

Reconfiguring the Archive

*Relationality and discovery in the Africa Multiple
Interactive Research Atlas (AMIRA)*

Frédéric Madore

Data Curator

Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence



 [fmadore](#)  [frederickmadore.com](#)  [0000-0003-0959-2092](#)  [frederickmadore](#)  frederick.madore@uni-bayreuth.de



Scan for these slides

slides.frederickmadore.com

The Africa Multiple Cluster of Excellence

A large African studies cluster,
reconfiguring the field both
conceptually and structurally
to confront **power imbalances**
in how knowledge is produced
and transmitted.

THREE WORKING CONCEPTS

- **Multiplicity:** relationships before fixed entities
- **Relationality:** worlds made, unmade, silenced
- **Reflexivity:** our own positions, and the power behind them



IN FIGURES

RESEARCHERS, CLUSTER-WIDE	300+
RESEARCH CENTRES, FIVE COUNTRIES	5
SECOND PHASE, UNDER WAY	2026–32

KNOWN WITHIN THE CLUSTER AS

"Reconfiguring African Studies" — reworking the field's
concepts and its structures at once.

A network of five centres

AMRCS

- Université Joseph Ki-Zerbo (Burkina Faso)
- University of Bayreuth (Germany)
- Moi University (Kenya)
- University of Lagos (Nigeria)
- Rhodes University (South Africa)

Shown in green on the map. [africamultiple.../centres](https://africamultiple.org/centres)

We build the cluster's data infrastructure

Four areas of work — one goal:
research data that is **findable, reusable
and presentable**.

DATA MANAGEMENT & CURATION

Metadata and ontologies, Wikidata reconciliation, African-language taxonomies, DOIs and archiving.

Assisted by DRE & CARE pre-bookings knowledge systems. Full range:
africamultiple.../digital-solutions

OCR, transcription, entity extraction, tagging — on local, open-source, GDPR-compliant models.

DATA SCIENCE & METHODS

Text mining, NLP, network analysis, web scraping.

DISSEMINATION & PRESENTATION

Dashboards, maps, network graphs, Omeka S databases, websites.

Two principles guide how we work

DESCRIPTION IS A JOINT EFFORT

Curation and description are shared with our AMRC partners. Each centre describes the data it knows best; the DRE runs the shared infrastructure that connects them.

STORAGE STAYS DISTRIBUTED

Data stays in its local repository; Bayreuth holds the **metadata layer** that points to it. Research data becomes **findable without being relocated**.

NOT AN EXTRACTIVE MODEL

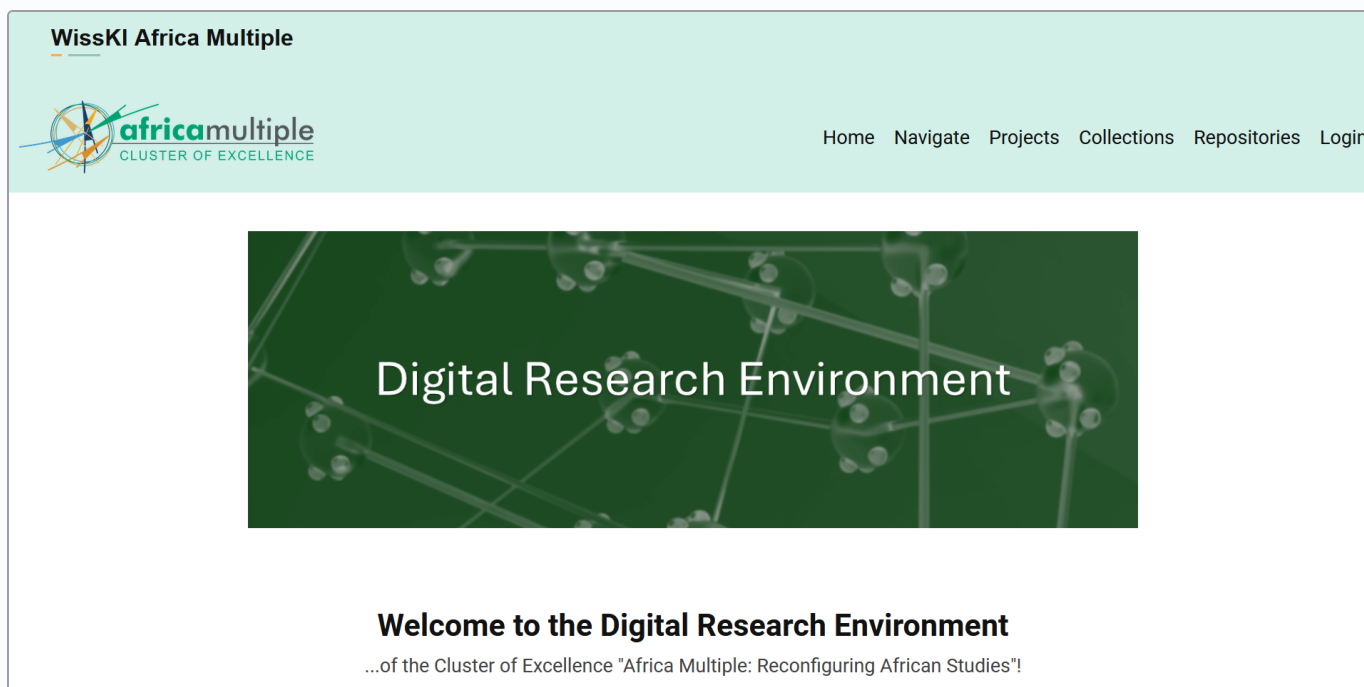
A considered response to debates on **data colonialism and extractivism**: the field's material is not drawn from Africa onto a server in Germany.

