The London School of Economics and Political Science

Social-mediated *Afrobeats* culture and identity construction among young Africans in homeland and diasporic space

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Declaration

I certify that the thesis I have presented for examination for the MPhil/PhD degree of the London School of Economics and Political Science is solely my own work other than where I have clearly indicated that it is the work of others (in which case the extent of any work carried out jointly by me and any other person is clearly identified in it).

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Abstract

This project investigates how young African people across homeland and diasporic contexts construct collective identity through their engagement in and with Afrobeats culture. Taking a multi-sited ethnographic approach, it examines the interconnections between locales in Accra and in London that, extended through a social media ecology, constitute a transnational cultural space. It explores how meanings of shared African identity, generated and/or validated within Afrobeats culture, are produced, circulated, and contested within this space. It relies on participant observation (offline and online) and semi-structured interviews to uncover practices, (re)presentations, and narratives that are mobilised by young Africans toward defining individual and collective modes of *being* and *belonging*.

Drawing from literature across cultural studies, media & communications, sociology, psychology, migration studies, and cultural geography, the thesis analyses the interrelations of music culture, media, and space. It contributes to a spatial approach to identity, proposing concepts such as *everywhereness* and *collocational homeliness* that elucidate extended translocational conceptions of home. The empirical work builds on existing popular and scholarly discourse on how the global popularity of Afrobeats generates moments for affirmation and for cohesion; but, also, for contestation. The work scrutinises the role of music culture in processes of meaning-making and investigates how everyday modes of cultural engagement and popularised self-styling authenticate existing conceptions of Africanness and inform new ones. It also examines the sutures between homeland and diaspora and explores the symbolic boundaries that contour and clarify the meanings of Africanness.

The thesis offers context-specific analytical categories for explaining logics of particularity, proposing interventions that support nuanced perspectives vis-à-vis dominant dichotomies in individualist/collectivist, constructivist/essentialist traditions. It reveals layers of conviviality and the expanses of Black joy, while also unravelling contradictory conceptions of race. Through this work, the thesis attempts to untangle the nuanced social and cultural mechanisms shaping the co-constitution of a digitally mediated collective African identity.

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For Afi, my mother, my first and best teacher.

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Chapter 1

'It's not "their" music, it's *our* music': an introduction

"The rhythm, the beat, was to become the central underlying principle."

Sylvia Wynter (n.d., p.877)

This project did not begin with an attention to *rhythm*. Not directly. The central organising thought for its epistemological concerns was always identity. It still is. However, although it dissolved into the background until the final stages of the research process—until the full view of things became available—rhythm, too, was always there. It was in the textures of the music culture through which the project worked to explore meanings of identity: in the waveforms of the diverse musics (McKittrick, 2016), in the synchronicity of the bodies that moved to them (Chasteen, 2004), and in the visual cadences of the unique motifs of their textiles (Hannel, 2006). It was in the interconnections among the young Africans at the heart of this music culture; in the routines of their everyday sociality (Lefebvre, 2013); in the 'multiplicity of flows that emanate from, pass through, and centre upon' their shared space (Edensor, 2010, p.3). It was, as they would tell me, in their *vibe*—their embodied, 'African' rhythm.

What exactly 'African' means *to them* is the question at the core of this project. It is a difficult question; one that scholars have been attempting to answer based on notions of collectiveness—of commonality in ancestry (Shepperson, 1962; Banks Henries, 1977), in ethos (Nkrumah, 1963; Lake, 1995; Araoye, 2021), and/or in culture (Sow, 1989). We have attempted to do so in largely (strategically) essentialist terms (Spivak, 1988). We have had to, because of the historical socio-cultural intrusions and racist-terrorist erasures of trans-Atlantic slavery and colonialism. We have tended to do so, also, because, for many African societies, identity has always been about the weaving of relations with the related other, the ancestors, and the cosmos (Mbembe, 2024); about the rhythms of human interrelation (Gyekye, 2010).

There is a constructive logic in considering an Africanness based on commonality. Those that have done so have sought to offer a solution to a crisis of identity (Gordon & Osoro, 1996; Montle & Mogoboya, 2020). The logic, here, rested on the assumption that, prior to European contact, there were certain commonalities that linked the fairly homogenous populations of Africa, and, by excavating these commonalities, an authentic African identity can be recovered (Anise, 1974; Mazrui, 2005). As Stuart Hall (1994) reminds us, there is some value in attending to this 'conception of a

rediscovered, essential identity', particularly for its power to 'offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation' (p.224). Nonetheless, Africa's diversity—its many peoples, our scattered geographies, multifurcated histories, and our varied, intricate cultures—renders any essentialised, fixed-in-the-past conceptualisation of Africanness analytically inexpedient, even if we might be able to trace certain continuities among them (Anise, 1974; Mazrui, 2005). As Hall (1994) also reminds us, we should not think of the imagined coherence as fixed to the 'essentialised past' it is recovered from, but view it as something continuously undergoing transformation, subject to 'the continuous 'play' of history, culture, and power'; something multiple, something constructed (1994, p.225).

To think of African identity in this sense, then, would be to consider the primordial commonalities—the cultures, in essence—that precolonial 'hidden histories' (Hall, 1994, p.224) might reveal and of their evolutions into contemporary continuities. Or, in other words, to think of 'what we have become' as a way of understanding who we collectively are (Hall, 1994, p.225). If a collective African identity is to be understood, therefore, it might be useful to attempt to distil it from the commonalities in culture across African societies; commonalities that are developed out of the intercourses, the rhythms between/among the distinctive value systems that have historically been specific to populations of African descent (Sow, 1989).

This thesis functions within such a logic. It understands African identity as belonging 'to the future as much as to the past' (Hall, 1994, p.225); as much a product of primordiality as of currency; as attached to pre-colonial commonalities between/among African cultures as to their modern continuities. The thesis begins from the premise that something new is happening in the ways young Africans are constructing their sense of self and of belonging; that it is happening through and because of their engagement with a co-created culture; and that it is happening within a transnational space extended and sustained by convergences of digital and social media. It is an African music culture–Afrobeats–that has, as its foundation, traditional West-African cultural forms (which, themselves, may be traced from precolonial cultures), but that also continues to evolve as it is reconfigured through extended engagement across the rest of the continent and its diasporas. By co-creation, I mean the coming-together of the various tastes, styles, standards, values, influences, aesthetics, *etc.* from homeland and from diaspora into the collective production of Afrobeats culture. The thesis focuses on understanding how African identity is constructed through engagement with this music culture, and how it is circulated, (re)configured, contested, and/or settled across varying geographies of Africanness, expecting that the observed continuities (and divergences) would provide a more nuanced sense of how Africanness is lived, as well as richer, fuller knowledge of the contextual/social conditions that structure its construction.

Growing up in 1990s Accra, there was always what we categorised as 'African music'. My mother's warm but untuned voice crooning an Eʊe rendition of '*Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika*'[1], as my brother and I drudged through the Saturday morning cleaning. Angélique Kidjo's 'Malaika'[2] on the radio, as we rode to school in the back of my father's Datsun. The groups of girls in the talent shows, who would perform choreographies to Brenda Fassie's 'Vulindlela'. Or, perhaps, Francis Kwame, my primary school best friend, singing the hook to 'Zangaléwa'[3] , dancing in the front of our classroom, and I behind our shared wooden desk, providing the drumline. These songs were from different parts of our continent, but they were never foreign. In the segmented television music chart shows, in the 'moral panic' (Hall et al, 1978) over what was ruining the youth, in the stalls of the pirated music vendors, 'foreign' was always Western. Because their rhythms were familiar, they felt like ours, even if their language was unknown to us. It is this givenness that I suggest might be traceable through Afrobeats.

Afrobeats: a lived backstory

Bear with me. Attempting to produce a history of Afrobeats is an endeavour that requires caution. Claims over the origins of the ***core sound*** that was formative for what now has become an umbrella designation of African musics (Ayobade, 2024) are contested. The matter, it would seem, has, now, settled into a kind of uneasy consensus that it was produced in Ghana, Nigeria, and in the UK; uneasy, because Afrobeats' Nigerian superstars and some contributors across popular discourse, still claim Nigeria to be its origin (see, for example, Ghali, 2024; Moutot, 2024; The Breakfast Club, 2024). The challenge with this claim, besides the obvious elision of Ghana and the African diasporas, is that it diminishes the actual syncretic quality of the sound and the many influences that have led to its current form. I attempt, here, to address this. I do not offer this as an authoritative history; I work, here, neither as a historian nor a music scholar. I want to work with relative caution, as a media researcher studying a cultural phenomenon, and present, instead, a kind of lived

[1] The Xhosa Methodist hymn, composed by Enoch Sontonga, that became national anthem for several countries in southern and eastern Africa. The Eʊe version my mother sang was taught to her in her Methodist primary school in the 1960s, likely translated by missionaries for its more Christian messaging.

[2] A 1992 cover of Miriam Makeba's rendition of a Swahili love song, first recorded by Kenyan singer Fadhili William, with disputed authorship. Angélique is Beninese. Miriam is South African.

[3] The 1986 song by Cameroonian makossa band, Golden Sounds, that was covered by Colombian pop star, Shakira, for her 2010 World Cup theme song 'Waka Waka'.

backstory—an account of the evolution of Afrobeats as has been documented, but, also, offered within a timeline, as I have experienced it, and as I consider it to be relevant to this thesis.

'The backbone of Afrobeats': tracing the roots of a distinctive sound

In late June 2022, Netflix released '*Afrobeats: The Backstory*', a documentary series[4] produced and directed by Nigerian music industry insider, Ayo Shonaiya, who admits in the final episode of the docuseries: "the foundation of Afrobeats is from Ghana". His reasoning, which he had previously articulated in an August 2020 tweet[5], is that the "the *Kpanlogo* drum beat from Ghana" is the "backbone of the Afrobeats genre". In the second episode of the docuseries, this 'beat'—more accurately the ensemble of Ga[6] traditional drum patterns and the five-tone bell[7]—is highlighted as one of the first signs of the 'changing sound' of Nigerian music. Shonaiya, who had been a talent agent and manager for a notable list of Nigerian artists before and around the period of this 'changing sound', is steadfast, despite some discontent among his compatriots, as he continues to double down on his reasoning across multiple interviews, following the release of the docuseries.

He is not wrong. The ensemble is a uniquely Ghanaian adaptation. The drum rhythm[8], in its most base form, is carried, typically, by a master solo on the *oblente*, and supported by two *tswreshi (*more widely referred to as *'kpanlogo* drums'). In expanded performances, there can often be additions of one or two *tamalin* and/or a *gome*. This drum rhythm (in any combination) is also accompanied by idiophones[9] in any combination of the *axatse* (gourd rattle) and/or the *gankogui* (bell) and/or the *atoke* (high bell) adopted from the Eʊe[10], and/or the *frikyiwa* (thumb bell) adopted from the Akan[11], which provide the 3:2 rhythmic bell[12] (or son clave) pattern in duple-pulse structure, usually for temporal organisation. The ensemble is the core of neo-folk Ga dance-music such as *kpanlogo*[13] and *kolomashi* (that preceded it), which also

[4] https://www.netflix.com/gb/title/81591183
[5] https://x.com/ayoshonaiya/status/1289663065806446592?s=46
[6] Ethnic group settled mainly in the south-south-east (Greater Accra Region) of Ghana
[7] Or, perhaps, more recognisably, 'clave' (noted as a central feature of Afro-Cuban music)
[8] See a selection of drums at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=vZQGRuRb-Kk
[9] The Ga have names for some of these (e.g. '*nono*' for the *gankogui*) [see Nketia, 1958] but scholarly consensus is that they were adopted from the Eʊe (see Jones, 1959, for detailed descriptions and uses).
[10] Ethnic group settled mainly in south-eastern and eastern Ghana (and parts of Togo and Benin)
[11] Ethnic group settled mainly in central, south-western, and western Ghana (and minority groups in La Côte d'Ivoire)
[12] See performance of pattern at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=rFAgmpErrek&list=RDrFAgmpErrek&start_radio=1
[13] See performance at: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/fINEo_0IEUw . In some variations, there is an alternate/complementary three-tone bell rhythm, complemented by a two-tone clap rhythm: https://www.youtube.com/shorts/vjkW8A-bF7k

bear degrees of congruity (Avorgbedor, 1983) with other neo-folk Ghanaian musics such as the *borborbor* [14]of the Eʊe, the *simpa* of the Dagomba[15], and the *bɔsoɛ* of the Akan (Collins, 1976). *Kpanlogo* was the name of both the music and its accompanying dance style.

These are neo-folk (Nketia, 1958) because they 'can be classed as modern-traditional' (Collins, 1976, p.66), reliant on indigenous musical instruments and sonic scales, but, having emerged around the 1950s, were also influenced by the rhythmic patterns of, especially, Ghanaian *highlife* (Collins, 1976; Nketia, 1959), which preceded them. Highlife, the syncretic popular music that emerged in the late 1800s in Ghana (then, the 'Gold Coast'), although 'based on…rhythms of African foundation', was, itself, innovated with the 'inspiration of Western band music' (Nketia, 1957, p.14). European influence, I have to stress here, was not direct. Local Fante fishermen were inspired by mainly the Black regimental bandsmen, who had been brought to the Gold Coast by the British from the Caribbean. Having heard the calypso and mento fusions that these bandsmen played in their spare time, the Fante fishermen were inspired to create their own version, which they named '*adaha*' (Collins, 1989), an earlier form of the music that would later be known as 'The High Life' (Nketia, 1957). The base structure was built on the Akan heptatonic scale–principally, based on the *osibi* music of the Fante sub-ethnic group (Collins, 1989)–which, bearing some similarities with the European diatonic scale, fostered the merging of the music styles and fuelled its popularity across the country by the 1920s (Collins, 1976).

However, there were influences from further along the West African coastline as well, with two-finger *palm-wine* guitar playing styles, improvised by the Kru of Liberia; and older *gome* drumming styles from Sierra Leone (Collins, 1989). As the Kru were a 'traditionally maritime peoples who had settlements (Kru Towns) down the West African coast before the colonial period', they were able to 'spread around West African coastal towns some of the basic *palm-wine* guitar chord patterns' (Collins, 1989, p.222). *Gome* styles were innovated by Jamaican Maroons, who, having escaped enslavement, had created a fusion of the musical styles that were native to the African civilisations from which they had been violently abducted and transported to the Caribbean. Those styles were reintroduced to West Africa, when some Maroons were resettled in Sierra Leone by the British, following abolishment of slavery (see Collins, 1989, for a more comprehensive account).

Based on this brief history, we might observe the great diversity of influences that led to the creation of the "*kpanlogo* beat" Shoyaina refers to, in the inter-ethnic instrumental influences and in the fusions of *highlife* patterns, which, too,

[14]See performance at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=y1HKv_RPQWc&list=RDy1HKv_RPQWc&start_radio=1
[15] Ethnic group settled mainly in northern Ghana

were influenced by musics from across West Africa and blended styles from the Caribbean. Those Caribbean styles were, themselves, originally based on African music patterns (Collins, 1989), which were primarily structured by variations of the 3:2 bell pattern that 'might well be described as the African signature tune' (Jones, 1959, p.3). It is a circular route that brought a kind of resonance to *highlife*, which made it the cross-ethnic, cross-class sound of a newly independent Ghana (Nketia, 1957); and would propel it to wild popularity across West Africa in the 1950s and the 1960s (Plangeman, 2013).

At this point, 'The High Life'[16] had undergone multiple transformations, having shed itself of the colonial segregationist label of 'high-class' band music that originally led to its christening (Nketia, 1957). By the time of independence, it had acquired a sort of composite rhythm—a fusion of elements of the styles of the so-called 'high-class' dance orchestra, the street brass bands, and the popular guitar bands. The differences were not significant, however; they differed mainly in the content (and venues) of their shows. The dance orchestras played ballroom music in addition to Western music (e.g. swing, ragtime, quickstep) and *highlife*, the brass bands played *highlife* and some Western music, and the guitar bands played predominantly (guitar-heavy) *highlife* (Collins, 1976). This composite rhythm was the base of two standard forms of *highlife*; the fast tempo, which was the normative *highlife*, and a slower tempo, which was known as '*blues*' (Nketia, 1957) or *ɔdɔsɔŋ* (Kaye, 1999). Both forms were played by the newer *highlife* bands of the independence era.

The most celebrated of these was The Tempos[17] band, led by E.T. Mensah, a trumpeter and saxophonist, who became near-synonymous with the *highlife* of that era. The band achieved unprecedented success across the West-African sub-region, especially in Nigeria, where it introduced the composite rhythm of Ghanaian *highlife* in the 1950s (Collins, 1976). Older styles such as *gome* and *ashiko* had been introduced to Nigerian audiences prior to '50s (Collins, 1989); however, it was Mensah's style that gained the widest popularity, leading to the formation of bands modelled after the Tempos such as Victor Olaiya's Cool Cats and Rex Lawson's band (Collins, 1976; Oti, 2009). Ghanaian *highlife* had taken root by the '60s, and several Ghanaian bands started to record music in Yoruba, Igbo, and Efik, with many of these songs gaining nationwide success in Nigeria (Oti, 2009). The Ghana sound had become so highly regarded for its quality that Rex Lawson, whose music became popular in Nigeria around the '60s, was thought to be Ghanaian, as his Kalabari/Ijaw language (which were less widely spoken in the urban areas) compositions were mistaken for Ghanaian languages (Oti,

[16] What the working-class folk of Accra initially called the music (before the name settled into 'highlife'), because it was originally reserved for the elite classes, and was played in the ballrooms and places of 'high society' (see Collins, 1976).
[17] I refer, here, to the reorganised Tempos band, after most of the original members, including famous master drummer, Kofi Ghanaba (or Guy Warren), who has been credited with the innovation of Afro-jazz. See Collins (1976) for more on the original Tempos band.

