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The Afropop landscape: A continuum fusion of trans border black dances, crystallised as contemporary Africanist intangible cultural identity.¹

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Abstract

This article particularly examines how Afropop dance amalgamates by drawing on current popular dances from different African nations, constantly reinventing itself and subsuming other dances from black diasporan dancers from Europe and the USA. Contributions from within and without the African continent are constantly shaping the dance landscape across the world today, more so because of social media. In the last ten years Afropop has grown in leaps and bounds attracting the interest of several youths across the world. New dance moves as well as routines and dance challenges are constantly shaping the dance landscape. Dancers such as Dancegod Loyd, Ezuntey Flex, Incredible Zigi, Afrobeat, Endurance and Afronita, all from Ghana, continually influence the Afropop dance landscape and are invited across the world to undertake workshops. As a result, these young talents have developed career paths in dance and survive within the dance landscape whilst adorned with the dance practice everywhere they go as an African identity marker, a phenomenon which did not exist in the past. The word Afro was introduced into the African music and dance cultural scene in the late 1960s and early 1970s. Chief amongst the originators of the musical types were Fela Anikulapo-Kuti who created Afrobeat, Osibisa band who created Afrorock,

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Ghanaba who was involved with Afrojazz, etc., all together referred to as Afro Soul Collins, 2018). In recent times, a new derivative of Afropop music and dance type also known as Afrobeats has evolved. Interestingly, the dance is as popular as the music making their combined representation a strong cultural marker. The article thrives on analysis of data collected in the form of interviews as well as examination of social media videos. The paper concludes that it is the totality of the activities of these young dancers, and by extension, the Afrobeats musicians that has gradually shaped the Afropop dance landscape.

Introduction

The colonial interregnum in Africa allowed the Europeans who took over administrative responsibilities research into African behaviour and cultural practices. Several of such research disregarded African culture including music and dance practices, classifying them as inferior, what Manuh and Sutherland-Addy describe as “self-destructive myths about African inferiority” 2013:1). The initial biased colonial gaze of African music and dance resulted in several African scholars condemning such Eurocentric views after gaining independence. The result? Several African leaders after independence, amidst the fast-developing world, pushed for a resurgence of traditional African culture, tied to Pan-Africanism. New cultural developments, including hybrid creations, became engulfed by this resurging cultural agenda.

During the colonial period however, interaction between indigenous musicians and colonial musicians and regiments resulted in novel creations such as highlife, soukous, and several others classified as popular music Collins, 2013). The new creative products, through the resurging cultural agenda, were regarded as typically African. It is in the light of this that Collins argues, “...these new art-styles contain distinctive features that express the identities, symbols and underlying value orientations of their African practitioners and audiences” Collins, 2013:445). In the area of dance, a similar derivative popular dance and neo-traditional dance occurred, but despite their acculturated nature, they still maintained their African identity.

It is the re-iteration and establishment of this African identity that initially prompted Kwame Nkrumah, the first Ghanaian president, to introduce the term “African Personality” Asiedu, 2014: 2). Nkrumah’s idea was based on the Pan-Africanist movement espoused by blacks such as W. E. Dubois, Kwame Nkrumah, Frantz Fanon, Leopold S. Senghor, Patrice E. Lumumba et. cetera. This whole idea of Africanness espoused by these scholars stems from “the global racial hierarchy” which “is an edifice etched in stone” Osumare, 2024:2). It is based on this, that African Americans coined the term ‘Afro’, a symbolic representation of blackness and its concomitant culture.

The term Afro was first used by African Americans in the 1930s, appearing in the *Oakland Tribune* in 1938. Etymologically, Afro derives from the Latin word prefix)

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Afr- meaning Africa, and the suffix -o- probably meaning origin. Its use became more prominent in the United States of America during the civil rights movement in the 1960s. Afro was therefore signified by the characteristic hairstyle that became an identity marker of black people, a source of pride and empowerment. It later became a general adjective for black styles of clothing, musical type and many more (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). In the 1960s, according to Ebony Media “The Afro was Black beauty personified without White validation, and it did not care about critics” (online source). It is this same ideology that was transferred to all performances of persons of African origin.

