

The *Azonto* Dance - A Ghanaian New Creation: Exploring New Boundaries of Popular Dance Forms

Terry Bright K. Ofori & Tabitha Dei
University of Ghana, Legon

Abstract

As part of the efforts to redefine the current diversity and complexity of popular and social dance practices in and out of Africa, the emergence of *Azonto* dance, a Ghanaian new creation has sparked a lot of controversy. Will this unique dance form fizzle out and vanish into thin air like many other popular dances which come in vogue? Will it metamorphose into an institutionalised or traditional popular dance form like highlife?

This paper examines the development of *Azonto* dance and the training system used in the University of Ghana to support and preserve it as a popular dance practice; it also investigates the phenomenon that characterizes its transformation and transition into an African or African diasporic youth identities or African American dance practice such as breaking, hip life¹ or hip hop.

Introduction

Several scholars over the years have argued concerning issues with the 'popular' and have always outlined certain key points connected with it. Sherill Dodds (2011:63) outlines conditions under which popular dances occur; these, she indicates, are rooted in matters of historical context, economic structure, physical location and the socio-political framework. The conditions above are deduced from a constellation of definitions by various popular arts scholars, which is an indication that defining popular dance can be very elusive. Dodds (2011:64) nonetheless provides a working definition that states that it is 'a form with a low level of cultural worth; a form with a high level of consumption; and a form that either maintains the dominant ideology or articulates expressions of resistance.'

Dodds definition highlights culture, consumption and resistance, which suggests popular dance, has less value within the annals of culture, has numerous enthusiasts and is a mode of expressing either acquiescence or resentment.

According Ghanaian based ethnomusicologist, John Collins (1982), popular arts [dances] are works that are produced and/or consumed by “the people” as opposed to the wealthy and well-educated elite. Collins also suggests that popular theatre is a hybrid form, adjusted to innovation and fashion, and also that the consumption of what is said to be popular sometimes overlaps between the social elites and the “common people” (p. xviii). Popular dances can be referred to as dances that are novelties, fashionable, liked, performed and enjoyed by the masses, especially the youth. Ofose (2009) identifies five popular dances in Ghana; these are: Western, Latino, highlife dance, Francophone and locally created popular dances. Locally created popular dance movements, just like the traditional dances, are derived from activities of humans and certain circumstances that surround their creation. Traditional dances are mimetic or symbolic movements which may be inspired by movements; observed in nature, generated from religious themes, developed from everyday situations-including work situations (Nketia, 1965: 20). It is this same philosophical approach which is applied in the creation of popular dances today. For the Ghanaian therefore, the employment of a traditional approach within the modern context ensures a merger between things indigenes are familiar with and the new developments within the society, a situation referred to as ‘glocalization’ (Robertson, 1995). This view is shared by Agordor:

An important creative extension of the traditional mode is neo-traditional music which is inspired by traditional music but is a phenomenon of African modernity and urbanization. In Ghana, this includes types like *Borborbor*, *Kpanlogo* and *Simpa*. (2013: 443)

In this instance, Agordor refers to these new developments as neo-traditional instead of popular dances. One of such dances is the world acclaimed *Azonto* dance from Ghana, a dance which the Ghanaian youth employ traditional ways of washing, drying, chatting up of women and modern activities like ironing, use of mobile phones and smoking as movement mannerisms/motifs.

The paper looks at *Azonto* dance and the process of its development as well as interrogating what informs the creation of the various movements that constitute the dance, and what has made the dance so popular across the world as exemplified by its adoption amongst African and

African diasporic youth. Further investigation is also done on what may drive its longevity, whilst outlining the training system or approach implemented by the Department of Dance Studies at the University of Ghana in sustaining and preserving it.

Longevity and Possible Institutionalisation

Over the years in Ghana several dances have come into vogue and faded out whilst a few others have survived. In the Akan area in the past, dances like *Ɔmpɛ*, *dwae*, *sobom*, *adakam* and *osoode* were once popular dances which were later abandoned for new ones (Nketia, 1963:66). Today, these dances found in isolated places are regarded as traditional dances. Other dances such as highlife, *Kpanlogo*, *Borborbor*, are popular dances that emerged in the 20th century and have survived till now; in fact, *Kpanlogo* and *Boborbor* have transcended the popular and have become traditional dances. Reasons being offered for this happening have been that the semantics and syntax of these dances, coupled with their musical accompaniment are so organic that the traditional societies in which they developed have adopted them as traditional dances.