— THE FIRST PHASE

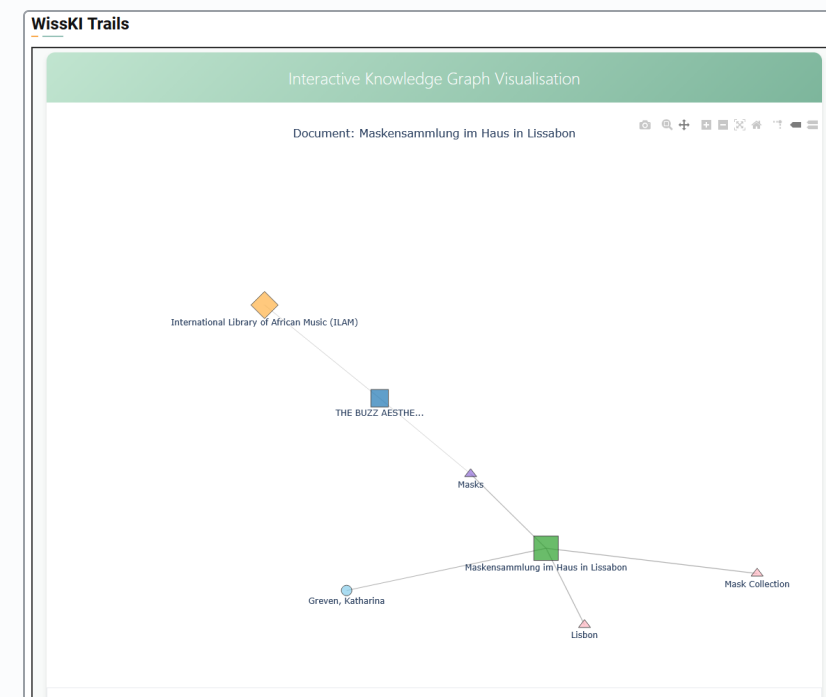
We began with WissKI

A semantic research-data system built on **knowledge graphs** — entities and their relations, tied to shared ontologies.

WissKI — *Wissenschaftliche Kommunikationsinfrastruktur*, "scientific communication infrastructure".



Searching and exploring research data across the centres.



Records as a knowledge graph: entities linked by typed relations.

— THE NEW PLATFORM · REPLACING WISSKI@UBT

Enter **AMIRA**

*The **Africa Multiple Interactive Research Atlas** — the Cluster's new home for its research data, publications and outputs.*

BROWSE

Items, people, projects, publications and media — with type-ahead autocomplete and faceted filters.

VISUALISE

Maps, network graphs and charts across the whole collection — not one record at a time.

CROSS-LINKED

Every person, project, subject and place is its own page you can open.