Afro was therefore introduced as a postcolonial West African music jargon in the late 1960s and early 1970s by young musicians, who were experimenting the fusion of African and Western rhythms. Musicians such as Fela Anikulapo-Kuti who created Afrobeat, the group called Osibisa band created Afrorock, Ghanaba Warren Gamaliel Kpakpo Akwei) was involved with Afrojazz, et cetera, all together referred to as Afro Soul (Collins, 2018).

Contemporary Afropop dance and Afrobeats music – The amalgamation

Abrantee Boateng (DJ Abrantee) a Ghanaian-British radio host and television presenter, is credited with coining the term Afrobeats to group West African music that transcended the national designations such as Ghanaian hiplife and Nigerian Naija Beats in the early 2010s (Ayobade, 2024). Today Afropop, Afrobeats or Afro-fusion, are music and dance genres rooted in African movement cultures, rhythms, as well as urban expressions. Whilst some practitioners have questioned the interchangeable uses of the terms, this article finds the differences so subtle that they are subsumed by the prefix ‘Afro’. The performances serve, not only as entertainment, but also as a medium for negotiating identity. Understanding the theoretical basis of identity in Afropop requires an exploration of heritage and identity markers within both historical and contemporary frameworks. The paper will mostly use Afropop when discussing the dances and Afrobeats when discussing the music.

In the Afropop or Afro dance space, identity markers represented by the body and costumes, are especially dynamic. They include the use of African movement mannerisms, languages e.g., Twi, Ga, Yoruba, Pidgin. fashion inspired by African or Western or global prints, props, hairstyles, and musical samples from traditional folk songs or local instruments versus foreign or global ones et cetera (Ofosu, 2019).

According to Ugor (2023) Afrobeats music) has remained arguably the most dominant form of popular youth culture on the continent for at least a decade. Identity markers of Afrobeats, on the other hand, are predominantly represented by language, fusion of African and global musical samples, local African and foreign instruments employed, fashion inspired by African or Western or global prints et cetera.

Afro-fusion was originally practiced in South Africa by several groups conspicuous amongst which is South African choreographer Sylvia Glasser's *Moving into Dance* in 1978 (Jedua, 2023). Before South Africa's independence in the 1993, "Afro-fusion was a provocative and resistance dance form" (Jedua, 2023:20). and it was only after independence that it transmogrified into a recognised blend or hybrid dance representation. Today, however, Afro-fusion is a term that refers music and dance practice emanating from West Africa championed by musicians such as Burna Boy, Wizkid, Davido, King Promise, Black Sherif and Mr. Eazi. It is music particularly from Nigeria and Ghana as well as the diaspora (London) that incorporates West African musical idioms and diverse musical forms especially from the West. Its key features are blending, diversity and innovation (Ayobade, 2024).

Theoretical basis of identity in Afropop

According to Chris Baker identity is "best described as a discursive practice that enacts or produces that which it names through citation and reiteration of norms or conventions" it is an "essence signified through signs of taste, beliefs, attitudes and lifestyles" (2004:94). While it is generally classified as 'identity', a "discussive-performative" (2004:94. signifiers (Pierce, 1958) "collective self-image" (Geldof, 2007:94. each specific practice can be referred to as an identity marker. Identity markers are symbols, attributes, or cultural elements that signify and communicate individual or group representations. These include language, dress, musical style, religion, social norms, and performance (As cited in Osumare, 2012: 90).