Highlife, on the other hand, is still maintained as a popular music and dance type. Researches in Ghana have shown that most of these popular dances that have developed together with their musical types have lived on over the years; these musical types bore the same names with their corresponding dances. However, dances that have developed with music genres that do not share similar names such as Messup, *Gbodzors* and *Apaanoo* have fizzled out quickly. A similar situation can be referred to in the USA where ragtime music and dance originated from African Americans and leisure industry agents immediately capitalized on its commercial potential (Dodds, 2011: 54). The above phenomenon is an indication of the direct relationship between a popular dance and its music.

In Ghana, since dance studios are rare, performance to music are on the streets corners, drinking bars, night clubs and several open places, which helps in generating interest and subsequently sales of music records, compact disc or tapes. For Ghana therefore, there is an intense symbiotic relation between popular music and dance that bears similar names, which seem to prolong their life span because perhaps they are considered as a whole music and dance genre by the populace. A similar situation is presented by Kraines and Pryor in *Jump into Jazz*; they aver that 'Jazz dance has been greatly influenced by social and popular music- especially jazz music. The two jazz forms evolved together, each echoing and affecting developments in the other' (2005: 1). Today, jazz dance and

music still exist as dynamic popular arts genres across the world and have been institutionalized. It is on this same standpoint that the longevity of popular dances in Ghana is being argued.

There is also the experience that dances that come together with their musical types have the tendency of engulfing new movement developments (popular movements) that fall within their domain. Highlife, for example, adopted some Latino dance movements like Salsa, Chachachaa, and other local popular dances such as *Osoode*, *Sikyji* and *Asaadue*. This is because newly developed or adopted movement that possess the semiotics and syntax of the popular dance in question will be performed to its corresponding music in fashion, which invariably bears the same name, making it easier to be subsumed. This argument suggests that the *Azonto* dance has subsumed a lot of other dances like the *Amanda*, *Truck pusher*, *Alqaida* and *Gongon* or 'shoulder dances'² and has created a pseudo-paradigm, because its creative process has semblance to that of highlife suggesting the possibility of longevity.

Contributions of the University of Ghana in Preservation

In the past, the Department of Dance Studies at the University of Ghana has trained students by broadening their scope of movement knowledge and basic technical skills on selected traditional African dances, some modern dance and jazz, some acrobatic movements. During the 2010/2011 academic year, the Department of Dance Studies started introducing popular dance movements as part of the training curriculum. The popularization of *Azonto* dance therefore necessitated the retrieving, codifying and inclusion of its movements in the training scheme.

Today, the Department of Dance Studies has a repertoire of *Azonto* dance movements, which serves as archival popular dance materials.

It was in a similar vein that Ghana's premier president, Kwame Nkrumah, in 1962 charged the Ghana Dance Ensemble through the Institute of African Studies and School of Music and Drama at the University of Ghana to research and document almost all the Ghanaian traditional dances (Adinku:1996).

Presently, the Ghana Dance Ensemble is the repository of the various traditional dances across the country. Similarly, the Department of Dance Studies at the University of Ghana is a research and preservation centre for popular dances in Ghana.



Figure 1: Members of Ghana Dance Ensemble and Students of the School of Performing Arts in popular dance technique class.
Source: Solomon Dartey Theatre Arts photo archives, University of Ghana.



Figure2: Students of the School of Performing Arts in Azonto dance performance.
Source: Solomon Dartey Theatre Arts photo archives, University of Ghana.

Origins of Azonto Dance

The *Azonto* is a dance that metamorphosed from several different dances and has been influenced by factors such as musical types, human activity and some personalities. Though the exact origin of this constantly evolving dance is vague, most dance enthusiasts believe that the *Azonto* dance originates from the Greater Accra region of Ghana precisely around the *Bukom* and James Town municipality. It is a fact in Ghana that popular dances are normally created in deprived areas, an assertion which can be substantiated by Collins (1986: 2) who argues that although highlife has been influenced by the West it is still linked to the society and addresses issues such as movement of rural people to the ethnically heterogeneous towns with their consequent problems of unemployment, poverty, crime and prostitution.

In places in the city such as Bukom, James Town, Nima, Chorkor and Korle Gonno where youth unemployment is relatively high, they spend their time learning how to dance, rap, sing and practice other art forms. Halifu Osumare's (2007: 15) theory of connective marginalities provides some connected reasons for this:

There are four major resonances, which unify hip-hop culture [in this case pop culture] across a wide span of geographic landscapes; culture, class, historical oppression, and youth rebellion.