2009). The Ghanaian sound became the standard (Oti, 2009), inspiring musicians such as Fela Kuti, who, after having studied highlife styles in Ghana, watching stars such as Joe Mensah (Collins, 2012), would later develop his jazz/funk fusion of *highlife* into what he called *Afrobeat* (Collins, 1976).

This is the first point of contention for the debate on the origin of Afrobeats. Nigerians who claim Nigeria to be Afrobeats' singular origin do so based on the assumption that the newer style of music is merely an evolution of Fela's *Afrobeat*. As Ayobade (2024) notes, the 's' is important. While some Afrobeats artists have sampled Fela's music, the sonic bases of the music styles differ. *Afrobeat* does not use the 3:2 bell rhythm that is foundational to Afrobeats; it uses, instead, a two-beat clave/rim (which is more characteristic of salsa and mambo), if a clave pattern is present at all. *Afrobeat* also has a rhythmic basis, developed by the half- Ghanaian-half Nigerian drummer, Tony Allen, that relies on 'improvisations, polyrhythmic high-hat pulses, and offbeat accents that supplied rhythmic space and ventilation for the dance groove' (Collins, 2012, p.15). Afrobeats does not rely on these features.

In Ghana, *Afrobeat* gained some popularity in the 1970s, and Fela travelled to Ghana often to play shows at Napoleon Club, where E.T. Mensah and South African trumpeter, Hugh Masekela, also played. Masekela had been in exile and had spent some time in Ghana playing with the Hedzoleh Afro-rock band, which was resident at Napoleon Club (Collins, 2012). Afro-rock was created by Osibisa, a London-based band, led by three Ghanaian former *highlife* musicians: Teddy Osei, Mac Tonto (his brother), and Sol Amarfio (a drummer from their old *highlife* band). The band also included other members from Ghana, from the Caribbean and, later, Nigeria. Osibisa became one of the most successful international bands of 1970s, and that success led to the formation of several other bands in Ghana (including Hedzoleh), and across Africa (including Harare and Juluka in South Africa; Acid Band in Zimbabwe; Kapingbdi group in Liberia; Super Combo in Sierra Leone)[18]. While the music was a syncretic mix of funk, calypso, reggae, rock, pop, and jazz, the foundational sound remained very heavily *osibi*-fusion *highlife* (or *osibisaaba*) from which the group coined its name (Collins, 1976).

This was the next step in the evolution of the *highlife* sound. Drawn by Black music traditions and the Afrocentric look and messaging of James Brown, Jimi Hendrixx, Sly and the Family Stone, Ghanaian musicians started to experiment with Afro- versions of these genres (Collins, 2012). By the 1980s and 1990s, Ghanaian *highlife* had become more of an umbrella term for these fusion styles, which included (the disco/funk-inspired) *burgher highlife*, *reggae highlife*, *gospel highlife, Afro-pop*, and *Afro-soul*, among others (Cofie, 2020; Plangeman, 2013).

[18] See Collins (2012, pp.13-15) for a more comprehensive list of bands.

These were the *highlifes* of my childhood. The older styles remained, in some form, in more electronic machine-beat recordings, but that composite rhythm of the 1960s had now been designated 'traditional' or *palm-wine highlife*, and had become almost solely attributed to Koo Nimo (see Kaye, 1999, p.159). His music, according to the musician himself, was intended to be a contemporary 'enrichment' of the old guitar band *highlife* styles (Kaye, 1999, p.159). However, the newer *highlifes* had become so dominant across the airwaves that Koo Nimo's music had become classified as a preservation of the folk music of the 'forefathers' (Kaye, 1999). This dominance was such that, many Ghanaians of my generation would likely only have had their first contact with the *highlife* of the 60s through the sampled loops and cuts in *hiplife* hooks.

'The Present-Day Sound': Hiplife, Azonto, and Afrobeats

Rap music started to gain popularity in Ghana in the early 1990s, with largely middle-class youth imitating hip-hop artists, and mimicking the 'fashions, 'bling-bling' adornment and projected images of materialistic success' (Collins, 2014, p.566). *Hiplife* grew out of this emerging sub-culture, when, in the mid-1990s, Reggie Rockstone, a pioneer of the form, returned to Accra from London, where he had been a member of an underground hip-hop group. In Ghana, Rockstone started to rap in a mix of English and Twi, sampling *highlife* music and mixing that sound with hip-hop beats (Shipley, 2013). Because of this blend, he would name the genre '*hiplife*' ('hip' from the first half of hip-hop, and 'life' from the second half of *highlife*). The genre would gain widespread appeal from the late 1990s, inspiring sub-genres such as *GH Rap* (hardcore rap) and *raglife* (ragga+*highlife*) (Collins, 2014), and, by the mid-2000s, would start to draw in Nigerian audiences. In 2003, for instance, *hiplife* trio, VIP's 'Ahomka Wom' was so popular in Nigeria, it inspired an Igbo language cover, 'Make We Jolly', performed by Nigerian screen legend, Patience Ozokwor. The success of 'Ahomka Wom' led to a record deal for VIP with industry-leading Nigerian label, Kennis Music. Kennis Music would, then, go on to produce several collaborations between *hiplife* artists and Nigerian artists, including a remix of Nigerian Afro-pop[19] star, 2Face Idibia's 'Nfana Ibaga', which featured Reggie Rockstone and Jamaican dancehall great, Beenie Man.

Hiplife had started to gain international appeal. Around the same period, artists of Ghanaian and Nigerian descent had started to gain prominence within the UK hip-hop scene (Shipley, 2013). Rappers Dizzie Rascal, Lethal Bizzle, and Sway

[19] This is what the genre was called at the time. Also, sometimes, 'Nigerian pop' (see Oloworekende, 2024) or 'Naija Beats' (Rens, 2021)

were all born to Ghanaian parents and had all started to achieve mainstream success in the UK around the time *hiplife* had started to gain international attention. Sway, who became the first UK rapper to win a BET Hip-hop Award, started to leverage his success and reach back toward the continent. Several collaborations would follow, mainly with *hiplife* artists in Ghana, but also, notably, with 2Face Idibia, who, by the time of the collaboration in 2010, had become a leading figure in the Nigerian music scene. Sway's collaboration with '70s *highlife* great, Gyedu-Blay Ambolley, was, perhaps, the most significant, as it was the first UK hip-hop song to incorporate the *kpanlogo* rhythm (Shipley, 2013), albeit in a slightly adapted form. The production, however, seemed a kind of mix between the two dominant production styles of 2000s *hiplife*.

In the early 2000s, I was in an all-boys' boarding school. *Hiplife* fandom among the boys was divided into two major factions, based on the production styles of the two most popular producers. There was a faction that preferred Hammer, whose production relied heavily on samples of brass-band-style *highlife*; and there was the other faction that preferred JayQ, who relied heavily on samples of the *kpanlogo* rhythm. For each, a set of dances were improvised; but, a dance we called the *azonto* was versatile enough for both. In 2011, six years after I had left secondary school, I encountered *azonto* again, but it had evolved into an entirely new dance.

This new *azonto* had more moves; it was slicker, faster, edgier; it required less hopping, more gliding; and, by the end of 2011, it had become an urban craze. The dance had borrowed from the *kpanlogo* dance of the 50s and 60s, most sources claimed, and had been developed by street dancers in the same coastal Ga communities of Accra that developed the *kpanlogo* dance[20]. It was unclear if the dance had been improvised to match the new style of *hiplife* production or if the dance had inspired the new style of production. Regardless, much like *kpanlogo* before it, the dance had become so popular, the music became eponymous. When Sarkodie and E.L., two of the more regarded *hiplife* rappers of the new school, combined to make 'U Go Kill Me', the era of *azonto* music, despite initial resistance from *hiplife* purists, had fully arrived. The song became the unofficial soundtrack to viral YouTube video compilations of dance performances in secondary schools across Ghana, further feeding the frenzy.

[20] The music video for one of the first *azonto* songs, Gasmilla's 'Aboodatoi', was shot in one of these communities. Gasmilla, the rapper, performed the dance in the music video, alongside members of the community, and, this, essentially became an unofficial tutorial for the dance.

YouTube would become crucial to the next phase in the evolution of *azonto*. In late 2011, Afro Mask, a London-based mime dance duo, uploaded a video[21], which would play a key role in shaping the transnational digital life of what would become 'Afrobeats'. The two dancers developed and recorded an *azonto* choreography, which they performed in several locations across London, including Trafalgar Square. In some of the frames, they were shown teaching other Londoners basic *azonto* moves, as they danced to Fuse ODG's 'Azonto'. The song became the first hit *azonto* collaboration between artists from the UK diaspora and from homeland[22]. The video went viral, and it was instrumental to transporting the *azonto* craze to the UK (see McQuaid, 2014). Following its success, Fuse ODG launched a dance challenge. Submissions were to take the form of the flash-mob style Afro Mask had used for 'Azonto', and the winners would be featured in the music video for Fuse's next single 'Antenna'. The challenge received uploaded entries from the UK, France, Germany, and The Netherlands.

Around the same time, Nigerian Afro-pop star, D'banj, released his hit record, 'Oliver Twist', which also had started to make waves in the UK music scene. The song, which used a similar tempo as some of the *azonto* songs in Ghana, also relied on dance video virality to gain popularity, entering the official UK charts, and spending 17 weeks in the Top 75 (see The Native, 2017). In the music video for the song, D'banj and his dancers performed what was essentially the *azonto*.

This is the second point of contention. For those who insist on its Nigerian origins, 'Oliver Twist' is often cited (see Adofo, 2024; Conteh, 2022; Hancox, 2012) as the first Afrobeats song. Again, the sonic properties of the Afrobeats sound and that of 'Oliver Twist' differ. 'Oliver Twist' had neither the *kpanlogo* rhythm nor the 3:2 bell pattern that would distinguish Afrobeats from the 'Naija Beats' of the late 2000s, which had heavy pop and R&B influences. In fact, P-Square, who had been among the most recognisable names of that era in Nigerian music, self-fashioned, for most of their career, after U.S. R&B superstar, Usher.

The beginnings of the Afrobeats sound were in the slower *azonto* productions that begun to emerge in late 2012 in Ghana and in the UK, which featured the *kpanlogo* rhythm more prominently than the *azonto* productions of 2011. In the way that I experienced it, the transportation of this sound to Nigeria was through the music of Mr. Eazi, whose early

[21] Prior to this, the male member of the duo had uploaded two videos titled 'Azonto In London', in which he had been dancing to Sarkodie's 'U Go Kill Me' and Stay Jay's 'Shashee Wowo' at different locations across London.
[22] Singer, Fuse ODG was born in London to Ghanaian parents. In 2011, he returned to Ghana and teamed up with producer, Killbeats, and rapper, Itz Tiffany, who was featured on the song.

songs were produced in the slower *azonto* style. Having lived in Ghana since 2007, Mr. Eazi's musical style was heavily influenced by Ghanaian music. In 2013, he produced, in collaboration with Ghanaian-British producer, Juls, what he called 'Banku music', which would merge the newer *azonto* style with a Nigerian pidgin singing style. The music was successful, and more music like it begun to come out of Nigeria. In 2017, Mr. Eazi admitted this on Capital Xtra, a UK urban dance music radio station[23]. Like Ayo Shoyaina, Mr. Eazi has been vocal about the impact of the *kpanlogo* rhythm on Afrobeats. In 2017, he tweeted: "*Ghana's influence on present day "Nigerian Sound" cannot be overemphasized!!!*", and, while some of his compatriots agreed with him, the tweet was met with intense backlash (see BellaNaija, 2017).

Following its circuits, the stages of its evolution, its circular journey within Africa and through its diasporas and back, we might, perhaps, think more of Afrobeats' ***core sound*** as *African*; not as a singularity, but as an umbrella category. We might see, in a way that is often missed in analyses based on the Black Atlantic frame (Gilroy, 1993), the *routes* that Black musics take across Black worlds *and* back to their *root*. We might see how Afrobeats could be an important lens through which we can understand these movements.

Studying Afrobeats: aims and justifications

Afrobeats has evolved, now, from those beginnings as a distinctive sound, into a music culture[24] that encompasses the musics, the dances, the fashions, the colloquialisms, the attitudes, the *vibes* that characterise the young people of Africa and its diasporas. There are pluralities, here, that must be emphasised. These populations are not homogenous. They have their distinct tastes, styles, standards, values, influences, aesthetics, *etc*. What becomes of interest is how these diverse elements are brought into relation through processes of co-creation. These are dynamic processes of constant (re)negotiation of meanings that are produced in the interrelations between groups of young people, who, despite their heterogeneity, create and sustain a space within which they clarify and assert the boundaries of what they believe to be their commonality.

[23] See interview at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=DuJWVlM4NHU

[24] By music culture, I refer to 'a group of people's total involvement with music: ideas, [behaviours], artifacts and material culture, institutions, and musical product' (Titon, 2009, p.121)

In a 2021 interview on 'The Zeze Mills Show', a YouTube talk-show popular among Black-British audiences, dancehall legend, Beenie Man, is asked what he thinks of Afrobeats[25]. "*I love Afrobeats*", he replies, *"[because] the music is from Africa; the drum is from Africa…[we know that] the bass is from Jamaica, but…*". The host interrupts. She is attempting to steer the conversation toward concerns she says she has observed online amongst British-Caribbean youth in the UK around Afrobeats' increased prominence at the expense of bashment. Beenie Man interjects: "*There's a lot of Africans living in England, you know that?…so [your concern is] it's all about pushing the Afrobeats and it's all about pushing their music?*" The host responds in the affirmative, to which Beenie Man summarily asserts: "*It's not 'their' music; it's our music. We are all Black people*." The host nods in agreement.

Their interaction reflects not only the expanded meanings of collective identity that tend to be produced in relation to Afrobeats culture; it also reveals the processes of contestation and of (re)negotiation that come to clarify those notions of commonality. In their brief exchange, a vast geography of Africanness is imagined. The continent of Africa becomes one node in this geography, and Jamaica becomes another, each assumed to have produced some separate aspect of Afrobeats. The UK diasporas also become separate nodes in this geography, with the juxtaposition between Afrobeats and bashment marking their (imagined) dissimilarity. A final node in this geography emerges in the online or digital community (Saha, 2021) within which this imagined dissimilarity is rearticulated. However, by the end of this exchange, all of these are brought together in their re-arrangement of the meanings of Afrobeats; in the articulation of a point of commonality within which their differences can still co-exist; in the recasting of Africanness as Blackness, and Blackness as Africanness.

This thesis aims to understand this dynamic, complex process. It seeks to understand how African identity is constructed through Afrobeats culture; through the confluences that emerge as young Africans across homeland and diasporic space engage with it. With its increased popularity and widespread acceptance into Black popular culture, might Afrobeats culture offer young Africans an Afro-cool[26] value that repositions them within cultural hierarchies of Blackness that have historically been disparaging toward them (de Witte, 2019)? Across popular commentary (e.g. Adegoke, 2015; Mullaly, 2022; Ofiaja, 2017) young Africans are articulating sentiments of a new-found pride in their expression of a collective African identity, how does this relate with the emergence of Afrobeats culture as the new 'cool'? Emerging research (Alakija, 2016; Chacko, 2018; Rens, 2021) has identified this trend, but little is known on *how* the process unfolds. This thesis attempts to fill this gap by drawing out the mechanisms that are involved in the construction of both individual

[25] See interview at: https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=CIUBk32pSWY

[26] I understand Afro-cool as 'the positive, creatively hybrid, mostly urban-oriented [styling] of Africanness' (de Witte, 2014, p.288).

and collective African identity among young Africans, with focus on the relations between those in the homeland and those in the diaspora, in their exposure to and engagement with Afrobeats culture.

How might the Afro-cool value that Afrobeats offers young Africans position them to reclaim dispossessed space, as the music culture opens to them the material and symbolic arenas from which they previously had been excluded? Across popular discourse (see Egobiambu, 2025; Williams, 2022), sentiments of pride in the increased visibility that Afrobeats offers Africa within the global cultural imagination are not uncommon. These articulations often emerge in the contexts of endeavours to 'forcefully challenge the excision of Africa from contemporary articulations of [B]lackness on the world stage' (Ayobade, 2024, p.2). Studies (Alakija, 2016; Chacko, 2018) suggest that young Africans' use of social media play certain roles in this process; that young Africans rely on their social media networks to engage with Afrobeats culture in a way that asserts their place within this global imagination, and with other young Africans who 'unite in identifying as African' (de Witte, 2019, p.37). Social media, then, offer an interconnectedness that extends and sustains transnational networks of sharing between one diaspora and others (de Witte, 2019). We understand that diasporic populations rely on digital media and technologies to connect with homeland (Saha, 2021). What we might stand to understand better is how homeland populations might reach back to diaspora; how their interrelations might materialise beyond the opposition of 'diaspora to homeland as either two distinct entities or poles of a continuum' (Laguerre, 2009, p.195). Social-mediated Afrobeats culture offers a frame within which we might gain such an understanding, as it creates an interconnectedness across varying diasporic and homeland geographies. A second aim of this thesis, therefore, is to draw out the ways in which young Africans are co-constituting/expanding/reclaiming a transnational space of identity through Afrobeats culture and social media.