Theoretically, identity markers are understood through a constructivist lens, which posits that identity is not fixed but socially constructed through interaction and representation (Hall, 1996). Afropop artists use socially constructed representations or markers to position themselves within multiple cultural frameworks: local tradition, postcolonial African identity, and global urban modernity (Royston, 2022; Ofori, 2009 & 2019;). Elisabeth Eides based on Spivak's (1988) initial ideas on subaltern studies, describes the latter notion as Strategic Essentialism, she argues that "strategic essentialism may thus be seen as a political strategy whereby differences within a group) are temporarily downplayed and unity assumed for the sake of achieving political goals". This paper argues that Afropop, Afrobeats or Afro-fusion, may have shades of different meanings, but the term Afro suggest a common political tone or agenda that unifies all under one umbrella – culture based on 'Africanness', 'Blackness' and people of African origin, in this particular case, represented by mixtures of dance and music within and without Africa.

Afropop artists draw heavily on intangible heritage—storytelling, proverb-infused lyrics, signs, symbols, rhythmic patterns, and vocal styles passed down through generations, as foundational elements in their music [dance] (Nkansa-

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Kyeremateng, 2017). These heritages form the cultural resources through which Afropop artists assert and recreate identities, both individual and collective. The dance on the other hand draws from existing traditional dances (Ofosu, 2021)

Contemporary identity in Afropop

Contemporary identity, particularly in Afropop, is fluid, hybrid, and performative. It moves beyond the singular ethnic or national identity towards a plural, global one. It is a site of identity negotiation where artists balance between being authentically African and globally relevant. In this context, it aligns with Stuart Hall's (1992) notion of *new identities* formed at the intersection of history, culture, and power. Afropop artists draw on their heritage to shape identities that are transnational, cosmopolitan, and youth-oriented. They navigate local and global platforms, reshaping what it means to be African in the 21st century. Collins (2013) best describes the situation as the cornerstone of a "booming 'World Music' phenomenon due to internationalisation of black popular performance [or dance]" ... "and the impact of new digital technology" p. 463).

For instance, Ghanaian artistes such as Black Sherif fuses highlife elements with trap music, combining Islamic spirituality, street life experiences, and traditional rhythms to articulate a new form of African urban youth identity. These artistic choices are not merely aesthetic—they are political acts of self-definition in response to globalization, diaspora influences, and cultural commodification. Additionally, digital media has become a critical site for the expression and visibility of these identities. Platforms like YouTube, TikTok, and Instagram allow Afropop artists to perform identity for both local and global audiences, covertly challenging Western perceptions of African culture (Jeduah, 2023 & Thompson, 2022).

Afropop's theoretical framework of identity is deeply rooted in heritage, where tangible and intangible elements provide resources for the construction of identity. These help in the creation of identity markers that are used by artists to negotiate the contemporary terrain. Contemporary identity markers are fluid, hybrid, and globally connected. In this way, Afropop becomes a powerful cultural form that derives from several African countries including African and black diasporan influences and therefore articulates modern African identity in a globalized world. The latter view, based on the influence of social media dance challenges, has according to Royson resulted in "reshaping the global optics on identity and the Black body (Wade, 2017) commonly called *African viral dance* (AVD). A new genre of digital screen media" 2022: 2. ushered into the internet zeitgeist and crystalized as an African intangible cultural identity.

The Afropop and Afrobeats landscape, social media and identity creation

Afropop and Afrobeats music and dance craze was triggered by azonto dance that which started going viral in 2010 to 2011 when Ghanaian football legend who

plied his trade in United Kingdom's Sutherland Football Club danced *awukye* one of the pop dance moves subsumed by *azonto* dance) anytime he scored. By the time curious journalist made efforts to find out about the dance in Ghana, *azonto* dance had surfaced initiating an information domino-effect Ofori and Dei, 2014). By 2013, *azonto* dance had started to gain a large international following on YouTube Jeduah, 2023; Ofori, 2021; Ofori and Dei 2014. a phenomenon credited to British-born Ghanaian musician Fuse ODG. The musician "created a music video for his song titled Azonto, by having two people, a male and a female do the *azonto* in public spaces in London, as well as attempt to teach passers-by how to do the dance" (Roystone, 2024:5; Jeduah, 2023:5). Fuse ODG's bold attempt resulted in *azonto* going so viral, it was being played in hotels lobbies, shopping centres and in spaces where trending pop songs are usually played in London.