Of course, people who find themselves ostracized as a result of cultural difference, class distinction, and historical oppression will want to express their resentment through an artistic medium. This viewpoint is buttressed by Kottak (2004) who says that popular culture (from hip-hop music to comedy) can be used to express discontent and resistance by groups that feel powerless or oppressed (p.705). Some of such discontented groups in Ghana are the *Ga* (indigenes of Accra) and the *Zongo* (Muslim community) youth in the city of Accra. It is through the ingenuity of the youth of the *Ga* and those of other communities in Accra that the *Azonto* dance was created.

It is common knowledge in Ghana that the term *azonto*, which was popularly used among senior high school students to refer to a particular life style later, became accepted by the larger population as the name for the dance. One of our primary sources, Tettey Do (a freestyle dancer from *Bukom*) indicates that the term *azonto* was first used by the *Sakawa* boys (internet fraud gangs) to refer to 'cheap loose girls'. The assertion is validated by Killakam who posted this on the web on the 25th of January 2011 under the heading 'Ghana's *Azonto* Takeover'. He points out that 'starting

off as a slang to describe a “loose”, cheap or ghetto person, *Azonto* soon became a popular word when rappers like Sarkodie started using it in their songs’.

Some Analysis of the Dance

The main movement of the *Azonto* dance that gave it the uniqueness is the ironing movement of forward and backward thrust of the arm together with the shoulder to a 4/4 time rhythm, which is sometimes terminated by a punch in the air. Meanwhile, one of the dancer’s limbs simultaneously does an isolated twist from the hip, on the ball of the foot to the same rhythm with knees slightly bent. The execution of the movements is characterized by a body posture (raised shoulders) and facial expression that depicts the dancer’s self-importance and esteem.

This posture is termed on the street as “swag”, which Brenda Dixon-Gottschild terms as ‘aesthetic of the cool’ - it carries with it an attitude (in the African American sense of the word) of carelessness combined with a calculated sense of aesthetic clarity (Gottschild, 1992), as exhibited in figure 3. This attitude exists in most Ghanaian traditional dances, which the *Ga* refer to as ‘*he woo*’ (meaning to show-off) and the *Akan* (the most predominant ethnic group in Ghana) ‘*ntsere ho*’ (meaning to show-off). Within the various Ghanaian communities, there is a common approach to dance that can be referred to in common terms as dance attitudes. These are postures and facial expressions that have been passed down from generations; an embodied Ghanaian approach and which adds to the maturity of the performer. This can be witnessed in the dances of almost all ethnic groups in Ghana.

What is even more intriguing is that the term *azonto* which originally referred to a cheap low life woman was later used for both sexes and finally adapted to mean the type of dances both of them often do. In the mid-1990s, the word *asorkpor* was coined for cheap low life women and was later transferred to mean a popular music type. Perhaps, the reference to the woman is an emulation of the capitalist approach in the use of women as sex symbols in commercials. It can be assumed therefore that the choice of a terminology that suggests cheapness is an indication that the marginalized admit that their artistic products are cheap, and likewise the ladies who indulge in it. The Ghanaian terminologies *asorkpor* and *azonto* were used derogatorily because they originated from a low class society, a social order as explained by Storey (1998) ‘a residual category, there to accommodate texts and practices that fail to meet the required standards to qualify as high culture’ (p. 6). Residual category in this instance is low culture, culture of the marginalised or popular culture.



Figure 3: Students of the School of Performing Arts in *Azonto* dance performance doing the ironing movement.
Source: Solomon Dartey Theatre Arts photo archives, University of Ghana.



Figure 4: A student of the School of Performing Arts in *Adowa* dance performance exhibiting aesthetic of the cool through facial expression and composure.
Source: Solomon Dartey Theatre Arts photo archives, University of Ghana.

Evolution of the Dance and Some Influences

The *Azonto* dance continuously evolves due to influences such as the *Ga* popular/traditional *Kpanlogo*, *Gome* dances, immediate preceding popular dances such as *Korgon*, *Gbeohe*, *Awukye*, *Kpe*, some dances from Francophone countries (former French colonies in West Africa) and *Apa* are also significant. Other influences are personalities/celebrities like Asamoah Gyan (international footballer), Gasmilla (musician), Sarkodie (musician), Reggie Rockstone (rap artiste), Bukom Banku (boxer/musician), Funny Face (stand-up comedian and actor) and the several media stations that embraced the dance. One other significant influence is the musical type in vogue, the *Azonto* music, which has *Kpanlogo* and *Gome* rhythm antecedents. The ensuing sub-topics are a cursory chronicle of the influences identified above on the *Azonto* dance.