In their interactions with other young Africans that articulate this sense of commonality (de Witte, 2019), how might notions of what it means to *be* African become validated? How do they rely on these meanings to distinguish individuals who are similar to them from those who are not, and to mark the contours of the African collective within which they belong? How does this reflect what we know of symbolic and social boundaries? We understand that these processes of differentiation tend to be 'central to the constitution of the self' (Lamont et al, 2015, p.852) and to the clarification of group affinities (Wimmer, 2013). What we do not know is how these processes might clarify one another; or what 'the dynamic between self-identification and social categorisation' might be (Lamont et al, 2015, p.853). This thesis aims to elucidate this; to reveal how these processes might interrelate; how the boundaries that clarify who young Africans believe they belong with might work to define the boundary of who they believe they are.

In this sense, there is a more ambitious overarching aim. Predominantly, we think about identity as constructed, flexible, always in process; but, also, to certain degrees, as almost 'inherently ephemeral and unstable' (Wimmer, 2013, p.3). This raises certain practical challenges for explaining manifestations of singularity (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) and for analysing contexts within which there may be high degrees of social closure (Wimmer, 2013). The alternative has been to 'harden' the concept (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000); to assign to it a universality, a naturalness, an unchangingness. This view has largely been relegated to the margins of scholarly discourse (Wimmer, 2013), mainly because it fundamentally fixes a homogeneity onto a social world that is characterised by heterogeneity. However, increasingly, social and political actors are deploying this language of homogeneity in their projects of segregation. How can we explain this without validating that language, without relying on the conceptual tools of fixedness and of 'essences'? This thesis seeks to generate a conceptual basis for understanding identity in a different way, drawing from African traditions of thought which conceive of the individual as constituted *within* and *by* the collective, and which offer tools for conceptualising commonality despite difference. By examining the construction of collective African identity through Afrobeats culture, it seeks to develop analytical categories for understanding identity in a way that allows for us to account for its fluidity and multiplicity; but, also, to explain how it might congeal and crystallise (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

Structure of the thesis

The thesis is developed across 9 chapters. Following this first introductory chapter, I lay out my theoretical assumptions around *identity* in Chapter 2 - *'I am because we are': conceptualising identity and the collectiveness of being African*. I, first, clarify how the concept is deployed in the thesis, assembling, based on a synthesis of available conceptualisations, an understanding of identity as a sense of *being* and of *belonging*. I, then, draw on African philosophical traditions that understand the individual as constituted in and by the collective, and on concepts of perduring, trans-spatial collective Africanness, to map out, more specifically, the theoretical margins of African identity. Relying on these ideas, I build a theoretical basis for understanding how identity is *both* individually *and* collectively constructed, and how it might find certain degrees of stability—not as fixedness, but as *holdingness*—in certain contexts and structures of meaning-making such as culture and media. In this thinking, the chapter proposes certain interventions. First, it highlights how we might need to account for the importance of commonality to constructions of individual *and* collective identity, in practice (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000), where individuality may be emphasised across our more dominant constructivist literature

(Wimmer, 2013). Second, it presents the possibility of a middle ground between essentialist assumptions of fixedness and constructivist insistences on fluidity, particularly for those contexts where there might be some appearance of the manifestation of 'givenness, transsituational stability, and deep-rooted[ness]' (Wimmer, 2013, p.2), without validating claims of 'essences' or of the permanence of identity. Working within the scaffolds of these concerns, the chapter lays out the conceptual basis for a potential alternative theory of African identity, which it proposes to be multi-nodal; always encapsulating multiple categorisations that might stand alone, compete, and overlap as distinguishable meaningful groupings, or find continuity, coalesce, *hold* within specific contexts and over certain periods of time.

Chapter 3 - *It's (not) our culture: transnationalisation of culture, digitalisation, and [a] space for identity*, then, fleshes out some mitigating circumstances under which such a multi-nodal configuration would likely be produced, foregrounding the role of co-created culture, whose materialities circulate meanings of collectiveness, as they transcend space; collapse it, extend it through processes of *transnationalisation* and *digitalisation*. Specifically, it attempts to develop a conceptual basis for the argument that, the co-creation of Afrobeats culture among young Africans on the African continent and those across its diasporas is shaping a collective African identity, which is validated within the Afro-cool cultural value that Afrobeats is conceived to offer. It, therefore, relies on concepts that explain the interrelations between *culture* and *digital/social media*, and the *connections* and *space* they engender for the (re)production of meanings, as well as for their circulation, sustenance, and (re)negotiation. It maps out the cross-fertilisation among these concepts and shows how they might be understood by thinking through *home*; not only from examining diasporic imaginaries, as much of the literature has tended to do, but also from homeland perspectives. Home helps illuminate, as the chapter elucidates, the features of an transnational space that is formed through the inherent interconnections between homeland and diaspora and their sustenance through a connective place constituted by a social media ecology (Olesen, 2020). This understanding of home from both homeland and diasporic imaginations allows for a conceptualisation that makes sense of the transnational space in its expanse, but also its individual constituent places that have their distinct features, characteristics, norms, practices. This way, the chapter lays the foundation for the practical work of empirical enquiry, for which the thesis takes a multi-sited approach.

The specifics of this multi-sited approach are, then, detailed in Chapter 4 - *Multi-sitedness: a methodological framework*, wherein I relate the motivations for and justify the choices I make towards the accomplishment of the empirical enquiry. I begin by offering elaborations for the choice to situate the empirical enquiry in a qualitative research methodological framework. From there, I discuss the project's research design, briefly reflecting on the epistemological considerations that inform the choice of a multi-sited ethnographic method, before stating the research questions underpinning the study. I, then, offer more detailed discussions of the decisions made toward sampling, data collection, and data analysis,

providing justifications for these decisions in relation to the theoretical framework and the specific research context. Following this, I reflect on how my role as ethnographer shapes both the research process and its outcomes, as I consider my positionality in relation to my research participants and to the subject of enquiry itself. As I consider my obligations to my participants, I also discuss the steps that I take toward ensuring critical ethical concerns are addressed and how I ensure that the safety and privacy of my participants are safeguarded. More specifically, I detail, in this chapter, the methodological stages for this project, which involved periods of immersion within Afrobeats cultural locales, observing how groups of young Africans engage with this music culture across space, eliciting accounts of their experiences of the culture in relation to and in distinction from others, and organising these accounts into themes and subthemes. The most salient of these are presented in detailed, reflexive, and evocative narrative in the chapters that follow.

In the first of the empirical chapters, Chapter 5 - *Afrobeats culture: everywhereness, and the logics of being*, I discuss how young Africans construct their sense of *being*; how, in other words, they make sense of *who they are* through their everyday engagement with Afrobeats culture. I do so by drawing out the logics and the processes that work together to produce notions of a *true* African culture, which becomes the foundation of this sense of *being*. I begin by discussing how assumptions of the *everywhereness*—the manifold presence of Afrobeats culture in everyday life—become the basis upon which a collective African 'reality' is constructed. In this 'reality', Afrobeats is imagined to be a settled part of the fabric of everyday life across Africa. It is thought to convey aspects of the 'real' everyday routines that are common across the diverse cultures within the continent, and is thought to, *itself*, represent this commonality through its sonic qualities and its lyrical content. I demonstrate how elements of Afrobeats culture such as dance and fashion are relied upon to validate these assumptions, as they are thought to represent the traits and sensibilities that are unique to an African collective. By uncovering these logics, I demonstrate how identity is constructed *both* individually and collectively; how, for young Africans, definitions of self are constituted *within* notions of the collective.

Chapter 6 - *Home: space and the mediated rituals of belonging,* then follows. The chapter, broadly, discusses themes related to space. It foregrounds the co-constitution of space through the interrelations between homeland and diaspora. It focuses on how imaginations of 'home' might offer a lens through which the interrelations between homeland and diaspora might be understood differently—that is, beyond the dichotomous terms in which they are predominantly presented (see Laguerre, 2009). Accordingly, the concept of *collocational homeliness* is proposed as an analytical tool to explain how a sense of *feeling at home* can draw in, *simultaneously*, homeland and diasporic imaginations. The concept works to clarify how 'home' is constructed as a continuous space, constituted by many interconnected places—physical and virtual—brought into fluid relation through assumed shared experience and memory. This transnational space, the discussion reveals, is constituted by cultural locales within homeland and diaspora, as well as a convergence

of digital and social media that co-produce, circulate, (re)negotiate meanings of what it means to *belong* within an assumed African collective. The chapter, also, presents a discussion of how 'home' becomes imagined as the *root*, as an origin, as a starting point for the circulation of meanings related to a collective African identity; how its multiple places become experienced as one in the everyday performances of Afrobeats culture. By discussing instances of virality, the chapter shows how ways of being together in the physical places of homeland and diaspora can also be brought into relation through processes of digitalisation, and how they become imagined as a *vibe* that is reproduced across space.

Vibe, then, becomes the focus of Chapter 7 - *'The vibe': particularity and a sociality of Africanness.* The chapter details how conceptions of a unique African vibe become core to notions of African particularity. It reveals how these notions are formed based on *expectations* for self and for others to know, to feel, and to display attributes/attitudes related to the individual and collective ways of engaging with Afrobeats culture, and how the ability to do so might generate certain affects of pride, of affirmation, and of *Black joy*. It demonstrates how moments of especially Black joy become foundational to a conviviality that is *felt* as unique; how the continuous experience of this conviviality comes to validate assumptions of a unique African *vibe*; and how this reinforces notions of a collective African identity. The chapter reveals how this conviviality becomes the basis of a sociality of Africanness; how social media and Afrobeats culture become important in structuring this sociality; and how certain manifestations of co-creation of elements of Afrobeats culture across social media, homeland and diaspora exemplify this sociality.

Chapter 8 - *The situatedness of being, and the shifting boundaries of belonging* presents an analysis of the extents to which these notions of collective African identity are reinforced; how, in essence, they come to *hold*. The chapter begins with a discussion of how the stable meanings of African identity are scaffolded by and within Afrobeats culture, and how they become destabilised without Afrobeats as a frame of reference. The discussion reveals the depths of conviction with which a collective African identity is articulated, when considered within the context of Afrobeats culture, and shows the limits to this conviction, outside of that context. It discusses certain contradictions in articulations of the meanings that are mobilised toward definitions of Africanness, showing how those contradictions reveal certain boundaries across and within which *belonging* is negotiated. From there, the chapter focuses on how these boundaries may extend or contract; how they are negotiated, enforced, contested. It reveals the logics of inclusion in and the conditions of exclusion from the assumed African collective that define its boundaries. These are symbolic boundaries, as the chapter demonstrates, that are produced and maintained in everyday interaction, and are valorised in engagements with Afrobeats culture. I discuss how we might distinguish between inner boundaries and outer boundaries and consider how inner boundaries work in potentially mutually constitutive, interactional mechanisms to produce the *holdingness* that outer boundaries

might come to find; how, in other words, inner boundaries might inform/shape/define the contours/margins of outer boundaries. I identify this process as *boundarying*, and I demonstrate how, through this process, young Africans make sense of their collective identity, by (re)negotiating meanings, as they determine who *belongs* with them.

Chapter 9 - *'It's Afro-beats; it's African music': a conclusion* is a recapitulation of the key findings of the study, in dialogue with the core conceptual arguments I have made and my key contributions to existing knowledge. I emphasise how these findings provide answers to the research questions and how those answers may contribute to our thinking around the thesis' three broad concerns: identity, music culture, and space. I discuss how the interventions I propose to theory might be useful for scholarship and how they might provide tools for explaining the recent turn toward nativism across Western nations, as well as the revivification of biological determinist discourses toward the enforcement of social boundaries. Following this, I consider some directions this thesis might have taken, and offer them as potential areas of interest for further research related to Afrobeats, which is, now, at the time of writing this introduction, a growing area of scholarship. I, then, close the chapter with a reflection over the limitations of the project, considering, mainly, how the direction and tone of the thesis might break with convention, however justified.

Chapter 2

'I am because we are': conceptualising identity and the collectiveness of being African

"We know of no people without names, no languages or cultures in which some manner of distinctions between self and other, we and they, are not made."

John Calhoun (1994, p.9)

Identity *still* matters. It has mattered, even as psychoanalytic, post-structuralist, and cultural materialist critiques have sought to dispute the extents of its ontological, epistemological, and/or political applicability; to eliminate it (Moya, 2000). It has mattered for its usefulness in explaining the many social assemblages, the various politics of dominance and of resistance, and the constant redefinitions of societal categorisations that have marked the modern world (Gilroy, 1993; Calhoun, 1994; Hall, 1996). It continues to represent the meaning we ascribe to our ubiquitous concerns with self-knowledge (Calhoun, 1994), to the processes of social clustering that define, (re)organise, demarcate our social world, and to the positions we take within this social world based on manifestations or assumptions of mutuality in specific aspects of that self-knowledge. Conceptually, identity is core to fundamental questions about how individuals can belong within distinct communities and how this may work within the structure of the social world, providing an important analytical category for explaining changes in social/cultural systems, as well as interfaces between subjective positions and sociocultural conventionalities (Woodward, 1997). In a globalised world now increasingly marked by polarised ideological factions and contested sociocultural boundaries, it, perhaps, matters even more. It matters for prevailing popular and academic discourse on universal social and political concerns around power and inequality, sameness and difference, and erasure and reclamation. And it matters for our understanding of group affinity despite dispersal, of coexistence in diversity, of how positionalities may converge in spite of histories of separation, or because of them.

This thesis focuses on a specific identity formulation—African identity—which is considered, here, to reflect these points of importance in its embodiment of the experiences of African people and the cultures, practices, and histories that they claim to define them. I suggest that this identity is at the core of historical and contemporary claims to common ancestry, common destiny, and common experience(s) that have transcended geographical and geopolitical separation; that it brings into meaning the fluidity of ethnic, national, regional, and globalised relationalities, and points of commonality,

which even their frictions generate; and that it becomes central to movements of solidarity and of resistance against structures of oppression and erasure. The thesis operates on the premise that something new is happening amongst groups of African people in the ways that they (re)present themselves—individually and collectively—and that these evolving modes of (re)presentation codify a shared sense of *being* and of *belonging* defined not only by imaginations of sameness, but also by negotiations of difference. I consider in further detail later (in Chapter 3) what some mitigating circumstances for the new observations around the construction of Africanness might potentially be, mapping out the roles of co-created culture and of digital/social media. I will think through the interconnections they engender for the production of meanings of identity and for their circulation, sustenance, and (re)negotiation across space. But, more immediately, I work, in this chapter, to build a theoretical basis for explaining this shared sense of *being* and *belonging*, drawing briefly from discourses around identity (e.g. Castells, 2009; Gilroy, 1993; Hall, 1994; Woodward, 1997) more broadly, and mapping out the theoretical margins of African identity, more specifically, through a review of historical and contemporary conceptualisations, as I contextualise the assumptions that inform, here, my deployment of the concept.

Conceptualising identity

Before the deconstructive contributions of postmodernist theorists (forwarding variants of theories about the endlessly performative self) and critical cultural and feminist theorists (drawing from psychoanalytic traditions and emphasising subjectivity and its unconscious processes), identity, in the essentialist sense, was framed as an 'integral, originary, and unified' condition (Hall, 1996, p.1); a state of 'being', inherent and all-defining, transhistorical and unchanging. In this sense, 'being' was something measurable in authenticity, in purity; something totalising that distinguished a collective (and the individuals that shared the common traits that defined it) from others different from it; something exact, fixed in an absolute state in an essentialised past. But, as Stuart Hall (1994, p.225) argues, identity is more usefully thought of as being as much about this 'being' as it is about 'becoming'—as much a product of the past as of the future; not fixed and absolute but contingent on culture and history; not exact but always in transformation.

I use *being*, for my purposes, in a derivative and synthetic sense, collapsing, without seeking to reduce, Hall's 'being' and 'becoming' into one present, continuing state. Here, I rely on an understanding of 'who we are' (Hall, 1994, p.225)

at any present time to be a product of who we have always been ('the past') and who we are becoming ('the future'). In this form, *being* represents an internalised active process of self-knowledge that reconciles experience with aspiration, memory with change, and older embodied practices/meanings with newer modes of self-representation. But identity is not only about this *being*. It is also about *belonging*; about situating within a collective (Castells, 2009). It involves a process of identification with others, externalised; an alignment predicated on points of sameness; a positioning within group-defined meanings, within narratives of particularity; a kind of clustering of multiple resemblant states of *being*. If *being* is defined mainly by difference (Hall, 1994), *belonging* is inscribed within sameness; and knowing, as we do, that identity is as much about difference as it is about sameness (Woodward, 1997), it can be broadly thought of as a sense of *being* and of *belonging*; who we are and who we are with.