The Afropop and Afrobeats landscape is constantly and dominantly chaperoned by social media, invariably creating a culture that is representative and loved by the youth of African origin as well as other youth across the world. It is quite evident from Bakar A. Jeduah's PhD. thesis title – *Afrobeats on Social Media: Transnational flows, Intercultural formations, and identity construction* that Afrobeats virality is due to social media and it certainly creates an intercultural identity. Jeduah argues that "the current generation rely on digital platforms to express themselves," and that these "platforms or sites offer groups or subgroups a space to create communal culture and adhere to shared norms" (2023:144).

According to Rotman and Preece (2010), groups or subgroups of people with shared values, converge on YouTube, Tik Tok and Instagram to create a communal culture online communities) by adhering to specific norms as cited by Roystone (2024). Users ascribe meaning to such videos shared on the platforms Kozinets (2002) which are actions that signify ways of belonging. "This wide visibility, together with the new social interaction mechanisms, shapes intercultural interaction in the global sphere and presents new self-presentation strategies for young people of African descent" Jeduah: 150) defining the Afropop landscape.

Mode of approach – Afropop within and without Africa

Our research approach is qualitative including ethnographic interviews as well as digital ethnography. We interviewed some astute Ghanaian Afropop dancers as well as study their YouTube, TikTok and Instagram videos to ascertain their content and patronage. We also watched videos of Afropop dancers and some Afrobeats musicians in the diaspora, identify trending videos and how these online communities created and shared their values. We ask some basic questions including:

1. What are the names of various dance styles or movements that define Afropop movements shared on social media and taught in the diaspora.

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2. Which countries are these dances from?
3. How do dancers perceive the role of Afropop dance in expressing African cultural identity in a transborder context?
4. In what ways have transnational influences shaped your dance style and performance practices?
5. How do you represent yourself on social media platforms or when you travel abroad for Afropop workshops, e.g. choice of music, clothes, movements et cetera?

We also asked follow up questions for clarification. In our study of the Afropop dance videos of our respondents on social media, we tease out the various movements or styles and Afrobeats music from across Africa, and those from the diaspora, to demonstrate the transborder tendencies of Afropop and beats culture.

1. Analysis of Dancegod Loyd dancescape Video)

Music

In this section we look at Dancegod Loyd's Laud Anoo Konadu – a renowned Afropop dancer and social media influencer. Afropop dance video on TikTok performed to Davido's *With You*, featuring Nigerian born Omah Lay, suggesting a Nigerian/America and Nigerian music collaboration, with dances created in Ghana by Ghanaians.

Costume

In this video Dancegod Loyd, who is wearing a purple shell-suit trouser and a jacket with a front zipper, with a hanging hood. he is wearing a purple winter cap and plane glasses. He performs a dance narrative with a guy also wearing a white and dark-blue shell suit, his white trousers have a yellow tiger printed on both legs, and he dons a haircut that is dyed beige at the top. They engage three other ladies dressed like South African school girls all wearing miniskirts with white shirts and ties. Whilst Dancegod Loyd and his colleague's dressing suggest a global outfit with a tinge of African flavour from the tiger prints, the three ladies dressing emphasises the South African presence on social media platforms in recent time. The costume representations suggest the plurality of the Afropop landscape. In recent times Dance God Loyd has switched to wearing patch trousers in his videos and travels. It must be noted patch jeans was introduced by Ghanaian fashion icon Ricci Osei in Europe and the USA, in the 1970s and 80s. It is a Ghanaian local concept, which was made global by the icon, and it is being played back by Dancegod Loyd a social media dancer, choreographer and influencer.