1. Influences by Preceding Popular Dances

Azonto dance has antecedents in *Korgon* (literally meaning, 'climb the hill') developed in the mid-1990s as part of its vocabulary. The *Korgon* movement has the dancer basically suspending the body on the ball of the feet, with shoulders lifted high. The dancer pretends to push his/her hands against an imaginary bar by the waist to rhythmically lift the body up and down whilst dance-walking or sometimes running. *Gbeohe* is a dance that developed alongside *Korgon*. The dance evolved from the Francophone dance *Awilo*, which is characterized by movement done with bent knees on the ball of the feet with rhythmic opening and closing of both knees.

Dances like *Kpe* (named after the sound of a gunshot) which metamorphosed from the *Gbeohe*, was created by students of second cycle institutions and was later adopted by the masses. It involves the posturing of the body slightly tilted forward, both knees slightly flexed with one foot on the ball and a step ahead together with the corresponding hand, whilst both hands mimic the holding of a gun; at the end of every move, a gunshot is mimicked with the hands and, if possible sonically.

The people in the *Zongo* communities also created the *Awukye* dance (literally meaning, 'go back'). The dance is concentrated around the waist, with one active leg slightly flexed and on the ball of the foot the dancer attempts to lift or push an imaginary object up away from the body whilst thrusting the hip in the opposite direction, and twisting the active foot at the same time.



Figure 5: Students of the School of Performing Arts in *Azonto* dance performance doing the *Gbeohe* movement with both knees bent.

Source: Solomon Dartey Theatre Arts photo archives, University of Ghana.



Figure 6: Students of the School of Performing Arts in *Azonto* dance performance doing the *Kpe* (gunshot) movement.

Source: Solomon Dartey Theatre Arts photo archives, University of Ghana.



Figure 7: Students of the School of Performing Arts doing the *Awukye* movement.
Source: Solomon Dartey Theatre Arts photo archives, University of Ghana.



Figure 8: Students of the School of Performing Arts in *Azonto* dance performance, doing the *Apaa* movement.
Source: Solomon Dartey Theatre Arts photo archives, University of Ghana.

Another significant dance is the *Amanda* that was originally initiated by Ga gay men. Aneley Sackey (one of our informants from Bubuashie, a suburb in Accra) believes the dance was transmuted from American popular solo artist, Beyonce's dance movement and later developed using Ghanaian aesthetics.

Perhaps one of the most conspicuous among the dances that preceded the *Azonto* dance is the *Apa* dance (meaning 'work'). According to Kofi Ayetey (a primary source from *Bukom* in Accra), the dance involved a lot of body touching movements, signs of making phone calls, disc-jockeying, boxing, chatting-up a woman, and ironing. First of all, there is the issue of gender in the terminology *Azonto* discussed earlier in the paper; in *Apa*, therefore, there is a dialogue between the male dancer and the *azonto* (cheap low-life woman) lady. This dialogue includes an expression of love, phone calls, drinking, description of chores and jobs, boxing and many others. A kind of movement vocabulary was developed over time, which was ostensibly transferred to *Azonto* dance.

2. Influences by Human Activity

Human activities within Accra Central - *Bukom*, James Town, *Chorkor*, and *Korle Gonno* - have helped in shaping the *Azonto* dance. Movements from activities such as boxing, telephony retail business, traditional laundering, disc jockeying and driving, which are the common occupational activities of the youth in these areas are those employed in the *Azonto* dance. Contributions have also been made by people in some urban centres in Accra and Kumasi, including 'street communities', pubs, night clubs; in fact, local film producers have produced films such as *Azonto Ghost* and others with themes centring on the dance. The report above is central to Dodds' understanding of popular dance, which is the contesting power relations between the commercial industries whose activities produce and disseminate popular dance and the popular dance enthusiasts who create locally articulated practices (Dodds, 2011: 64) suggesting that although popular dance is a locally created articulated practice, commercial industries like record and film producers have always capitalized on its connection to the masses in order to cash in, thereby furthering its popularity through commercials. Dodd's understanding is replicated in the circumstances surrounding the development of the *Azonto* dance and explains the endemic nature of the dance, an unstoppable progression. One other intriguing human activity is the 'night street dances' in front of the popular Havana and Club House drinking spots in the heart of Accra around James Town, which serve as a converging, rehearsal and training grounds for dancers, musicians, footballers, boxers,