While I offer this very elementary understanding of identity, I am wary of proposing it as any kind of a definition, as I am mindful that it is debatable. It is, perhaps, the one consistency in scholarly engagement with the concept: that any attempt at defining it would likely be disputed. The debates have largely remained unsettled, as much of the discourse continues to situate between somewhat polar clusters of conceptualisation, either offering critiques against essentialist hyper-specificity, on the one hand, or constructivist ambiguity on the other, which often means that the conceptual work that 'identity' is often deployed to do becomes either too narrow or too underdefined (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). Views considered essentialist tend to privilege an externalisation of the identity formation process, understanding it to be one of discovery, a coming-to-know, a realising of a condition fixed outside of the individual (Wimmer, 2013). It is an essence towards which they have a natural disposition and to which they have unique access because of specific inherent traits that bind them and others like them (Roth *et al*., 2023). In this view, identity is often defined in collective terms, within logics of relationality (the connections that can be made between identities and distinct communities) and of stability (the seeming permanence of identities across time and space). Constructivist approaches reject this conceptualisation of identity, considering it to be more of a construction, emphasising 'fluidity and individual choice', as Andreas Wimmer (2013) points out, 'even where social reality is marked by sharp boundaries and high degrees of social closure' (p.3). There is often less focus on collectiveness in this understanding of identity, viewing definitions of identity, that assign group affinities or common attributes to all members of a social configuration, as erroneously homogenising. Here, the boundaries of collective identities are thought to be fluid, as individuals can often belong to multiple communised identities (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000).

There are, of course, merits and challenges to both approaches. On the one hand, thinking of identity in bounded terms may be reasoned as useful in explaining the clustering of multiple positionalities based on perceptions of sameness,

but it also tends to singularise the experience of identification as though it were universal, without space for tangible analysis of inherent difference. On the other hand, conceptualising identity as multiple/impermanent/fluid provides a basis for explaining the hybridity (Bhabha, 1994) and contingence that characterise processes of (self-)identification, and how experiences of identities thought to be communal can often be personal and nuanced. It, however, also fails to account for the singularity that individuals often seek to affirm, as they come into relation with others they identify as similar to them; how this singularity may persist, thereby materialising some form of an underlying affinity; and how it may 'congeal and crystalise' into a collective sense of being (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p.1). I suggest that a useful way to settle what I will call an impasse between both approaches is to consider a synthetic approach; a sort of balance at the juncture of social constructionist perspectives, that conceives of identity as a tangible, lived condition, constructed individually *and* collectively, that can be given degrees of stability within communally defined structures of power and of meaning-making (such as culture and media), and that can crystallise/congeal out of multiple nodes of identification. I want to propose, here, that we think of stability somewhat differently; that, rather than fixedness, we consider, in the context of our thinking around identity, *holdingness*; in the way that we might understand, for example, in medical parlance, how a patient's condition can be stable—neither particularly improving nor deteriorating, neither volatile nor unfluctuating, neither labile nor fixed; their condition, within the extents of its stability, is understood to merely (for a time) hold. I identify layers of this thinking in Stuart Hall's (1996) understanding of identities as 'points of temporary attachments' (p. 6) and Chris Wheedon's (2004) suggestion that identity is 'a limited and temporary fixing' (p. 19), both of which, as I understand it, seek to describe this *holdingness*. I argue, as I will show with empirical evidence and with *holdingness* as an analytic category, that such an understanding of identity might explain and/or be illustrated by the identity formulation heavily debated, theoretically unsettled, and contestably defined as 'African'.

To begin with, conceptualisations of African identity have tended to articulate ideas of collectiveness—of commonality in ancestry (Banks Henries, 1977; Shepperson, 1962), in ethos (Araoye, 2021; Lake, 1995; Nkrumah, 1963), and/or in culture (Sow, 1989)—in largely (strategically) essentialised terms (Spivak, 1988), often based on notions of oneness resulting from primordial ethnocultural continuities. Although these continuities may have existed to certain extents (Anise, 1974; de Luna, 2013; Mazrui, 2005), Africa's diversity—its many peoples, their scattered geographies, multi-furcated histories, and their varied, intricate cultures—renders an essentialised, rigid, fixed-in-the-past configuration of Africanness unsustainable. In fact, emerging conceptions of Africanness suggest that, because of this diversity, African societies could never be homogenous and, therefore, cannot be ascribed an undifferentiated identity (Eze, 2014; Eze & van der Wal, 2020).

There is, however, a constructive logic in considering a communal Africanness. Theorisations that have done so sought to postulate African particularity as a solution to a crisis of identity (Gordon & Osoro, 1996; Montle & Mogoboya, 2020) engendered by the socio-cultural intrusions of trans-Atlantic slavery and of colonialism (and their associated terrors and erasures). The logic, here, rested on the assumption that, prior to European contact, there were certain commonalities that interlinked the fairly homogenous populations of Africa, and, by excavating these continuities, an authentic African identity can be recovered (Anise, 1974; Mazrui, 2005). We might extend a similar logic from Anthony Smith's (1993) relation of the pre-modern ethnic base—what he has termed '*ethnie*'—to the formation of regionalised identities. For Smith, identity is, at its base, formed through the collective 'memories, symbols, myths and traditions of an *ethnie*—any 'human population with a myth of common ancestry, shared historical memories, elements of shared culture, an association with a specific 'homeland' and a measure of solidarity' (1993, p.130). Identities are, by this logic, thought to be fundamentally collective, gaining imaginations of an essence, as multiple *ethnies* coalesce to form new collective identities, all the while staying dependent on the 'antiquity' the core *ethnie* possesses (Smith, 1993).

As Stuart Hall reminds us, there can be some value in attending to this 'conception of a rediscovered, essential identity', particularly for its potential to 'offer a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation' (1994, p.224). However, Hall also invites us to not think of this imagined coherence as fixed to the 'essentialised past' it is recovered from, but, rather, to view it as something constantly in flux, continuously undergoing transformation, subject to 'the continuous play of history, culture, and power'; something fluid, something constructed (1994, p.225). To think of a collective African identity in this sense is to think of the primordial commonalities—the cultures, in essence—that precolonial 'hidden histories' reveal, *and* of their evolutions into contemporary continuities. Or, in other words, to think of 'what we have become' as a way of understanding who we collectively are (Hall, 1994, p.225). The suggestion is not that these commonalities constitute an 'essence'; rather, it is to draw attention to their centrality to strategically essentialist conceptualisations of African identity that have emerged at particular historical, cultural, political, social, or economic conjunctures (Hall, 1996; Spivak, 1988). If a configuration of collective African identity is to be understood, therefore, it would be practical to attempt to distil its constructive elements from the continuities in culture across African societies; continuities developed out of the intercourses among the distinctive value systems that have historically been specific to populations of African descent (Sow, 1989).

Primordiality, Consciousness, and Collective Identity

Questions of Africanness have always been rooted in, shaped by, placed in context of or in contention with questions of history—in discourses around the timelines of the construction of 'Africa' within Western thought, both as a category of otherness and as a demarcated geographical landmass (see Banks Henries 1977; Zeleza, 2006); in considerations of the associated sociocultural intrusions of trans-Atlantic slavery and of colonialism; and in analyses of primordial cultures that preceded both (see Sow et al, 1979; Mazrui, 2005). In many ways, histories of external contact—European and, to smaller extents, Arabic and Indo-Asian—have been central to notions of what Africa is, or who might be considered an 'African', framing narratives of 'who we were' (before this contact), 'who we are' (because of this contact), and 'who we should be' (in spite of this contact). These narratives have structured old and new debates featuring, on the one hand, logics that privilege notions of collective consciousness, forgotten commonalities, a sameness that is thought to exist within erased histories; and, on the other hand, the critiques that have named these logics 'essentialist'.

There *is* an essentialism in the primary assumption that a 'true', untainted Africanness survives locked away in a history preceding racist enslavement and dispersal, particularly as it is imagined as singular, rooted in abiding tradition and, therefore, unchanging. However, arguments advancing this presumed 'essence' are often positioned within historical accounts of continuities that existed across primordial or precolonial African empires/societies/groups. Some of these continuities have been traced through social, cultural, and linguistic commonalities (*e.g.* Tejani, 1988), knowledge systems (*e.g.* Mazrui, 2005; Mudimbe, 1985), political systems (*e.g.* Michalopoulos & Papaioannou, 2013), value systems (*e.g.* Mazrui, 2005), music (*e.g.* Aning, 1973), and other forms of material culture (see Sow *et al*, 1979), among other aspects of precolonial African life. These continuities existed. They were manifest, despite the heterogeneity of African societies, across base norms and institutions that structured social, cultural, and political life (Sow *et al*, 1979; Mazrui, 2005). Modes of leadership, for example, amongst the Bantu across southern Africa were not only similar in structure to those among the Tumba of central Africa and the Krobo of western Africa, the base Bantu phoneme for 'leader', *kúmú*, was also the centrally structuring morpheme in the respective words, *nkumu* and *okumó*, for ruling figures among the Tumba and the Krobo (de Luna, 2013). Systems and institutions of knowledge production amongst the Songhai and Mali empires of western Africa were in sustained contact with those of northern African civilisations, sustaining multiple sociocultural connections and points of collaboration, including the establishment of institutions of higher learning, across various historical periods (Mazrui, 2005). Woman-woman marriages have been documented to have been institutionalised across 40 precolonial African cultures, with identical modes of structuration and logics of kinship, for example, among the Igbo and Fon of western Africa and the Lovedu of southern Africa (Greene, 1998).

Several additional examples of lines of continuity can be drawn across histories of contact among precolonial African societies, however diverse they were, through their unique rites of kinship/passage/burial, through animistic beliefs, and through art (Sow *et al*, 1979), *etc*. Many of these continuities are as well evident in contemporary language and cultural continuums—dialects of the (Eʊe)Gbe language cluster, for instance, stretched out across the Ewe ethnic groups of eastern Ghana and central/southern Togo to the Fon people of western Benin; and commonalities in marriage and naming rites exist among the Akan, Ga, Eʊe, Fon, Yoruba and Igbo ethnic groups, geographically scattered across parts of Côte d'Ivoire through Ghana, Togo, and Benin towards eastern Nigeria. These common practices and sets of shared cultural attributes become sources of meaning that potentially develop into codes of identity (Castells, 2009). Gaining stability across time and space, these codes coalesce into notions of commonality, which, while fundamental to the forming of collective identity (Smith, 1993), are erroneously assumed, in some conceptualisations, to contribute to an 'essence'.

While the charge of essentialism against approaches centred on primordiality is valid (insofar as it critiques notions that these commonalities trace to an African essence that is inborn, singular, unchanging), arguments claiming these logics attempt to deny the heterogeneity of African peoples and their cultures may not be as robust. Many across the literature (*e.g.* de Luna, 2013; Sow *et al*, 1979) have acknowledged that, despite the commonalities that may bind them, African societies were/are not homogenous. The focus for these approaches has, in many aspects, been on the various facets of African life that flow into one another; that speak to the ways African people categorise themselves and those they come into relation with; that forge identical modes of engagement through which they build community, order their social worlds, name themselves. Their focus on commonalities does not necessarily suggest homogeneity (Gyekye, 2010; Sow et al, 1979).

There is, in this logic, an attention to the *common* that works or, at least, seeks to explain the tendency of African people to be communal rather than individualistic in their social structuring, in their receptivity towards kinship and ethnic or regional belongingness, in the perduring sense of collectiveness that underlies historical and contemporary ideologies of a shared consciousness. Communality[27] is central to the African consciousness (Gyekye, 2010). It is the configuring

[27] By 'communality' I refer, broadly, to the state of being communal; of social organising around a shared sense of belonging, with specific reference to how African societies tend to place value on caring for the related other, hospitality, and feelings of solidarity (Gyekye, 2010). Communality, then, tends to be based on commonality—the fact of having qualities in common; of possessing shared beliefs, values, attitudes, features.

force that underlies, for example, philosophies of brotherhood in western Africa (Gyeke, 2010) and *ubuntu* in southern and central Africa (Venter, 2004), both of which focalise the individual's connection to the related other; a boundless *human* connection purposed, in all aspects, towards the *collective* good. This sense of connection is inscribed in these (as well as other) African traditions of thought reproduced through maxims such as the Akan '*honam mu nni nhanoa*' [humanity has no boundary] and '*nipa nua ni onipa*' [the human's brother is the human] (Gyekye, 2010); as well as the Nguni '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' [I am because we are] (Venter, 2004).

It is a similar sense of connection that structured the foundational pull, the *banzo*—the melancholy felt by enslaved Africans in Brazil upon their removal from homeland (and the dispossession of their cultural heritage), which led to acts of resistance such as hunger strikes, suicide/infanticide, rebellion, and/or escape—toward the formation of *quilombos*. Quilombos were communities of Black resistance, where self-liberated Africans set up autonomous societies after escaping bondage (Smith et al., 2021). They became symbols of liberation and reconnection to the related other and, as Beatriz Nascimento theorised, multi-sited spaces of a *collective* Blackness 'anchored in the spiritual simultaneity of the here and there of Black life between the Americas and Africa' (Smith et al, 2021, p. 286). In this conceptualisation of African communality, the sense of connection becomes multi-spatial, formed of memory and spirituality, living inside the Black bodies that constitute the *quilombos*, and traversing physical geographies in the transatlantic reconstitution of 'home'. Nascimento imagines this transcendence through doctrine of *candomblé* cosmology, invoking the belief that the *orixás* (from the Yoruba '*Orisha*')—deified ancestors, serving as links between the spiritual world and the world of humans—travelled with enslaved Africans across the Atlantic, thereby connecting and rooting their bodies to the soils of Africa despite being physically located in the Americas. A similar sense of collectiveness is proposed in Lélia Gonzalez' concept of 'Amefricanity', which is also a concept of transcendental Africanness proposed to capture the specificity of the experience of Africans and African descendants as lived and historically constituted in the Americas (Barreto, 2021). Gonzalez conceives this collectiveness as 'a historical process of intense cultural dynamics (resistance, accommodation, reinterpretation, creation of new forms) referenced in African models but referring to the construction of a whole ethnic identity' (Gonzalez, cited in Barreto 2021), which is collectively constituted not only by 'the Africans brought by the slave trade, but also those who arrived in America long before Columbus' (Gonzalez, 1988, p.77).

In both of these conceptualisations of Africanness in the (Latin) American diasporic context, there are firm references not only to connections fostered by memory and primordiality, but also a sense of collective consciousness transcending space and time. Several traditions of Black thought—often conceptualised as African—from other diasporic contexts have used, as foundation, a notion of a shared consciousness in postulating a collective Africanness. Garveyism, for example,

privileges notions of racial unity, pride in a shared African cultural heritage, and a self-sufficiency it attaches to its vision of an Africa for all persons of African descent (Van Leewen, 2020). W.E.B. DuBois' vision of a Pan-African unity among all persons of African descent, regardless of their geographical location, was framed within an assumption that a common historical, cultural, and social experience framed the lives of all African peoples, and it was essential to pursue a global bond built on their collective African heritage (Nascimento, 2004). Similar notions of collective heritage and shared destiny framed the Black nationalism of *Négritude*, the anti-colonial movement that sought to reassert the value of African cultural traditions, to install a sense of collective dignity for Black people across the Caribbean & Africa, and to place in sameness the cultural and intellectual production of Blackness as shaped by common experience (Diagne, 2010). Founded by Caribbean and African students in colonial France, its ideological trajectories cut across geographies of (Francophone) Africa and its diasporas, establishing cultural and political ideas that enforced a sense of single Black consciousness in opposition to hegemonic whiteness. In these notions of collectiveness, there is a kind of reimagining of geographies of Blackness as satellite locales of Africanness, connected by a collective imagination of home, one that is trans-geographic, that exists both in the *here* and the *there*; a notion of constituting home and *belonging* that, as I will show in Chapter 6, is *collocational*.

This sense of collectiveness, Alpha Sow argues, manifests as well beyond the hypotheticality of ideology (Sow *et al*, 1979). In various formal discourses on collective African identity, young people in post-independence Africa placed importance on the need for unity and for the delineation of a shared identity based on the 'African cultures' common points, which constitute the basis for Africanism' (p. 10), and on the core 'similarities' that existed 'between the different peoples of the continent' (p.11). More contemporary popular discourses around the subject have produced similar ideas of collectiveness (see, for example, Deutsche Welle Africa [DW The 77 Percent], 2019), with a general sense that certain emerging unifying cultures, including Afrobeats culture, have the potential to become the basis for building this collectiveness. In diasporic contexts, emerging empirical work (*e.g.* Chacko, 2019; de Witte, 2019) is identifying an increased attachment to a collective African identity among groups of young people of African descent, different from the individuality that marked the older generations' identity formation processes in the diaspora. However, in these instances, there is also an attention to the inherent difference amongst African societies, as with some approaches that inspect primordial commonalities as a way of understanding collectiveness.

There are similarities in the ways that these approaches have conceptualised African identity. Considering the histories of colonial dispersal and erasure, it is particularly noteworthy that diasporic perspectives tend to align with those within homeland contexts in centring certain shared cultural practices in their conceptualisations of African identity. My aim in

discussing these theoretical, philosophical, ideological, and empirical treatments of commonality and related notions of collectiveness is to highlight why attending to conceptions of collective identity, particularly in relation to questions of Africanness, may hold some usefulness. I do not suggest that this collective identity exists already bounded in some historical place of purity or that the commonalities we can trace through the histories of African societies *must* define this identity. I am simply attempting to identify some of the ways in which African people/communities may position themselves within broader narratives of similarity, while still holding to the more individual modes of *being* that typify the continent's wide diversity, and how some of the common artefacts—primordial and current—that they share may be instrumental in shaping these narratives. Commonality is key (Gyekye, 2010). I suggest, here, that it is so persistent across collective constructions of African identity because of, as the empirical work will reveal in Chapter 5, certain assumptions of the *everywhereness* of cultural ways of *being*. I want to think of *everywhereness*, in this context, as presence—not just in terms of multiplicity, but also in terms of significance; not only about location in space, but also about weight in meaning. I think of presence, in this second sense, as the imprint, the impact, the inheritances that are (imagined to be) inherent in a thing that would make it (re)claimable for the value it (is assumed to) accrue(s) relative to its expanse/compass/stature. My rational, here, relies on a basic reading of 'presence', as Stuart Hall (1990) deploys it. Although Hall does not conceptualise the *everywhere* in a specific sense (using his deployment of the Négritudean ideal of 'Présence Africaine'), he does highlight how 'Africa was, in fact *present everywhere*: in the everyday life and customs…musics and rhythms of slave and post-emancipation society' (1990, p.230, emphasis added). This presence is the logic that underlies the assumptions of trans-geographic commonality that have structured so many theorisations of Africanness, as I have just discussed, as a collective identity.