Dance styles

The performance starts with an act: the male dancer trips in front of the three ladies. He and Dancegod Loyd try to engage the girls and the girls ignore them. The video cuts to the ladies performing by a nice car, seductively inviting the guys as they interpret the song in the similitude of very sensual movements. The

presentation is a combination of African drama, dance, and music total theatre) presented in a global scenery. Their movements are predominantly South African *amapiano* and *pantsula*, body popping and Michael Jackson's Thriller movements from the USA, snippets of West African Francophone hip gyrations, Ghanaian *azonto* boxing dance, Nigerian *legwork* dance, Ghanaian *gbeohe* (open your thighs) movements, *kuduru* (meaning hard ass) movements from Angola, all performed to Davido's music. These dance move across Africa and the African American pop movements suggests an African dance practice fused with African American dances – a representation of African cultural heritage within a global context – plurality of African.

2. Analysis DWP Academy's Dancescape Video)

DWP Dance With Purpose) Academy is a dance academy initiated and co-founded by Dancegod Loyd, Afrobeat Nicholas Botwe) and Quables a.k.a. Ernest Kwablah is a talent manager, influencer, and brand ambassador).

Music

Another typical example of an Afropop dance performance is a video posted on YouTube by Afrobeat on 22 August 2019. The video features members of DWP academy, a choreography by Afrobeat performed to a South Africa song by Sho Madjosi titled John Cena. The music title is an organic global mix, since it is the name of a global wrestling icon known across the world, that is being utilised by a South African pop singer.

Costume

The dance starts with Dancegod Loyd in a black hood top and black track suit trousers together with two other male dancers in purple and blue training trousers with sweat tops, flanked by the entire academy. All the dancers are dressed in colourful T-shirts, sweatshirts, track suits, training pairs of trousers, some with dyed hair, sneakers et cetera. The scene depicts Africans dressed in Western training outfits but with attitudes based on traditional African dance cypher – often exhibited by various traditional dance groups, characterised by constant exclamations, appreciative screams and very euphoric ambiances.

Dance

The performance begins with a first group of all male dancers who perform a combination of *thuso phala* and *gwara gwara* from the South Africa involves placing the weight on one leg on the ball, often with a bounce, while bending the knees and bringing it in towards the static leg.) with some subtle traces of body popping. The second group, an all-girl trio enters with *azonto* and then exits with a move resembling the *kpe*, all from Ghana. The third group performs intricate leg movements usually found in *pantsula* from South Africa, *kuduro* from Angola and Ghanaian *azonto* and *asorkpor*. Right at the end of the intricate foot, works is Michael Jackson's signature high kick move, which usually transitions into dips that the group blends nicely into south African *head vosho* from south Africa. The fourth group performs Nigerian *legwork* with traces of *head vosho* from South

Africa). The last group perform *aare*, *agado* and *kiki* step popular dance moves from the gay community) from Ghana including some of the other movement vocabularies already mentioned above. This video exemplifies the whole concept of Afropop that is, bringing different styles, voices, and identities together to create a distinct repertoire representative of the African youth – the plurality of African dance exemplified.

3. Analysis of Afrobeat's dancescape Interview)

In an interaction with Afrobeat Ofosu, (2025) he claimed most of the clients in his beginners' class are Caucasian but the very best dancers in the advance classes, are predominantly black. In his European tour advertisement video for his master class, Afrobeat impresses upon the audience: "This is just the basics, the basic experience of the whole African culture, tomorrow I am teaching an advance class, which is very intensive..." video sent to us by Afrobeat). By this assertion Afrobeat confirms that he sees Afropop as African culture being exported to Europe.

In his basic level class Afrobeat's choice of movements are predominantly Ghanaian such as *alkayida*, *gbeohe*, and some leg works from Nigeria, *Kudauro* from Angola, and *Amapiano* from South Africa. However, scrutiny of the master class dance movements revealed a fusion of snippets of dances from across Africa including *pantsula*, *kuduro*, *legwork*, intricate body popping, tutting from USA African American culture and freezes introduced by Incredible Zigi Michael Amofa from Ghana). Bottom line is all the movements represent a peculiar African culture mixed with aspects of Western hip hop moves.