actors and other individuals. It is on these streets that most of the dances are created and individuals add their personal touches to these movements and the interesting ones are imitated by the masses. Stearns and Stearns (1994), in their study of American jazz dance, describe the terminology 'vernacular'; a word used by scholars interchangeably with popular, which they intend to mean 'native and home-grown', outline cases of study that occur in professional films and theatre contexts, bars, clubs, dance halls, and 'street' environs. Across the world, popular dance and its music surface wherever the masses are gathered either for their enjoyment for free; as in street corners or for a token as in music records/compact discs, videos and films. Roy Shuker (2002), in tracing the paths of ubiquitous popular music, identifies malls, walk-mans, parks, films, television, radio, 'ghetto blasters, club culture, music press and stadium concerts as palpable mediums, which is certainly the case of *Azonto* dance in Ghana.

3. Influences by Musicians and the Media

Numerous musicians have contributed to the development of the *Azonto* dance in Ghana; this is so because the dance and its music exist in tandem. Stephen Atta Owusu (2012) enumerates some hip-life musicians who helped in commercialising *Azonto*, such as *The African Girl* by Castro; *Aboodaatoi* by Gasmilla (the *Azonto* king); *Shashee Wowo* by Stay Jay; *You Go Kill Me* by Sarkodie; *Azonto* by Fuse ODG and many more.

Other writers have attributed the creation of the dance to musicians like Sarkodie, whilst other musicians like Gasmilla have claimed ownership during several of his numerous interviews on radio and television. Amongst the musicians who claim ownership of the *Azonto* dance perhaps it is Gasmilla who has always impressed audiences anytime he performs the dance. This is more so because he hails from the place of origin of the *Azonto* dance and had also been around during its inception. Though their claims have been questioned by many, the fact still remains that the contributions of these musicians are immeasurable and therefore cannot be ignored, which are evidenced in the earlier argument on popular music and dance under the section 'Longevity and Possible Institutionalization'. Buckland (1983) provides a definition of popular dance that suggests a close correlation between the dance and the music and the fashionable centres they are transmitted through (p.326).



Figure 9: Gasmilla and his dancers performing the Azonto dance in the video *Azonto King*.

Source: *The Ghana-Nigeria warfare Over Azonto*, www.spy.ghana.com.



Figure 10: P. Square and his dancers performing in the *Alingo* video.

Source: *Samini Slaps P. Square with 'Azonto/Alingo'* exposeghana.com.

Steven Okai Nunoo, another source of our research from James Town in Accra, recalls: 'I danced *Azonto* together with Gasmilla in his video *Azonto King* way before the music style became popular.'

This is also evidenced in Kilakam's (2011) assertion of how the dance and music became popular when rappers like Sarkodie and other popular musicians used the terminology in their songs. In fact, because Sarkodie had earlier used the terminology in his song, it gave them the audacity to claim ownership of the dance.

Africans and African Diasporan Youth

There have been a few cross-border influences like dances from the Francophone countries in West Africa, such as *Zougla*, *Kwasakwasasa* that have been transmuted into *Azonto* movements. Cross-influences have also occurred between Ghana and Nigeria where Ghanaian movement such as *Awukye* and Nigerian movements like *Etiki* or *Kukere* have both utilized movement isolation in the hip. In fact, Nigerian pop group P. Square attempted to annex the *Azonto* dance by creating a similar dance and music titled *Alingo*, sparking off a media feud between the two countries.



Figure 11: Asamoah Gyan and his teammates in the *Azonto* dance performance.

Source: Meet Bimbi: Africa's *Azonto* Dance. www.meetbimbi.com.

There have been several other instances indicating the rapid diffusion and endemic nature of the *Azonto* craze. Ghanaian actor Abeiku Saigo in an interview recalls witnessing a teenage African American in a tube station in the United States of America performing the dance dexterously to the admiration of numerous pedestrian audiences. There have been several *Azonto* competitions in the United Kingdom in which all races participated actively. The above claim can be substantiated by this title on Google: *Ghana's Azonto craze takes over dancefloors across the world...* <http://www.guardian.co.uk/world/2012/sep/03/ghana-azonto-dance-craze-world>. The word craze as used in the title suggests something that suddenly becomes popular, and 'take over' and 'world' are self-explanatory. This and many similar information can be sited in several media and social media suggesting how widespread the *Azonto* dance is and how it has influenced many Africans in the Diaspora, African Americans and other races across the world.