My understanding of collective identity, here, is not limited to either position on the essentialist/constructivist divide within the discourse on identity. While I remain unconvinced by the logics that assign the source of collective identity to an 'essence', I find some value in thinking of commonality and how a collective identity can be mobilised based on certain points of sameness. Also, I am hesitant to dismiss all notions of collective identity as projects of homogenisation, as many who hold constructivist views of identity—particularly of African identity—tend to do. Although identities are often fluid and multiple, they can congeal and crystalise (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000); although they are often subjective and contingent, they can find commonality and come to *hold*.

I follow Kathryn Woodward's (1997) invitation to consider approaches that 'challenge the rigidity of dualisms and seek alternative understandings of identity and difference which are not limited to the polarities of binary opposition', taking a view of identity that 'engage[s] with the making of identity as well as with its source' (p.4). Collectiveness does not

require a 'truth' to structure it. It does not develop out of an 'essence' that binds all the individuals that possess it. It is constituted through the strands of commonality that *still* thread the hems of manifest difference; through the multiple individualities that come to converge outside and in spite of their multiple elsewheres. A collective sense of *being* does not have to imply exactitude or singularity. If we think of identities as multiple and fluid; if we understand them to be coexisting and, at the same time, competing; if we know them to be contingent on specific cultural, social, and historical conjunctures, then we can think of collective identities in the same way. We can understand them to contain multiple modes of *being* that can be fluid; we can think of them as overarching in their accommodation of sameness as well as of difference; we can learn the histories that structure them, the narratives of origin within which they are placed. To think of collective identity, therefore, is not to think of a rigid, innate, universal consciousness or a singular sameness void of nuance, void of inherent difference; it is to think of the ways difference might exist in commonality, or 'the ways in which we are same as others that share our position, and the ways [in] which we are different from those who do not' (Woodward, 1997, p2).

Defining 'Africanness': A theoretical mapping of African Identity

We might struggle to arrive at a definition for what 'Africanness' or an 'African identity' is (or should be) that would be uncontested. Besides the diversity that characterises Africa's many peoples and their intricate cultures (Eze, 2014, Rens, 2021), the challenge of settling on an undifferentiated 'Africanness' is the result of conflated, often unsubstantiated, claims and discourses on what it means to be African (de Witte & Spronk, 2014). Scholarly conceptualisations of 'African' self-realisation have primarily been framed within dichotomous perspectives, convening into a broader geohistorical debate: the essentialisation of Black Atlantic experiences (for discourses focused on Africa's diaspora of slavery) versus the centring of Africa as the unitary point of origin (for discourses focused on Africa and its diaspora of migration). The dynamics of the position of Africa—removed or centred—as a key element in African identity formation play out in these contending perspectives.

Foundational conceptualisations of African identity emphasised the socio-cultural connections of Blackness to Africa (Balakrishnan, 2018). In the early movements of Black thought such as Garveyism, the Négritude, and Pan-Africanism, Africa was centred as the racial common ground for the oppressed, and as a solution for the dominance of whiteness.

These formulations were characterised by the struggles for autonomy and independence among the Black populations of the Caribbean, the Americas, and of continental Africa. However, following the emergence of newer struggles over cultural representation, particularly in the African diasporas across the Atlantic, Africa progressively became decentred from considerations of what was theorised as 'Black identity'. Only marginally implied within diasporic formulations of Blackness, Africa itself was reimagined on the outside, displaced as the fulcrum of African particularity (Zeleza, 2006; Balakrishnan, 2018). The notion of Black particularity was often at the core of these formulations, which conceptualised Africanness as a distant condition, a remnant of post-slavery memory, relegated to an after-thought, only a small figure in the sum of diasporic experiences. Critics argued that, because this framework essentialised diasporic experiences, it relegated homeland African experiences to irrelevance (Koser 2003; Zeleza, 2006). What was recurring, here, was the question of the centrality of Africa, and how attached the construction of Blackness was to the presence or removal of it. Arguments raised by African scholars opened up the discourse for inclusion of homeland experiences, which came to extend the scope and range of theorisation of African identity. The focus of conceptualising African identity at this point became geohistorical: the displacement of African peoples in the geographical Caribbean-UK-USA triangle of the Black Atlantic (or Africa's diaspora of slavery) versus the Africa-Euro-America movement of African peoples (or Africa's diaspora of migration). Again, the dynamics of the removal of Africa and its recentring play out in these discourses or contending perspectives.

Newer debates have, however, shifted from the diaspora(s) of slavery/diaspora(s) of migration divide to discussions of African identity contextualised within globalisation. These debates have generally also fallen within one cluster of a sort of dichotomy, which, in very broad terms, insists on an Africanness *in* the world, or the other cluster, which proposes an Africanness *of* the world. I think of the clusters, without suggesting any kind of reduction, as either following Afropolitan logics or (revivified formulations of) Pan-Africanist logics. While I discuss these logics for my purposes in this thesis, I do not suggest that these are the only existing modes of thinking about Africanness. They are, as I have found them, however, the prevailing theorisations of African identity across the current literature.

I imagine Afropolitan logics as those that align with core assumptions of Afropolitanism, 'the networked individualism of Africans of the world', which claims to cater to a new generation of young Africans who identify with cosmopolitan ideals, and who navigate their African heritage mainly outside of a sense of rootedness to the African homeland (de Witte & Spronk 2014, p. 171). Its coinage widely attributed to writer, Taiye Selasi, the term is parochially attached to those who self-identify as Africans—more in the sense of citizens—of the world, who do not feel bound together as a single unitary category by race, religion or culture (Eze, 2016). Theoretically, however, this original (often criticised as

shallow, elitist, insubstantial) conceptual ethos of Selasi's (2013) Afropolitanism has seen some expansion through the work of scholars such as Achille Mbembe and Simon Gikandi (Balakrishnan, 2018), based on notions of 'multiracialism as both a social reality and as an ethical practice' (p.576). In these constructions of Afropolitanism, there is a reliance on a globalising positioning that conceives a sort of African cosmopolitanism, transcendent of geographical boundaries, whose codes of identity are formed within multiracial, multinational imaginaries. In fact, the concept of race is rather diminished in this Afropolitan ethos. The logic, here, as Mbembe (2020) argues, is that there can be no legitimacy to claims toward an equation of Blackness to Africanness, even if Black Africans make up a majority of the population in Africa, as Black Africans are not the sole inhabitants and, therefore, not the sole producers of art and culture on the continent. In Selasi's (2005) thinking, Black identity is no longer a prerequisite for being African. Selasi underlines this by suggesting that the way Afropolitans 'see [their] race—whether black or biracial or none of the above—is a question of politics, rather than pigment'; that not all of those who follow this ethos 'claim to be [B]lack' (2013, p.530). In this clear distinction from older movements of Black thought—this removal of the centrality of Blackness as Africanness—the Afropolitan logic raises questions about the position of race in the definition of Africanness. It follows, therefore, that proponents of the Afropolitan ethos distance themselves from what they describe as the Black nationalist tradition of Garveyism, the Nègritude, and Pan-Africanism. Achille Mbembe, for instance, juxtaposes the global-citizen perspective that Afropolitanism takes to that which he labels an inherent 'nativism' in African nationalist thought, declaring that 'Afropolitanism is not the same as Pan-Africanism or negritude' (2020, p.60), based on a racial politics that reproduces post-racial ideologies (Milazzo, 2024). This post-racial ideological leaning is one of many criticisms levelled against Afropolitanism, which include those on its classist, elitist ethos. Kigotho (2016) synthesises a few of these, some of the most exacting of which describe Afropolitanism as 'a crude cultural product, designed and potentially funded by the West' (para 10) and 'little more than a platform for self-congratulatory elitist groups trying to wage a war against massive brain drain in Africa with outdated and inefficient weaponry' (para 13).

Pan-Africanism is the central philosophy of Black humanity as a single, undifferentiated unit with common challenges and a common destiny (Araoye, 2021). Scholarly efforts at theorising African identity have historically been moderated within 'a spectrum of pan-African ideas' (Lake, 1995, p. 31). Early conceptions of Africanness espoused Black nationalist ideals of a shared cultural identity (e.g. Shepperson, 1962) and a universal socio-cultural consciousness (e.g. Nkrumah, 1963) inherent within a perpetual interconnection between Africa and its diasporas. Pan-Africanism theorises Africans, both on the continent and in its diasporas, to possess an inherent sense of belonging within a fraternity of Blackness, founded on histories of racist Western subjugation and the histories (imagined to be shared) before them. While Pan-Africanism has, at its core, a transnational outlook, its focus is heavily racial (Mbembe, 2021). The emphasis on race

within the Pan-Africanist conceptualisations of Africanness has been the subject of internal debate between groups of scholars that consider the foundational (racial/anti-imperialist) ideas of Pan-Africanism to be essential to its ethos and those claiming a 'new' (transnational/internationalist) revivified Pan-Africanism—what Kwame Appiah (1993, p. ix) has called 'a Pan-Africanism without racism'—that denounce the focus on race as biological determinism. In fact, these internal divides have existed for decades around questions of the place of Arab/Maghreb Africans and, in some quarters, the notion of 'white Africans' in southern Africa (Mbembe, 2020). As critics (see Milazzo, 2024) have pointed out, these ideas of racial inclusivity obscure histories of racial oppression and of the historical (and, in many cases, contemporary) hierarchisations that have placed Black Africans at the violent ends of 'xenophobia, neo-colonialism, and the…politics of citizenship' (p.375). The question of race, then, is material to the discussion of, especially, a collective Africanness. As Zeleza (2006) points out, even if we admit to some existence of biological determinism within constructions of Africa as Black, 'we also know from painful experience that race remains a powerful social reality with material consequences' (p.17). However, ideas of a racially inclusive notion of Africanness have become more popular in newer articulations of Pan-Africanist logics. Araoye (2021) refers to these ideological approaches to Pan-Africanism as 'conceptual deflections', insisting that Pan-Africanism has to be necessarily tied to Blackness, and that these deflections are the reinforcements of the 'dominant Eurocentric and Arab-Islamic structures of knowledge and values' that have 'imposed convenient numerous identities on [B]lack peoples to advance their hegemonic agendas' (p.2).

Although some scholars (de Witte & Spronk, 2014; Ankobrey, 2018) identify an overlap in the transnational orientations of both, mainly in the exhibition of African cultural consciousnesses and/or in their adoption of African cultural products, their contestations still fall into dichotomies. While Pan-Africanist logics (see Zeleza, 2006; 2010) argue for a centrality of Africa as the point of connection for all Black people, Afropolitan logics (see Mbembe, 2020) extend the idea of 'Africa' as decentred and argue for the diminishing of Blackness as a category for expressing African identity. However, an emerging trend, which follows shifting articulations between Blackness and Africanness, may be pointing toward a shift. Marleen de Witte's (2019) observations of Afro-Caribbean Dutch youth, aimed at understanding the role that race plays in how 'African heritage' as the deployment of cultural pasts 'is made to intersect with Africanness as read—and made readable in physical traits' (p.611), revealed race to be a recurring, contested and shifting category. Among the young people de Witte observed, race was at times expressed as 'Blackness' and, at other times, as 'Africanness'. She also observed that the young Afro-Dutch participants sometimes used both categories synonymously, and, at other times, created contrasts between them. Whereas in the past, de Witte (2019) observes, Black Surinamese and Antillean Dutch youth maintained an oppositional attitude of being Black but not African, in recent years, interest in connecting with and embracing their 'African roots' has been on the rise among that demographic. Similarly, de Witte finds, second-

generation Ghanaian-Dutch youth are embracing more, a Black racial identity, '(different from their parents) but…tend to be critical of subsuming their Africanness' under 'a dominant (transatlantic) framework of [B]lackness' (2019, p.611). She suggests that the popularity and the 'Afro-cool' value of *azonto* (which, as I have laid out in Chapter 1, was a crucial precursor to Afrobeats culture), played a key role in this switch (de Witte, 2014).

This shift she observes in the attachment to Blackness as a marker of their African identity has been observed, in some measure, in other diasporic contexts, among second-generation immigrants (see Alakija, 2016; Chacko, 2019). We might observe, here, that two themes of Afropolitan logic—the dismissal of Africa as a central imaginary in constructions of African identity, and the diminishing of Blackness in conceptualisations of African identity—appear to be incongruous with these emerging developments, particularly among younger generations of (diasporic) Africans. A few thoughts of interest emerge. First, as de Witte (2019) notes, the shift toward re-coupling Africanness and Blackness only begun to take hold in the last decade. As initial assumptions of Afropolitanism (Selasi, 2005; Mbembe, 2020) were tailored to the reality of a past generation of diasporic Africans, could there be a need to adjust these assumptions for the emerging realities of current generations? Second, taking some of the observations in emerging studies into consideration, it may be reasonable to consider the assumptions of the Pan-Africanist ethos as perhaps more accurately suited to theorising African identity construction and expression among current generations of African youth. Or, third, perhaps, there may potentially be a more appropriate theoretical framework for describing the character of African identity; one which would be most aligned with the everyday manifestations of identity formation among young African people, and, perhaps, this theory may rest somewhere in-between the Afropolitan/Pan-Africanist divide. I will attempt to build the foundations for such a framework later in this chapter, drawing on existing conceptual blocks, as I attempt to address certain pitfalls of older frameworks. These are, however, only intended, as I have stated, to be foundational, guiding more than definitive, with expectations that a substantive theory would emerge following integration of empirical data.

Towards an alternative theory of Africanness

Any additional rethinking of Africanness would require, as Bosch Santana (2016) suggests, 'addressing the spectre of old and new divisions' (p.125). Besides their divergences on the place of Africa in African identity and their differences in centring race, a division along class relations exists between Afropolitan logics and Pan-Africanist ones (Dabiri, 2016;

Musila, 2016; Salami, 2016). Older notions of African particularity such as those that were formative for Garveyism, Pan-Africanism, and Négritude seem to have come into tension with the idea of a 'cosmopolitan African', which is central to Afropolitan logics (Coetzee, 2016). This idea of 'belonging everywhere' as opposed to maintaining an attachment to Africa, because of the Afropolitan reluctance to be identified by negative white hegemonic imagery assigned to Africa—which, in itself, can be viewed as an acceptance of these racist depictions of the continent and its peoples—is one of the chief points of contention. The Afropolitan ethos distances itself from what it determines to be a mentality of victimhood and from the negative images of poverty and suffering often attached to Africa (Adjepong, 2021), and seeks to define the 'shapers of globalisation', while 'market[ing] our cultures *as well as* our political transformations' (Salami, 2013, para 7). Opponents consider this a move toward cultural commodification and suggest that Afropolitan logics align with consumerist ideas (Dabiri, 2016). Afropolitan logics have been dismissed as privileging the experiences of a wealthy, mobile, elitist minority, and pandering to Western imaginations of 'cool' at the expense of the real-life experiences of the vast majority of continental Africans (Dabiri, 2016; Musila, 2016). Proponents, on the other hand, suggest that this new aesthetic is warranted because older conceptions of Africanness (such as Pan-Africanism) have become ossified (Bosch Santana, 2016) and risk placing all African experiences within assumptions of a cultural monolith, and, hence, must be resisted (Salami, 2013).

While predominantly presented as opposing ideas of Africanness (see Bosch Santana, 2013; Eze, 2014; Dabiri, 2016; Adjepong, 2021), emerging perspectives (e.g. Salami, 2013; Khonje, 2015; Bosch Santana, 2016; Ankobrey, 2018) point to overlaps in Pan-Africanist and Afropolitan logics, in the ways that they are lived and experienced. Similarities between the two clusters, particularly in their global outlook and their inclination towards the inclusion of all groups of African descent, outline a spectrum of ideological dispositions within which African identity is framed and, potentially, might be theorised. Bosch Santana (2016) traces certain points of connection in what she identifies to be the presence of cosmopolitan frames in their understandings of lived–historical and modern–Africanness. She also draws parallels based on the premise that the recurrent dispersal of African peoples from and their continued return to the continent, together with the fact of their multilingualism (within and transcendent of national boundaries), are central to both of these approaches to understanding Africanness.

Beyond these similarities, some contributors, whose ideas are largely situated within Afropolitan logics, have attempted to find a cohesion in and a fluidity between both clusters of notions of African identity. Khonje (2015), for example, juxtaposes the two in relation to her real-life experiences, articulating how each represents her sense of Africanness in varying contexts. She identifies as Afropolitan in her everyday appropriation of and affinity towards the aesthetic of

Westernised African cultural products, and self-defines as Pan-African in her political leanings. Salami (2013) also presents Afropolitan logics as derivatives of Pan-Africanist ones, that can co-exist and not necessarily be competing. She finds a connection between the two in their mutual interests in 'Africans outside the continent' and, although she touches on the 'fresh[er] energy' of Afropolitan logics being a slight distinction, she concludes that these logics are a 'complement—not a rival—to Pan-Africanism' (2013, para 8).