NOW LIVE

BUILT ON OMEKA S



Scan to explore AMIRA

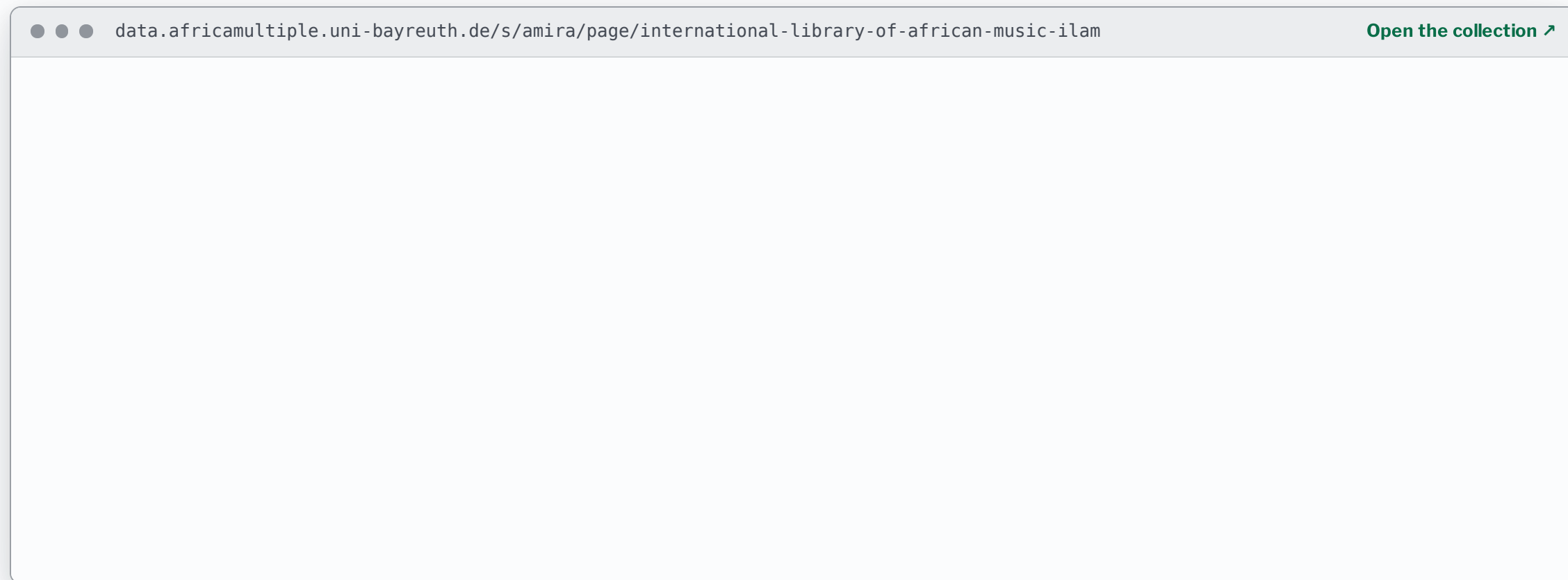
`data.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de`

— AFRICA MULTIPLE INTERACTIVE RESEARCH ATLAS

● ● ● data.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de

Open AMIRA ↗

A collection from Rhodes, in AMIRA



An external collection from **ILAM** at Rhodes — its catalogue is described in AMIRA