The Asamoah Gyan Factor

It is believed that "Baby Jet" Asamoah Gyan's dances at the 2010 Football World Cup in South Africa is one factor that caused other nations to be attracted to Ghanaian popular dances. The Ghanaian players during the 2010 South Africa World Cup would perform some of the *Azonto* dance movements anytime they scored.

Again, the footballer's stint with music when he was featured by the musician Castro in the hit song *Back On and On*, released in 2011, which was aired any time he celebrated his goals with dances at Sunderland in the United Kingdom actually popularized the dance across the world. His movements were mainly *Gbeohe* and *Awukye* movements, which are part of the *Azonto* dance today. Kilakam (2011) affirms how the dance was made popular through footballer and musician Gyan's celebrations after scoring in the 2010 African Cup and English Premier League with Sunderland.

Braimah Kamoko, the Ghanaian boxer and musician, popularly known as *Bukom Banku*, also claims ownership of the dance. Kamoko performs the dance in the ring before and after his fights, which are most often televised across the world. The nature of work of these all youthful artists demands they relate favourably with their fans, and the best way to do that is through the popular arts, which have always created a camaraderie environment because it is a platform for experiencing shared commonalities. One explanation that extends further this discourse is by Collins (2013): "Because of its inter-ethnic nature, popular art also

provides African polyglot cities with a common artistic language or 'lingua franca'" (p. 462).

There is also the view that most of the discussed artistes are multi-talented. Performers like Castro, though a very talented musician is also a dexterous dancer. Gyan, the Ghanaian footballer, and Funny Face, the comedian, both double as musicians and dancers. There are several other stars that are multi-talented and have used their career platform (through the media) to promote popular dance or arts after they have come to national or world prominence. For these 'stars', therefore, performing the popular dance is connecting to their fans. This is an indication that the popular dance/arts/culture is a substitute common language for today's youth.

Conclusion

In this article, a trajectory of popular dance development in Ghana has been traced with the view to unravelling what causes its longevity and possible institutionalization. It has been argued that in Ghana most popular dances that have developed together with their corresponding music that bear the same name have longevity, and the ability to subsume other dances created before or after its existence but yet still possess its semiotics and syntaxes. Based on the theoretical constructs of scholars like Sherrill Dodds, John Collins and a few others, a better understanding of the nuances that help in perpetuating the existence of popular dance with particular reference to Ghana is achieved.

The contributions of the University of Ghana in helping to preserve the *Azonto* dance through gathering and researching into it and some other popular dances are also discussed in this paper. The paper also chronicles the genesis of the *Azonto* dance, enumerating all the dances that preceded it whilst describing and analyzing the important movement qualities of the dance. The evolution of the dance is also discussed, culminating into a study of some influences that have helped to popularize the dance within Ghana and the world at large. One identified important influence on the dance is the activities in *Bukom* and James Town. Today, whilst the Ghanaian community outside *Bukom*, James Town and their suburbs are still enjoying their basic *Azonto* movements, the people of *Bukom* and their surroundings have termed the new development in the dance, *Alkaida*, an indication of the study, growth and expansion of the *Azonto* dance vocabulary.

Other very important identified influences include musicians, the media, African diasporic youth and Asamoah Gyan. The paper argues that the world was overtaken by the *Azonto* frenzy, probably because

tabloid newspapers, social media and televisions across the world carried Gyan's story and his dance performances in their reports. These are platforms that allow millions of spectators across the world to witness the dance, making it increasingly popular. Collins (2013: 463) provides some reasons for this phenomenon, citing internationalization of black popular performance, exodus of African performing artistes abroad and the influx/spread of digital information technology.

This paper is built around a theoretical framework that avers that popular dances are mediums through which the youth communicate and channel their grievances. Ghana is be-devilled with several problems, such as poverty, diseases, environmental degradation, conflicts and subtle political and social misunderstandings; it is only prudent that institutions and government alike, study the communicative tools of the vulnerable youth (for example, the *Azonto* dance) in order to be able to effectively dialogue with them. Presently in Ghana, several corporate bodies have capitalized on the use of the *Azonto* dance in their television commercials in order to reach their target audience- the youth. It is in the light of this that the Department of Dance Studies of the School of Performing Arts at the University of Ghana has embarked on researching and documenting these various movements in popular Ghanaian dances for posterity and much more for education.

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Notes

- ¹ Hiplife is a fusion of hip pop and highlife music interspersed with rap in the Ghanaian local dialect which developed in the nineties among the youth.
- ² *Alqaida*, *Gongon* or shoulder dances are popular dance styles that were developed after *Azonto* dance