These contradictions in Afropolitan thinking, even amongst its proponents, points to its conceptual prematurity (Musila, 2016). While Khonje (2015) and Salami (2013) move to reconcile the two, Selasie (2005; 2013) and Mbembe (2020) are categorical in their demarcation. At the core of these contradictions, however, is the discernible orientation towards a differentiated conception of Africanness that moves away from postcolonial motivations and towards modern realities of the transnationality of African peoples. Eze (2016) identifies, in Afropolitan logics, a 'shift in conceptions of African identity' that places 'the fluidity of African self-perception and visions of the world' (p.114) into view against exigencies of the twenty-first century. This shift has been reimagined (see Bosch Santana, 2016; Dabiri, 2016; Musila, 2016) as a new Pan-Africanism that veers away from what Mbembe (2020) describes as 'nativism' towards a more cosmopolitan outlook. It is a disposition that prefers the idea of an African transnationality that is more inward-looking than motivated by the external endorsement from white/Western cultures. It transcends the gaze of Western imagination, decentralises it, valuing instead approval from within Africa.

I identify this 'new Pan-Africanism' and the conflations of Pan-Africanist and Afropolitan logics as markers of a distinctive notion of Africanness that has played out in the lived experiences identified in studies (Alakija, 2016; Chacko, 2019; de Witte, 2019). The inconsistencies and/or insufficiencies identified by contributors on either side of the Afropolitan/Pan-African dichotomy seem indicative of a weakness in the normative assessments out of which they originated. As Jürgen Habermas (2006) points out, normative theorising alone may not provide a sufficiently comprehensive explanation of phenomena in the contemporary world as its tendency to 'express a demanding 'ought' increasingly now 'faces the sobering 'is' of ever more complex societies' (p.411). While normative theorising on African identity could remain constructive, abstract thought alone appears inadequate as, drawing from the main criticisms levelled, each against the other, some category of 'African' remains unaccounted for in either configuration. That is, the global, cosmopolitan 'African lite' (as Musila, 2016, terms it) is unaccounted for in Pan-Africanist logics; and the everyday, continental African is marginalised in the Afropolitan imagination. That certain pathways can be drawn from these ideological gaps to manifestations in the observable world, suggests that a more utile notion of African identity can be developed; one that might be more encompassing, more incorporating of continental and diasporic experiences. Understanding real-world

constructions of African identity, through empirical exploration of lived manifestations, for example, and working within the boundaries of the inadequacies of existing models, or outside of them, therefore, becomes expedient to any attempt at formulating such a theory.

As Salami (2013) correctly observes, a main point of cohesion between Afropolitan and Pan-Africanist logics is their mutual focus on diasporic connections to Africa, albeit from varying viewpoints. While Pan-Africanist logics approach the inclusion of the African diaspora from an inward-out perspective (*i.e.,* Africa connecting from within to its diasporas), Afropolitan logics focus on diaspora from an outward-in perspective (*i.e*., the diasporas connecting to Africa from outside the continent). A way to 'settle the spectre' of these divisions, would be to think of African identity as the consolidation of a multi-nodal configuration of identity positions; differing but related, mutable but also *holding*, unbounded but conjoined by their mutual connections to a common (real or imagined) *root*—Africa. By 'root', I extend Paul Gilroy's (1993) notion of 'roots and routes'. Gilroy's deployment of the history of the movements of African peoples from Africa to Europe, to the Caribbean, and to the Americas centres connections among people of African descent that transcend parochial national identities. By invoking the image of the sailing ship as a metaphor for the circulation of people of African descent and their cultures, Gilroy illustrates the transnational historical and contemporary movement of identity. His core ideas of cultural circulation and the kinds of connections it sustains are instructive to building an understanding of collective African identity. I, however, suggest a focus on a single root—Africa (as a geocultural[28] imaginary rather than the specific geographical landmass)—and on the various routes through which its cultural products travel and create continuities of Africanness.

My logic, here, is founded on two conceptual blocks. First, I rely on Stuart Hall's (1994) understanding of Black identities as subject to their history; their 'forgotten connections' to Africa, 'the missing term…which lies at the centre of our cultural identity and gives it a meaning' (pp.225 & 224); the root. But they are also subject to their transformations through place, time, history, and culture—in essence, to their routes. As Hall notes, 'identities come from somewhere, have histories. But, like everything […] historical, they undergo constant transformation' (1994, p.225). This notion of transformation carries through to my second conceptual block. Paul Zeleza (2006) maps out the transformations which conceptualisations of Africa and Africanness have undergone. He synthesises these into four broad categories: 'Africa as biology, as image, as space, as memory' or 'African identities as mapped in racial, representational, geographical, or historical terms' (p.14). While these categories may not be exhaustive, they point to the many contested ways in which

[28] Jane Stadler (2015) uses the term 'geocultural' in reference 'to the ways in which cultural practices and attitudes can be connected with geographic places and regions'. I employ it, here, in the same sense.

African identity has been conceptualised. I argue that, for the most part, these conceptualisations would be successful at describing certain manifestations of Africanness as experienced. Taking their broad categorisations into consideration in any definition of a collective African identity, then, becomes necessary. By thinking of these as nodes on a spectrum of identities, we can create conceptual room to analyse African identity across each of their configurations. Relying on these two conceptual blocks, we are able to place Africa at the foundation—at the root—of a multi-nodal configuration of Africanness (re)constituted and sustained through historical and modern routes of connection.

I do not pretend to present a solution to the question of Africanness. This proposed approach only serves to provide the needed analytical width to generate empirically derived theory that might encompasses the conceptual scopes of the dominant constructions of Africanness (including their shortfalls), plus emerging configurations observed elsewhere (*e.g*. Alakija, 2016; Chacko, 2019; de Witte, 2019). These configurations are, of course, subject to their contexts (the social conditions that frame them) and may likely also differ. Thinking of African identity as a multi-nodal configuration helps to cover these possible permutations, addressing blind spots of Pan-Africanist and Afropolitan logics. Moreover, relying on an understanding of African identity in a kind of umbrellaing sense, helps to explain how, despite the possibility of floating through multiple identities simultaneously, there is always some precedence of some over others; ones that become centralised; 'primary', according to Manuel Castells, that become the ones around which meaning is organised—'that is, an identity that frames the others…which is self-sustaining across time and space.' (Castells, 2009, p.7).

I have spoken earlier of how, in the context of this thesis, I will understand identity: as a sense of *being* and of *belonging*, more broadly; and, more specifically, as a tangible condition, constructed individually *and* collectively, that might come to *hold* within communally defined structures of power and of meaning-making and that can crystallise/congeal out of multiple nodes of identification. Relating this understanding to the conceptualisation of African identity I offer here, we might understand African identity as the encompassing sense of *being* African and *belonging* within some collectively constructed Africanness that frames multiple other nodes of identification within a kind of spectrum, and that is given stability through structures of power (such as race) and of meaning-making (such as Afrobeats culture and media). This understanding can be brought into connection with a loose conjecture that an African identity—through whichever node or combination of nodes of identification in which it may be asserted (be that racial, representational, geographical, or historical)—is likely to frame any additional identities (following Castells, 2009) people of African descent may assert.

To clarify, by 'nodes', I refer to the broad analytical categorisations (following Zeleza, 2006) that have been deployed in (self-)identifications of African people. These are numerous and they are contested. Nonetheless, they have often been discharged in certain broad cultural, geopolitical, racial, and ideological frames, across historical and contemporary moments, to classify peoples across the diverse and multiple geographies of Africa. These categories intersect, they may overlap, may combine, find certain points of connection—junctures where meanings may find some alignment. For example, we might consider a range of ethnic categories (Ga, Dangbe, Ewe, *etc*) that may find juncture in a national category (Ghanaian), which also could combine with other national categories (Nigerian, Sierra Leonian, *etc.*) to produce certain regional categories (Anglophone West-African, *etc.*), and so on. We might consider how these could produce geopolitical projects, which, when overlapping with racial discourses, might produce geographical distinctions between 'sub-Saharan Africa' and 'North Africa', for instance. While sometimes deployed as differing and/or competing, these are nonetheless also combinable; and they represent, singularly and in consolidation, meanings related to the broader construction of Africa. In this sense, they are nodes; points of juncture, which, themselves, intersect or divaricate within a broader, self-sustaining (Castells, 2009) configuration of collective Africanness.

Because these nodes can be discrete but also combinable, undefined but contextually bounded, diverse yet contiguous, we might think of their interrelations as occurring across a kind of spectrum. In its originary designation in physics (see Rennie & Law, 2015), a spectrum might be understood as the full, bounded range of constituent properties of any given phenomenon, often clustered in portions/bands, whose demarcations are distinguishable based on certain imprecise but identifiable boundaries. In the context of (a collective African) identity, these boundaries are, of course, symbolic.

We understand that symbolic boundaries are 'lines that include and define some people, groups, and things while excluding others', and that they can exist within and between groups (Lamont et al., 2015, p.850). We might consider how this might manifest through certain inward-operating mechanisms (that construct inner boundaries) and outward-operating mechanisms (that construct outer boundaries), which define in-group cohesion and regulate differentiation from groups constructed as 'other'. Working within this understanding, we might observe how the mechanisms that underlie constructions of outer boundaries might be directed more forcefully at enforcing demarcations, while those that engender constructions of inner boundaries might be more observable in negotiations of contested meanings that structure membership. In other words, we might observe how the lines of inclusion/exclusion existing *between* groups could define who the members of those groups believe they are (in opposition to who they believe others in a separate group to be), while those lines existing *within* groups organise the meanings of who must/can be with them. That is, the mechanisms that underlie the construction of outer boundaries work to define meanings of *being*, while those that

underlie the construction of inner boundaries organise meanings related with notions of *belonging*. The empirical work explores the value of these ideas and how they might clarify the *holdingness* of notions of a collective African identity. The conjecture is that, as inner boundaries of *belonging* are (re)negotiated, the meanings that are produced reinforce the outer boundaries of *being*, which settle, as those meanings are circulated across space and over time, into notions of a collective identity that come to *hold*.

Connected to the broader logic of this project's enquiry, I think about how these meanings are produced within (social) mediated popular culture. As Castells (2009) notes, collective identity concerns the construction of meaning defined by a centring of a cultural attribute, or an interconnected cluster of cultural attributes, prioritised over other sources of meaning. I intend to draw out the ways that a collective African identity is made sense of, by following how individuals engage with the co-created culture (I discuss this in more detail in the next chapter) that I suggest is prioritised in the construction of meanings associated with a collective Africanness. I look at the musics they define as their own, the clothes they elect to wear, the dances they seek to learn/perform, how these define their sense of *being*. I also scrutinise the frames of reference that they employ in relation to the value they attach to elements of this culture, the politics of representation/ownership/appropriation they engage in, as they create/sustain/contest a collective space of *belonging*. Then, I consider how they (re)negotiate, clarify, adjust certain boundaries, as they make sense of who they believe they are.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I built a theoretical basis for explaining the thesis' deployment of the concept of identity, clarifying my understanding of African identity as a collective sense of *being* and of *belonging*. I did this by drawing from discourse on identity, more broadly, and mapping out the theoretical margins of African identity, more specifically, through a review of historical and contemporary conceptualisations. The chapter draws from African philosophical traditions that understand the individual as constituted in and by the collective, as well as concepts of perduring collective Africanness, transcendent of time and of space. It does this to suggest, first, that we think about identity as *both* individually and collectively constructed and, second, that we understand it to find some degree of stability—not as fixedness, but as *holdingness*—in certain contexts and structures of meaning-making such as culture and media. By foregrounding these

ideas, the chapter offers a basis for developing an alternative conceptual frame within which analytical gaps might be addressed; particularly, beyond the 'constructivist consensus', where there is tendency to 'overlook empirical variation' in how collective identity might shape the lives of individuals (Wimmer, 2013, p.3).

In its attempt at doing so, the chapter identifies key areas across the literature where important analytical categories such as the concepts of *everywhereness* and *holdingness* (which emerge from the empirical data) might potentially add to our understanding of identity. First, it identifies how we might gain further understanding about the importance of commonality to constructions of individual *and* collective identity, where individuality may be emphasised across the more dominant constructivist literature (Wimmer, 2013). Second, it offers a kind of middle ground between essentialist assumptions of fixedness and constructivist insistences on fluidity, particularly for contexts where there might be some appearance of the manifestation of 'givenness, transsituational stability, and deep-rooted[ness]' (Wimmer, 2013, p.2), without validating claims of 'essences' or of permanence in identity.

Working within the scaffolds of these concerns, the chapter lays out the conceptual basis for a potential alternative theory of African identity, which it proposes to be multi-nodal; always encapsulating multiple categories that might stand alone, compete, and overlap as distinguishable meaningful categories, or find continuity, coalesce, *hold* within specific contexts and over given periods of time. The conjecture is that such a multi-nodal configuration would likely be produced within a co-created culture, whose materialities circulate meanings of collectiveness, as they transcend space; collapse it, extend it through processes of *transnationalisation* and *digitalisation*—which are concepts I discuss in the next theoretical chapter.

Chapter 3

It's (not) our culture: transnationalisation of culture, digitalisation, and [a] space for identity

"Identities are produced, consumed and regulated within culture… creating meanings through symbolic systems of representation about the identity positions which we might adopt."

Kath Woodward (1997, p.2)

A recurring trope across social media discourse, within online communities often collectively imagined as African, is the satirisation of the phrase '*it's not our culture*', which is typically deployed in traditionalist rebuffs of contemporary—often liberal/reformist—ideas, practices, concerns. Young Africans who tend to be active in those social media circles constantly tell of their familiarity with the phrase, trading anecdotes of how their elders routinely reached for it in admonishments of behaviours marked unacceptable, while enforcing those considered acceptable, using the converse '*it's our culture*'. Now a weapon of cyber repartée, it is deployed ironically by progressives, in derision of conservative resistances to social change, or by those conservatives, themselves, in reassertion of their dismissive traditionalist positions. But '*it's not our culture*' is not just a double-edged sword in the ideological online wars of Africa's 'social media generation'; it is, as well, a marker of the boundaries of what is understood to constitute 'culture' and the discourses of contestation that seek to reconfigure it. It is a code of identity, a demarcation of what is *ours*—that which belongs to us, makes us *us*—versus what is not—that which does not come from us, marks us as different from others (and, others, from us). It bears on ideas of ownership of culture and of space; and, because the labels of what is *'(not) our culture'* travel across internet circles and multiple geographies of Africanness, they also bear on ideas of *transnationalisation* and of *digitalisation*.

These are the concerns of this chapter. It broadly considers the interconnections between culture and space, and how both frame meanings of identity in a globalised world. It does this by thinking through considerations associated with transnationalisation and digitalisation, mapping out roles of co-created culture and digital media in the (re)production of meanings of identity and in their circulation, sustenance, and (re)negotiation. It will consider the definitions of (co-created) culture in relation to identity, and how processes of transnationalisation and digitalisation complicate their conceptual boundaries, mapping out what new considerations these processes have produced; and how these might relate with the constitution of space. For African identity, these considerations might be particularly illuminating, as

shortfalls of older transnational projects of collectiveness were attributable to inefficiencies in attempts at simulating cultural cohesion, and to the near-impossible goals of unification that were, in those periods, unsustainable due to the absence of the kinds of advancements in communications technologies they would have required (Smith, 1993). These deficiencies in realising cultural unity were always because of Africa's vast diversity, with the extant lines of continuity across cultures difficult to consolidate. We understand that codes of identity (Castells, 2009) are created, circulated, and engaged with through/in culture (Hall, 1994; Saha, 2021; Woodward, 1997); and culture carries these codes of identity through mediated symbols such as music, fashion, dance, *etc*., whose meanings are only specified within the contexts in which they are produced (Cohen, 1993). But, as people move, so do their meanings, and meanings eventually find ways of travelling beyond their people (Hannerz, 1996). As meanings from different contexts start to converge, they begin to build foundations for hybrid cultures, which, then, consolidate into newer cultures. As advances in technology (such as digital/social media) collapse the space and time within which these meanings have to travel, opportunities for co-created cultures (such as Afrobeats culture) develop.

In its traditional anthropological sense, culture was thought to be related to territory. It was broadly defined as 'the way of life of a bounded social group in a fixed and clearly defined geographical location or territory' (Welz, 2009, p.37). However, with the advent of globalisation and consequent processes of migration and transnational mobility, cultures became less static, less defined by location, rendering cultural boundaries less straightforward to define or locate within territorial limits, which are increasingly easily traversed by and through new communication technologies (Welz, 2009). While they may no longer be attachable to territory, we might still think about cultures, in a slightly adjusted sense, as 'packages of meanings and meaningful forms, distinctive to collectivities' (Hannerz, 1996, p.8); collectivities that have become or are becoming increasingly transnational(ised).

