the intersection of the material and the immaterial. Glimpses of an event are recorded, fixed as a binary code, and contained in a physical medium. The file's digital characteristics can then be modified through editing software, sometimes directly on a cell phone. These files are reproduced and exist in several places simultaneously, and the relational modes they engage do not depend on the co-presence between musical producers and an audience.

At first glance, these technologies are changing the relationship to music and, more broadly, the relationships that are built around it. As Shipley (2013), Olivier (2017a, 2017b) or Djebbari (2019) have described, the local and global music industries have had great impact on the way people circulate, listen to, and relate to music. However, the visual and sound recording of musical events is now also implemented by participants of the performance themselves, and not only by outsiders, non-african visitors, or (inter)national media. All over Africa, people have understood for some time the interest and stakes of sharing a trace of musical performances for both daily entertainment and political ends (as described by Matzke 2002 or Impey 2013). For example, in certain regions marked by inter-ethnic and inter-state conflicts, the circulation of audio and video recordings plays a key role in the construction of alliances and enmities. But are the systems of sharing, the

circulation paths, and the modes of listening entirely new? The production, the manipulations and the circulation of musical files are often inscribed in historical logics engaged by direct contact, writing, radio, or cassettes (see Aterianus-Owanga & Jadinon 2018, Morand 2020, Marmone 2021, Marmone 2022).

Some of the questions this conference seeks to address include: How to describe practices of "fileization" of musical performances? What are these historical continuities and connections? How are they embedded in histories of colonialism and neocolonialism? What are the political or aesthetic stakes when these music files are used in intra or inter-community interactions? What other forms of sharing do they replace or reinforce?

We invite proposals on the following themes:

- The political use of music files in relation between communities, urban and rural areas, or with the national governments
- Historical continuities in strategies of music circulation
- Technical and aesthetic choices in the recording and editing of music files
- The influence of recorded performances on musical and ritual know-how
- Transnational music file sharing, connecting Africa and its diaspora
- Communication, the music file, and migration journeys
- Viral circulation of musical files and social networks

### **Organizing Committee**

Katell Morand (LESC-CREM, Université Paris Nanterre),

Giordano Marmone (LESC-CREM, Université Paris Nanterre),

Raymok Ketema (University of California-Santa Barbara, Department of History)

### **Proposal submission**

Proposals in English or French will be sent before July 15, 2022, to the three email addresses below:

Raymok Ketema: [raymok@ucsb.edu](mailto:raymok@ucsb.edu)

Giordano Marmone: [giordano.marmone@gmail.com](mailto:giordano.marmone@gmail.com)

Katell Morand: [kmorand@parisnanterre.fr](mailto:kmorand@parisnanterre.fr)

Abstracts should not exceed 250 words.

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**Keywords**

Africa; Digital file; Mobile phone; Performance; Music; Politics; History; Ritual; Musical knowledge