— FACETS, FILTERS, AUTOCOMPLETE — BUILT ON TYPESENSE

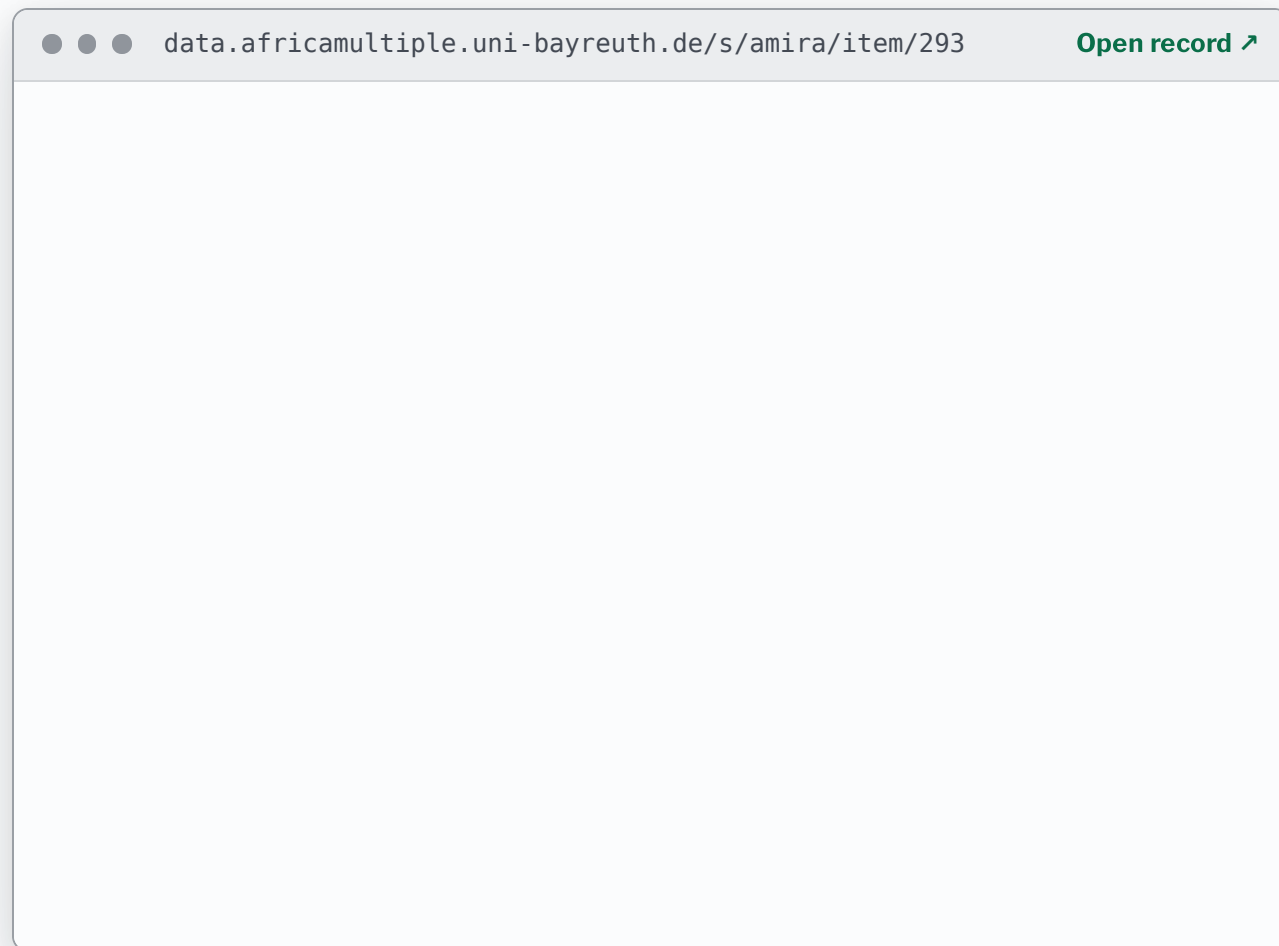
● ● ● data.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/s/amira/dre-search

Open search ↗

Here an entity is the sum of its **relationships**, rather than a standalone record.

Relationality, one of the cluster's three concepts, treats phenomena as formed through their relationships — and attends to the worlds those relationships leave *unmade* or *silenced*.

Connections, not records



Open a record — here, **Prof. Ute Fendler** — and AMIRA lists every resource linked to it, each labelled with the **nature of the connection**.

71

LINKED RESOURCES ON
THIS RECORD

Projects, publications, co-authors, places and subjects — each its own page, and each link naming the relationship.