The term 'transnationalisation' works to capture the cultural processes that transcend geopolitical boundaries, resulting from the dispersal of people and the flows of their ideas, practices, and artefacts across multiple geographies, beyond borders of nation states, often to extents that make them difficult to associate to a single place of origin (Welz, 2009). A distinction might be made between transnationalisation and globalisation, as globalisation is often defined as a more encompassing process, universal in scale, and 'embodied in economic and political processes whose protagonists are multinational corporations, national governments, and supranational organisations' (Welz, 2009, p.38). Although they are attributable to patterns of migration and mobility, which, themselves, can be linked to globalisation, transnational processes involve a different set of actors—'individuals, kinship groups, ethnic groups, firms, social movements, etc.' (Hannerz, 1996, p.237)—whose motivations are more about cultural interconnectedness than they are about economic

and political dominance (Welz, 2009). This need for cultural interconnectedness beyond geographical limits facilitates 'transnational flows of images, practices, discourses…perspectives' that are able to exert 'profound effects on people's identities [in]…both local and global settings' (Vertovec, 2001, p.580). As boundaries blur, localised identities tend to take on globalised features, and globalised identities, constituted through the intermixing of the codes and attributes from multiple localised identities, increasingly become points of reference for certain comparative assessments; a sort of 'double consciousness garnered from…transnational conceptions of self' (Vertovec, 2001, p.580).

But what are the dynamics of these flows between the 'local' and the 'global'? If processes of transnationalisation enforce connections within collectivities, they also compel difference from others. What implications could they have for issues relating to a sense of ownership of a culture or for concerns around appropriation, and how do they enforce or mark out boundaries of identity? I attempt to reflect on these questions in the following section, drawing out some observations in the social world by focusing on the African context, more generally, and on Afrobeats culture more specifically. As I have already discussed (in Chapter 2), African cultures have always been thought to possess a certain transnational character, with lines of continuity that are imagined to trace beyond the pre-modern era and transcend space. These continuities have been core to forming the consciousnesses—diasporic and originary—that have framed ideas, theories, and movements of collective identity. If we think of culture as a vehicle for the circulation of identity; if we can trace culture as the frame within which codes of collective African identity have historically been anchored; if we recognise that processes of transnationalisation are capable of creating the conditions that lead to the merging of the cultural attributes belonging to multiple collectivities; then, we can work within a conjecture that Afrobeats, a co-created transnational cultural form, could have the potential to hold the codes of identity that mark a collective Africanness.

Afrobeats as co-created culture: Circularity, Afro-Cool & Identity

As de Witte & Spronk (2014, p.171) observe, 'projects of Africanness often imply matters of cultural heritage, popular culture and creativity'. Everyday life across the continent is lived through creativity and inventiveness manifested in popular cultural forms that not only facilitate social life beyond bare survival, but also become the basis of connection within and across societies, across the continent (Barber, 2018). Among these elements of African cultural exchange, music, as Paul Zeleza (2008) notes, is of prime importance, serving as a 'powerful medium of communication between

Africa and its diasporas through which cultural influences… and identities have continuously [been] circulated' (Zeleza, 2008, p. 11). Music is often considered as a structuring element in the identity construction processes of groups across Africa. For example, as 'part and parcel of daily life…both in the configuration…of identities and in their expression' (Martin, 2013, p. 10), music was the main historical element that shaped the constructed creolised identity of Cape Town, South Africa, as it helped structure the city's social relations and foster connections among people, who had been ascribed separate rigid racialised identities, that seemingly merged across time. The role of music in the construction of identities and the direct impact it had on national cohesion in post-independence Mali became evident when, following its prohibition under Shari'a law in 2012, its absence contributed to a breakdown in social relations, destabilising the notion of a collective Malian identity (Potter, 2019). Music helped young adults in Canada, who identified as African, Caribbean and/or Black, in their resistance to racism; in fostering a sense of connectedness to their embodied Black identities; and in establishing 'self-continuity…coherence across histories and generations', as it engendered modes of (re)connection with homeland (Myrie et al, 2021, p.1).

Musical flows between Africa and its diasporas continuously sustain 'cultural influences, ideas, instruments, images, institutions, identities…creating new modes of cultural expression both within Africa itself and in the diaspora' (Zeleza, 2010b, p.212). Beyond national and regional manifestations, the centrality of music cultures in the articulation of multi-ethnic or transnational connections across African diasporas has also been a point of interest across the cultural studies literature. Rooted in the confluences of various African cultures that were transported and reconstituted by enslaved Africans and their descendants, syncretic Afro-diasporic music cultures help facilitate the circulation of Black identities across the transatlantic diasporas (Gilroy, 1991). Tracing these flows back to early twentieth century transportations of jazz/blues culture from America to Europe (Karush, 2012; Chincoli, 2017), through the colonial era circulation of reggae and calypso from the Caribbean towards and throughout Africa and its other diasporas (Campbell, 1998; Badase, 2017), music cultures, 'produced out of racial slavery' (Gilroy, 1991, p.112), have always been conduits for the constitution of Blackness. These inter-diasporic axes of circulation, however, have generally kept Africa at the periphery, maintaining distant connections with the continent, whose inhabitants often only engage with the cultures belatedly. There is often a unidirectional flow—from the diaspora(s) to Africa—of the creative processes that are foundational to these cultures, leaving continental Africans lacking active participation in or (co)ownership of their initial configuration.

Even with its vast popularity across Africa, hip-hop culture, for example, has largely remained resistant to any cultural influence from the continent, outside of the initial historical influences of pre-slavery African cultures (see Swartz, 2008). Despite the organic emergence and popularity of homegrown styles (e.g. *Kwaito* in South Africa, *Swah Rap* in Tanzania,

and *Hiplife* in Ghana) inspired, in part, by hip-hop culture, the flow of influence has rarely been reciprocal. Similarly, while, reggae music—whose earliest compositions were heavily influenced by Rastafarian orthodoxy and the notion of attachment to Black Africa—became popular across Africa, very few, if any, of the elements of localised versions have had visible impact on global reggae culture. The nexus of creativity, for reggae, has remained largely in the Caribbean. As Gilroy (1991) notes, there is some value in considering the linkages between Black cultures, and in the circulation of these cultures, as they shape a global Black identity. My argument, here, follows that, for a thorough understanding of the circulation of African identities facilitated by music flows, the axes of circulation and of creativity must necessarily be circular or, at the least, bi-directional. While diasporic music cultures serve as useful frames within which dynamics of Black African identity might be understood, the inherent limitation of their unidirectional flows, as I have just briefly elaborated, constrain a full understanding, at least in the contemporary moment, of the circulation of African identity through Africa and its diasporas. I propose that, as the product of collective creative enterprise of young people across homeland and diasporic space, Afrobeats culture provides the frame needed to extend our understanding of the impact of music on the circulation of African identity, potentially, beyond the single context.

Produced out of the collaborative endeavours of homeland and diasporic African youth, Afrobeats culture, as I discussed in Chapter 1, brings together a range of African musics and their associated rituals of engagement—that is, the styles of dance and of fashion, the symbology, the colloquialisms, the gesticulations, the *joy*. These are co-created, *first*, because they settle into distinct modes, out of dynamic processes of exchange, of refashioning, and of adoption, as different sensibilities, specific to homeland and to diasporic contexts, come into contact, overlap, and blend. *Second*, they are constantly being (re)made in a cycle of co-creation between producers and consumers, whose contributions equally (re)shape the value and aesthetics of the culture. For instance, besides the fact that the music is largely produced to match the rhythmic characteristics of existing dance styles, consumers (i.e. fans) create dances for the music, which are, then, integrated into dance routines for the music videos or dance challenges initiated by producers (e.g. musicians, choreographers), which are, then, popularised and, in many cases, assimilated as the customary dance moves for those specific songs (see Royston, 2024). In this sense, we might understand co-creation as the coming-together of various tastes, styles, standards, values, influences, aesthetics, etc. from homeland and from diaspora (and/or from producers and consumers) into the collective production of Afrobeats culture.

While scant, an emerging body of literature has been exploring the cultural significance of Afrobeats and its central value in the construction of a collective African identity within the continent and across its diasporas. In an examination of Afrobeats music videos as a place for expressing Africanness, for example, Rens (2021) focuses on representations of

Africanness and the meanings these representations produce across homeland and diasporic contexts; and Marleen de Witte's (2021) findings show that, while negotiating the politics of Blackness and of Africanness in Europe, second-generation migrant youth found Afrobeats culture essential to their construction of a collective African identity. While this work focuses on the formation of new diasporic identities, in earlier work (de Witte, 2019), the same demographic is found to construct a collective African identity based on meanings attached to and conveyed within cultural artefacts produced within homeland contexts. Ethnographic data from Alakija's (2016) enquiry into the identities expressed by first- and second-generation migrants in the United Kingdom suggests that, through their use of social media, the younger generation is constituting what the researcher identifies as a 'new' Nigerian identity anchored within Afrobeats culture. Similar observations of this 'new' African identity, distinct from the assimilated or hyphenated identities older generations asserted, have been made among groups in the United States (Chacko, 2018) and in the Netherlands (de Witte, 2019), who exhibit strong attachments to the Afro-cool value they find in Afrobeats culture. Across these contexts, young Africans in diaspora are found to be reclaiming their African identities, which are anchored on cultural elements produced in homeland, in almost passive, merely consumptive roles. What is missing is a fuller understanding of the actual participatory, contributive role they occupy in the co-creation of the culture and in its circulation, popularity, and in the upturn of its cultural value, as I will show across the empirical discussion.

These studies are valuable, nonetheless, in that they provide a basis for making initial theoretical arguments about the nature of the expected dynamics that Afrobeats culture would likely foster; dynamics that would have important bearing on observations of the construction of a collective African identity. Rens (2021) provides useful insight, from a homeland African perspective, into some of the assimilative processes involved in the production of Afrobeats music and music video content, and how the producers of the culture merge their identities with these processes. His analysis of the intersectionality of these identities and processes is also of value, as it sheds light into their multifaceted nature and on the socio-cultural realities that inform choices to assimilate these identities. De Witte's (2021) study provides potentially directly comparable data within a racialised context that might be similar to that of the United Kingdom's, that offers valuable insight into the dynamics of contestation that might complicate constructions of diasporic Black and/or African identities. Her study identifies Afrobeats culture as a sort of unifier for these contesting identities, which helps support a primary conjectural position that an emerging collective African identity is potentially observable and that it is shaped by Afrobeats culture. Alakija's (2016) study places all of these real-world observations within the space of social media, with focus on a diasporic context that is of interest.

In mapping out the relations of music to identity and tracing the cultural significances of Afrobeats, in particular, I attempt, in this section, to draw attention to how the co-production of Afrobeats culture among young Africans on the African continent and those in its diasporas may be shaping an emerging African identity or reinforcing/reaffirming existing conceptions of Africanness. I seek to relate the relationships between music and identity discussed in existing studies to the potential influences Afrobeats culture may have on the construction of a collective African identity, and, in identifying the limitations of older diasporic music cultures (in terms of circulation), I underline the prospects of co-created Afrobeats culture as a potential unifying force, at least culturally, for Africa and its diasporas.

Second, I identify in this emerging literature, suggestions that, as a cultural product, Afrobeats may be providing young Africans with a basis for the expression of their African heritage (see popular examples in Adegoke, 2015; Ofiaja, 2017). The reliance on Afro-cool—'the positive, creatively hybrid, mostly urban-oriented styling of Africanness' (de Witte, 2014, p.289)—across these contexts, for the cultural value (Kaszynska, 2024) it offers becomes salient. Our understanding of 'Afro-cool' might be brought into conversation with Robert Thompson's (1973) 'aesthetic of the cool', which attempts to capture the inherent impetus toward achieving a state of 'cool'– 'a return to *freshness*, to immaculate concentration of mind, to the *artistic shaping of matter* and societal happening' (p.41, emphasis added)–among African cultures, which is captured in and transmitted across the continent and its diasporas through art. Thompson (2011) traces the 'aesthetic of the cool' from within ethnic clusters across West, Central, and Southern Africa to Maroon ethnic formations in South America and to Black communities in North America, identifying lines of continuity across these Afro-Atlantic cultures, which he argues are retained in modern configurations. Coolness, Thompson (1973) finds, is carried through poise and depth of dignity, merging moral uprightness with beauty; harmony of the soul, with a maintenance of high aesthetic appearance. Among the Tinto-Mbu of Cameroon, for example, value lies in the depth of moral character; however, 'no matter how ordinary [the] face, it is important…to dress as beautifully as possible in order to attest [a] fineness of position in appropriate visual impact' (Thompson, 1973, p.42). Similarly, the Ga of southern Ghana believe that, once lost, harmony with one's ideal self can only be restored through 'extraordinary aesthetic persuasion: wearing brilliant cloth…and keeping important company' (Thompson, 1973, p.42). I suggest that this impulse towards maintaining a *freshness*, towards showcasing *beauty and poise*, is what carries through the sense of Afro-cool and/or of Black-cool. As I shall show across the empirical discussion, this impulse underlies affects of cultural and racial pride, and validations of the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats culture, in terms of its perceived cultural value.

Cultural value, here, refers to the collectively validated, intersubjectively warranted assignment of meaning to a cultural artefact, designating to it a worth not measurable in monetary or economic terms (Kaszynska, 2024). It is determined

on the 'basis of cultural values—norms, beliefs and practices' that collectively shape how people live (Kaszynska, 2024, p.463) and it is produced within communal interpretations of what is important, what is of 'significance in light of some underpinning socio-cultural norms' (p.471) and collective goals. The rise in prominence of Afrobeats culture within the circuits of global popular culture might be considered a basis for the validation of its cultural value. This value underlies the feelings of pride that provoke the reclamation of African identities (see Whaley, 2019; Obkircher, 2020; Mankaprr & Nelson, 2022) in cultural contexts where these identities had previously been regarded in negative light. Quoted in Obkircher (2020), Afrobeats superstar, Davido, attributes this reclamation of identity to an increase in cultural value he identifies in Afrobeats culture, which he describes as 'the new oil', and which he relates to transformations in mainly white supremacist perceptions of Africanness. This increase in value coincides with perceived positive transformations in assessments of African cultural artefacts in contexts (and in global cultural hierarchies), thitherto uncharitable towards them, because of the inherent *coolness* that is now associated with Afrobeats culture. He reflects on a childhood in the US where 'being African wasn't cool' and where stereotypical and racist depictions of Africa were ubiquitous; however, Afrobeats' Afro-cool quality injects a cultural value that pushes 'people [to] talk about the culture, the food.'; that makes 'everybody [want] to make African music' (in Obkircher, 2020, para 5).

Matters of cultural value are matters we might relate to—and even expect of—the processes of transnationalisation. They have always been matters connected to hegemonic, white supremacist assessments of 'high' and 'low' cultures, of migration and of mobility, and, in an increasingly globalised world, they are matters of global cultural hierarchies and of positionings within them. Migration produces diasporas whose removal from their original ethnic or geographical homelands creates complex communication and cultural networks, as well as 'the ethnically and culturally diverse cities that are so characteristic of contemporary cultural forms' (Clammer, 2018, p.71). For diasporic populations, especially, asserting cultural value is an evident aspect of everyday negotiations of belonging, enabled by transnational social, cultural, and political processes that are regulated within the shifting basis of social power, often inaccessible to them (Clammer, 2018).

The notion of increased cultural value becomes useful in considerations of the lived experience of second-generation West-African immigrant youth, who, after having expressed a sense of shame in their African identities following years of ridicule in the United Kingdom (Adegoke, 2015; Ofiaja, 2017) and in the Netherlands (deWitte & Spronk, 2014), reclaimed that identity with the cultural validation that accompanied the mainstream popularity of Afrobeats culture. Beyond its popularity and widespread assimilation into Black popular culture, Afrobeats culture has found appeal within non-Black social worlds, granting young Africans a sense of acceptance within these social worlds (Obkircher, 2020).

With the increased cultural legitimacy gained through alliances with key figures in Black popular culture—which, itself, facilitates the validation of 'cool' within the racialised contexts, where whites are at the top and Blacks at the bottom—Afrobeats culture lends Africanness an improved status within these racial/ethnic hierarchies. The access that Afrobeats has negotiated through authentication within mainstream Black/popular culture also exemplifies the more direct link (from Africa to its diasporas) that Afrobeats fosters, and the circular nature of the creative relationships it facilitates, where localised versions of other Black music cultures (such as hip-hop and reggae, for example) have had less success.

Mainstream success propelled Afrobeats culture to a global audience, which led to an international following outside of its original African (and subsequent diasporic) audiences. Non-Black participation in the culture has now grown from followership to performance. White pop superstars, Justin Bieber and Ed Sheeran, as well as rock star, Chris Martin, have all collaborated with Afrobeats stars in recent years. South Korean, Jeong Dong- uk, known by the stage name, *Penomeco*, attracted some controversy in Ghana and in Nigeria, after the music video for his Afrobeats song, *'Bolo'*, was circulated on Twitter and Instagram in 2021. It is not uncommon to find videos of non-Black individuals performing Afrobeats dances across digital media platforms such as YouTube and TikTok. These patterns of the culture's increasing reception, extending beyond the nexus of Blackness, however, raise questions of appropriation and commodification—questions that are linked to, and may be viewed as consequences of, processes of transnationalisation—which have always been subjects of concern relative to Black culture more broadly.