On the issues concerning the content of Afrobeat's classes abroad he confirms that whilst he picks movements from across Africa and the world he also creates a lot more movements in addition. "I do not go to night clubs and gatherings I am often rehearsing dance moves and creating new moves that can appeal to people across the world" Afrobeat avers. He continues "My movements are based on African pop dance culture and other interesting ones from the diaspora".

When asked how he represents himself when he travels Afrobeat averred that he makes sure he uses Afrobeats hit songs in addition to his Afropop dance styles. His clothes, aside from his braids that are very African with cowries, are very global, made up of colourful T-shirts, trending pair of trousers or baggy shorts and very good brand trainers. "I always represent myself as a contemporary African" he said (Ofosu, 2025).

4. Analysis of Ezunkey Flex's Dancescape interview)

In a telephone conversation with Ezunkey Flex Ofosu (2025) who is also currently on a European tour, he talked about the fact that Afropop dance is directly connected to traditional African dances passed from generation to generation) and that is what drives his passion and interest.

Songs

When asked about the type of songs he uses in his performances, Ezuntay Flex argues that he selects trending Afrobeats music as well as DJ mixes to demonstrate his skill. “ My choice of songs are typically African pop songs, I make sure I represent myself, first, as Ghanaian and secondly as an African” He does not compromise his music – typically Ghanaian or African.

Dance

Ezuntay Flex or Eflex a.k.a. #IAMAZONTO Michael Kweku Afriyie Sarpong) first iterate the fact that his social media dances are different from his touring workshops. Eflex touring workshops in Europe are purely Ghanaian he claims, where during which he demonstrates the relationship between *azonto* a Ghanaian popular dance and *kpalongo* and *gome* Ghanaian traditional dances of the Ga people in the capital Accra region. Eflex opines that his touring workshops are more about educating the youth about Ghana and Africa. He continues “my social media videos however are predominantly about Afropop. I do a variety of dances from Ghana and those across Africa” Ofori (2025). Flex claims he is more African on social media but very Ghanaian when he travels on tour. Concerning some of the dance styles he employs he mentions *amanda*, *agado*, *kiki step*, *azonto* all from Ghana. *legwork* Nigeria. et cetera. Other dance moves on his social media platforms include *kojo*, *network*, *angwa*, *kper* (punctuation move) all from Ghana and *kuduro* Angola.

Costumes

On the issue of costumes Eflex intimated he prefers wearing T-shirts, preferably Ghanaian branded, Shorts with a touch of African feel, including caps and good dancing trainers. The most important thing for him is representing his country and spreading the news about Africa.

Conclusion

Afropop, Afrobeats, Afro dance and Afro-fusion has become a melting pot for the culture of people of African origin across the world. Today, whilst Afrobeats musicians have gained visibility even at American and some global awards ceremonies, Afropop or Afro dance has also gone very global. In the last ten to fifteen years, Afropop dancers have continued to exhibit their talents to the world attracting several followers. Several of these dancers are invited across the world. As we write this paper Afrobeats and Ezuntay Flex both renowned Afropop dancers from Ghana are on their European tour. Their activities across Europe, Asia and America are creating an African presence that is being fed upon by diasporan blacks and Caucasians alike. The phenomenon is evident of the plurality of African dance exhibited in the Afropop dances of these individuals resulting in dances crystallised as contemporary Africanist intangible cultural identity.

The emergence of social media and the ubiquitous online platforms have given African youth the edge and media power to project African identities across the

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globe thus reimagining the stereotypical western gaze of Africa. Through the collective efforts of dancers both within Africa and in the diaspora, Afrobeats/Afropop/Afro dance/Afro-fusion continues to appear in spaces originally reserved for supposed high-brow art forms. Social media activities that began as self-presentation and impression management strategies for young people have obviously become avenues to catapult local trends to international audiences. In conclusion, Afropop dance is based on the constant flux of the dance landscape, movements created in various countries across Africa keep revitalising the landscape, yet still the various dances are connected to their traditional roots.

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