— CUSTOM OMEKA S MODULE · BUILT IN-HOUSE

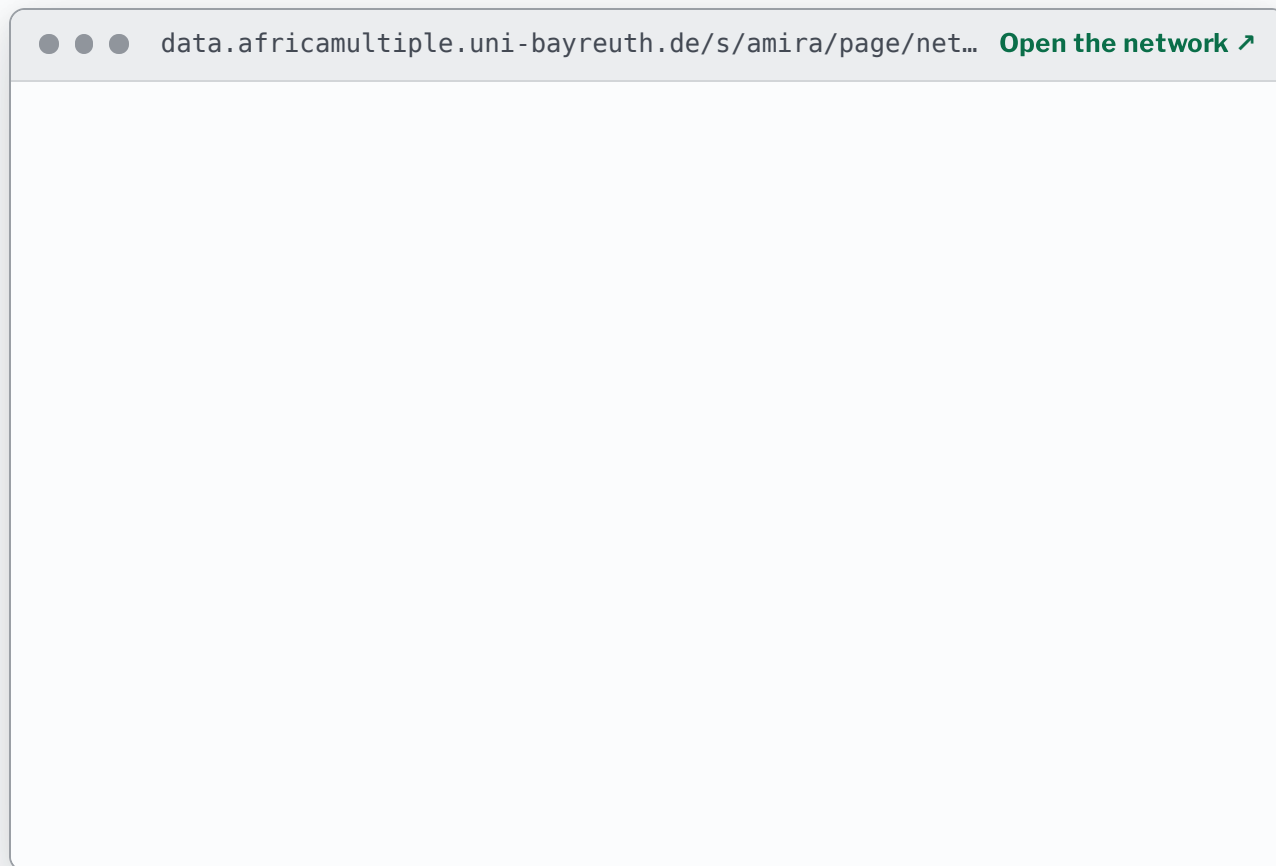
Spatial exploration

One of the DRE visualisation modules I build — every **georeferenced place** in the collection, on one map you can pan, zoom and open.

● ● ● data.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/s/amira/page/spatial-exploration

[Open the map ↗](#)

Entities and their links



The whole collection as one network — entities such as people, projects, subjects and places, drawn together by the **links recorded between them** in the knowledge graph.

THE CATCH, ALREADY VISIBLE

Every link here was described by someone. The network is only ever as good as that description — and subject description is the thinnest of it.

An atlas of relations is only as strong as its weakest metadata.

The weakest part is almost always subject description — the part that researchers supply the least of all.

Whose subject headings?

Where subject terms exist, they tend to come from Library of Congress Subject Headings.

- Our pipeline matches subjects against the LCSH API
- LCSH was built elsewhere, for other collections
- African concepts and languages fit it poorly
- Borrowed terms reshape what can be found

THE VOCABULARY PROBLEM

Two people pick the same term for the same thing under a fifth of the time (Furnas et al., 1987). One imposed vocabulary makes that worse, not better.

Risam (2018): standard schemas can carry epistemic violence — categories that erase as they describe.

— STILL EXPLORATORY

Building the entities the vocabulary lacks

WIKIDATA, NOT ONLY LIBRARY OF CONGRESS

Open, multilingual, editable by communities rather than one national library.

- Reconcile people, places, institutions to Wikidata
- Create the African entities it still lacks

EXPLORATORY BY DESIGN

To move authority over description closer to the people the data is about.

AI TO HELP, NOT TO DECIDE

Open-source local LLMs draft candidates at scale; people review and approve.

- Draft labels, definitions, links for review
- Curators and centres keep the final say

— THANK YOU

Who has the authority to decide how knowledge is described, and therefore how it is found?

In an era of contested truth, this is the challenge that reimagining the archive must face.

Explore AMIRA: data.africamultiple.uni-bayreuth.de/s/amira

 fmadore  frederickmadore.com  0000-0003-0959-2092  frederickmadore  frederick.madore@uni-bayreuth.de