For example, in October 2013, *Shokazoba*, an all-white-member band caused some controversy when they listed as an Afrobeats band on the roster for a Hampshire College student event. Following backlash from members of the student body and some social media commentators, the organisers of the event removed the band from the roster but paid the full performance rate anyway. In response, keyboardist for the band, Jason Moses, suggested that race was unimportant and that 'music and art has the opportunity to transcend all of that', as a rebuttal to concerns surrounding appropriation (Stabile, 2013). Comments such as Moses' are demonstrative of what has been critiqued as 'white entitlement' (Jackson & McDonald, 2019; Nguyen & Strohl, 2018); the sense that any cultural product, because of its inherent appeal, must be open to universal use, purely based on the fact of its accessibility. In this worldview—this wilful oblivion to the power relations and the racial dynamics involved in the use of Black culture for profit—there is a separation of Black artforms from Black people (Hall, 1997) and their real and symbolic worlds. As Akwugo Emejulu (in Davies, 2019, para 6) puts it, 'for hipster white folks, Blackness is still something to be consumed but not necessarily anything to engage with'.

As Perry Hall (1997) observes, the removal of Blackness from Black culture does not merely exploit Black people's 'aesthetic innovation[s]' culturally and commercially, it also 'nullifies the cultural meaning those forms provide' (p.31). These appropriated cultures, then, lose certain degrees of effectiveness as 'expressions and affirmations of the unique cultural experiences from which they arise' (Hall, 1997, p.31). There are discernible connections, here, with matters of identity. If collective cultural expression loses some of its symbolic meaning—its power to engineer affirmations of the distinctive individual and group experiences that define a people—there would, logically, be some implications for the construction and expression of their collective identity. Of course, we know this of older Black music cultures, but not necessarily of Afrobeats. Instances of appropriation of Afrobeats culture are not numerous; but they are becoming less sparse, and we do know that, at various historical points, newer Black music cultures have emerged that have been subjected to similar processes of co-optation, that led to the dispossession of the originally Black music cultures—swing, jazz, country, rock, pop, reggae—that were appropriated before them (Hall, 1997; Chow, 2019). We know, also, that these processes can be cyclical, often re-producing certain identical effects, until Blackness is erased, or whiteness co-opted in. This raises certain critical questions. Following the outrage that has followed some of the known instances of appropriation of Afrobeats culture, might there be any real concerns amongst young Africans that this kind of cultural dispossession could occur? Are matters of appropriation and commodification even of concern in the first place? How guarded (or not) are young Africans of the cultural significance of Afrobeats, and the ties it may hold to their affirmations of cultural uniqueness? How might these concerns potentially relate with the mechanisms that underlie the emergence of boundaries (as I have discussed in the previous chapter)?

As culture becomes more transnationalised, these tensions become more discernible. As localised cultures expand into transnational cultural collectivities, they also become more accessible to other collectivities, which, then, transforms them into globalised cultures. Processes of globalisation and of transnationalisation help to facilitate the creation of new hybridised cultures, which, for historically dispossessed populations, may be beneficial in regaining semblances of unification following histories of dispersal. As the production and consumption of transnationalised cultures become increasingly digitalised, they become prone to hegemonic subsummation or erasure, as the empirical discussion will show, in the ways that they are 'depicted…including in ways that do not involve (m)any real Black people' (Sobande, 2021, p.136). These processes create practical concerns over appropriation, especially as historically dominant cultures assert their hegemony by subsuming new, exciting forms of cultural expression (Clammer, 2018). They also have some implications for collective identity formation. For African identity, for example, just as older anti-colonial mobilisations towards the reclamation of a collective identity were provoked by histories and exertions of colonial dispossession and racist oppression, contemporary efforts could be stimulated by various resistances to forms of white hegemonic erasure,

exploitation, and systemic discrimination (as might be illustrated in the mobilisations of recent movements such as RhodesMustFall, BlackLivesMatter, and SoWhite); resistances that, themselves transnational, would likely be fostered by processes of digitalisation.

Digitalising Africanness: Social Media, Space, and African Identity

If the process of transnationalisation begins with mobility; with the movement of people and their meanings, then, the connections and spaces involved in the congregations and exchanges required for the consolidation of cultures and of collective identity are extended by digital technologies. Put differently, processes of transnationalisation are facilitated, accelerated, structured by and through processes of digitalisation. Transnationalisation becomes more immediate, more ubiquitous, because of advanced technologies and the accelerated connections they foster. Not only are there enhancements in the speed of transnational flows, there also are changes in the cultural experience, itself, in access and participation; in production and circulation of cultural products; and in creation and dissemination of meaning; processes of transnationalisation that, as I have argued, become influential in producing, circulating, and sustaining collective identity.

'Digitalisation' refers to 'the way many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures' (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016, p.1), distinct from 'the technical process of converting streams of analogue information into digital bits of 1s and 0s with discrete and discontinuous values', which is known as 'digitisation' (p.1). There is a history of conflation, one which has seen the two concepts used interchangeably; however, though they are interrelated, they describe two different processes. Brennen & Kreiss (2016) anchor their distinction between the two concepts in the dictionary definitions, which reference 'digitisation' as 'the action or process of digitising; the conversion of analogue data (esp. in later use images, video, and text) into digital form' and 'digitalisation' as 'the adoption or increase in use of digital or computer technology by an organisation, industry, country, etc.' (p.1).

I imagine (using the context of Afrobeats culture as an example) instinctively taking out my phone to record persons younger and much cooler than I, as they do the '*leg work*'—the quick-pace rhythmic movement of feet associated with the new wave of Afrobeats sounds—that I am so fascinated by. Ten years ago, *I* would have been the cool young person

doing the '*azonto*'—the rhythmic set of dances that defined the first wave of Afrobeats music. In that moment that I press the record button, my engagement with the culture changes. Where, ten years ago, I would have engaged with the culture *in the moment*—in its liveness, capturing it as (and in) my active participation of it, in my performance of it—my (hypothetical) use of a phone camera becomes a practice of digitalisation. The dances I record become digitised to be shared with others across other digital media; as I relegate my memory of the moment to these digitised recordings, that will become uploads, that will become social media content, further digitalising my engagement with the culture.

I use this very basic illustration to explain how 'digitalisation' is to be understood: the 'macrolevel changes in social structure and practice caused by [the ubiquity of] digitisation' at the micro level (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016, p.5). To be certain, much of Afrobeats culture—the music, the dances, the fashions—was digitised from its beginnings, and had to be in order to appeal on as large a scale as it did across the African continent and throughout its diasporas, and to attain the level of popularity it, now, has globally. As a co-created transnational cultural form, it was produced out of processes of digitalisation that already characterised social life in the mid-2000's, especially in the advent of digital and social-networking sites. These will be the focus of this section. Here, I discuss how these technologies shape engagement with (Afrobeats) culture and how they create space for the circulation of culture and of identity. As Manuel Castells notes, digitalisation of culture is amongst the most definitive features of the modern world (Castells, 2010). It has 'reshaped conceptions of materiality and place and facilitated new circulations of culture…and [of] people' (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016, p.5). Much of the scholarship on digitalisation focuses on how an underlying media and communications system organises the social world and nearly all the relations that occur within it (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016). This communication system, which is 'single, interconnected, digitised' is 'wholly characterised by "new media", often defined simply as media capable of receiving and manipulating digital signals' (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016, p.5). For my purposes, I focus mainly on social media.

Social media, through their extension of 'the ideological and technological foundations of Web 2.0' (Kaplan & Haenlein 2010, p.61), have added new dimensions for cultural engagement, fostering the creation/exchange of user-generated content and cultural artefacts (Burns, 2009; Jung, 2014), and continuing to facilitate, at great speeds, the convergences of the offline relations and routines of everyday life with online ones (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2014). The proliferation of these technologies has changed the mode and immediacy of communication across multiple geographies, improving transnational ties, helping retain diasporic connexions to homeland (Barber, 2018; Yékú, 2022), to homeland cultures (Christiansen, 2017), as well as to global popular culture (Burns, 2009; Poell, Nieborg, & Duffy, 2022). Also, because these technologies are universal, immediate, and accessible beyond and across physical boundaries, they play a crucial

role in expanding transnational space and sustaining connectedness, thereby facilitating communicative access crucial for the production of transnational cultural artefacts and, by extension, identities. Studies (Mano & Willems, 2010; Brinkman & Jacobi, 2020; Maynard & Jules, 2020) have shown how internet-based media create spaces for expression of individual and collective racial and national identities, because of the multiplicity of interactions they sustain and the immediacy with which they do so.

These affordances provided by and in the convergences of internet-based technologies (Diminescu, 2008) and social media (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2014) create a kind of synergic relationship that becomes essential for the circulation of popular culture, which is an important thread in the fabric of everyday life, particularly across Africa. As Karin Barber (2018) notes, 'popular culture in Africa is a product of everyday life' and, produced and sustained by the non-elite, it is its dynamism that 'makes Africa what it is' (p.1). It is the culture of a majority of the continent's peoples—the 'ordinary'—who make the continent a place of inventiveness and of creativity; a place to 'make a mark…to offer interpretation of experience' through their own stories; a place of self- and communal expression, and of identity (Barber, 2018, p.2). However, these stories are rarely told, Barber notes, as global forces and structures of power—international media, the cultural industries and the elite that own them—are not interested 'in the ordinariness of everyday life in Africa' or in 'people's resilience in solving ordinary problems' (2018, p.1). This is where social media become essential. Because of the relative ease of access to especially mobile internet and social media technologies in many parts of Africa, 'ordinary' people, who, themselves, become creators 'seeking to reach new continental and diasporic internet audiences' (Barber, 2018, p.2) are able to 'creat[e] networks of transmission with audiences or consumers locally and around the world' (p.130). It is not uncommon, Barber observes, to find 'everywhere in Africa, people using mobile phones to document events on the ground, share music, promote activist agendas…imagine alternative worlds' (2018, p.2).

These alternative worlds are built and sustained within social media ecologies. Social media platforms do not exist in isolation. Following their advance and wide diffusion, they are now a 'collection of possible channels' that 'represents a diverse ecosystem with an elaborate landscape of social roads and roundabouts within and between platforms' (Bayer, Triệu, & Ellison, 2020, p.488). Users tend to incorporate multiple platforms into their social media practices as they look to influence specific people and groups (Zhao, Lampe, & Ellison, 2016); thereby, creating an ecosystem. This ecosystem is customisable; users can select sets of tools that will be employed together—in a personalised social media ecology—to meet their communicative goals, which, according to emergent research, 'will vary considerably as a function of the specific user' (Zhao, Lampe, & Ellison, 2016, p.448). Olesen (2020) characterises this social media ecology, noting that it: (a) lowers the cost of initiating performances, (b) accentuates visual representation, (c) creates intimacy between

protagonist and audience, (d) draws in new and increasingly young audiences, and (e) distributes communication across several media platforms (Olesen, 2020, p.1326). These characteristics make social media ecologies important for the consumption and circulation of music cultures, particularly those, such as Afrobeats culture, that are co-created. In fact, evolutions in music consumption practices, in recent years, have led to a kind of co-constitutive relationship, as 'music has become a constitutive component of stories, shorts, reels, videos, pins, photos, and ordinary posts' across social media, highlighting these apps' pivotal roles 'in music consumption but also the increasing significance of music in the design of social media' (Siles et al., 2024, p.3481).

The concept of social media ecology, especially thinking through Olesen's (2020) characterisation, when combined with the concept of 'trans media', helps explain both old and new trends within Afrobeats culture. Transmedia, taken from the concept of 'transmedia storytelling', refers to the interlinked and open-ended circulation of media content across multiple platforms, where prosumers are becoming key agents in production flows (Jansson, 2013). The success of Afrobeats came with its heavy reliance on social media sites such as Twitter and YouTube and the online communities they offered. The deliberate attachment to and adoption of the concurrent popularity of flash mobs around the late 2000's, for example, enabled the sharing of Afrobeats cultural artefacts across platforms, facilitating fan co-creation, and increasing word of mouth promotion. The effect was a sustained frenzy over dance moves and fashions represented in the flash mob videos featuring early Afrobeats hits such as Ghanaian artist, Fuze ODG's, '*Azonto',* and, subsequent UK Billboard hit, '*Antenna'* (Hancox, 2012). The use of co-creation not only enabled the new artists to connect with a growing fanbase, it also created a sense of ownership of the music among its primary contributors and audiences, who were mainly young Africans on the continent and young second-generation African immigrants with the resources to produce the videos and generate buzz online. Their engagement, in turn, allowed those in the diaspora to maintain connections to and participate, in real time, in the (re)configuration of the cultural products (music, dance, fashions, etc.) originating from the homeland. These strategies for co-creation continue across newer social media technologies such as TikTok, which are wholly reliant on user-generated content.

We know that one of the most widespread effects of digitalisation on social life is how its processes are able to impose a 'convergence' on formerly disparate sectors of social life (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016). We are able to see this effect most markedly in the ways that processes of digitalisation foster the convergence of different media. Coupling this effect with the capacity of processes of digitalisation to enable, sustain, and expand the processes of globalisation—to, in essence, collapse territorial borders—we can, perhaps, think of the convergences of social media as fostering transnational space. Thinking additionally about how they often are or can be (social) sites of connection between diasporas and homelands,

we can understand these media beyond their function of creating, of fostering transnational relatedness, viewing them, further, as, themselves, lived sites of transnational connection. In doing so, we may position them as an intermediary dimension; a location, at once materialised (through physical digital technologies) and imaginary; a fusion of multiple practices and locales, joining home and host worlds.

Thinking of social media convergence as location, as connective site, as locale, would allow us to understand how transnational lives are increasingly lived through them. We can understand transnational lives within the contexts of their sustained connections; and these connections, Vertovec (2001) argues, inherently necessitate juxtapositions with the concept of identity, and the places within which it is constructed, negotiated, and reproduced. Place, then, becomes another important concept (besides transnationalism and identity) in understanding dispersed populations because 'transnational networks of exchange and participation' (Vertovec, 2001, p.573), are often built on notions of common identity, which ordinarily would be negotiated across social worlds that transcend a single place. This multiplicity of place—as well as the various practices that construct and define them—is what Myria Georgiou (2010) conceives 'space' to be. I rely on this notion of space as 'not singular', as manifold in its assembly of places and practices 'into meaningful relations and formations'. It is an embodiment of social meanings 'that are always plural' (Georgiou, 2010, p.22); and the fluid interconnection of places, constituted by 'intersections of mobile elements, assemblages and meeting points' (Georgiou, 2010, p.17). Here, we might extend de Certeau's (1984), conceptualisation of space as 'a practiced place', mindful—as studies of Black geographies remind us to be—that space is often composed of and by 'overlapping and contradictory…imaginations and experiences', especially for Black worlds, where 'multiple senses of place and multiple geographies' may co-exist (Allen, Lawhon & Pierce, 2018, p.1003). Place refers to site, to location; but, also, to an ensemble of the 'experiences and aspirations of a people' (Tuan, 1979, p.387), to their stories (Massey, 2005), to an interweaving of the meanings they (re)produce, to their logics of *belonging*. As 'functional nodes in space' (Tuan, 1979, p.388), places can be brought into relation and they can be transformed, as the meanings that produce them shift, circulate, evolve.

Place, then, might be thought of as 'a meaningful site that combines location, locale, and sense of place' (Cresswell, 2009, p.169). As an absolute identifiable point 'with a specific set of coordinates and measurable distances…location refers to the 'where' of place' (p.169). It is specified, given a 'look' by locale; by the 'material setting for social relations'; and is given meaning—a sense—by 'the feelings and emotions' it becomes associated with (Cresswell, 2009, p.169). The affective attachments to place can be 'individual and based on personal biography or they can be shared…based on mediation and representation' (Cresswell, 2009, p.169). In this sense, we might understand how places might be

brought into relation, as I have been arguing so far, through representation (that is, culture) and through mediation (that is, connection; the flows and convergences of a social [trans]media ecology). As the ensemble of multiple places (Tuan, 1979), therefore, space embodies various axes of connection and spans multiple domains of *belonging*.

This coming together of domains of *belonging* is, as I have argued, actualised through processes of transnationalisation; processes that bring into focus juxtapositions of homeland and diaspora (Blunt & Bonnerjee, 2019). Homeland is often defined in the context of diaspora, as the 'originary' place, outside the area of settlement, that 'may be remembered, lost, imagined or yet to be achieved' (Blunt & Bonnerjee, 2019, p.267). It is the 'authoritative source of value, identity and loyalty' to which a diaspora has some kind of orientation (Brubaker, 2004, p.5). Diaspora, in turn, is understood as 'any kind of dispersion in space' that involves the crossing of borders (Brubaker, 2004, p.5) toward a (re)settlement 'in locations different to those of their origins' (Georgiou, 2010, p.21). This dispersion across space, of course, produces multiple connections, with 'flows of ideas and information beyond a singular nation' (Georgiou, 2010, p.21); but, even in this multiplicity, there is some manner of 'boundary maintenance'; a 'preservation of a distinctive identity vis-a`-vis a host society' (Brubaker, 2004, p.6) or, in some conceptualisations, an erosion of it, with emphasis on assimilation or hybridity (Hall, 1990). In either case, however, there is some impulse towards connecting to home (Blunt & Bonnerjee, 2019); toward reaching for it or fitting into it.

We might say, therefore, that diasporic life is understood largely in contexts of 'historical and experiential rift(s) between locations of residence and locations of belonging' (Gilroy, 1993, p. 124); of how diasporic place is produced in processes and feelings connected with (re)making home. Home, therefore, emerges in the interfusions of diasporic locations of residence and those of belonging. We know that diaspora already 'embodies a subtext of home' (Brah, 1996, p.187); a 'there' either to return to or to reimagine in the 'here' of the area of settlement (Blunt & Bonnerjee, 2019). But home is, first, an artefact of homeland. It is 'the initial habitat of ethnicity'; the imagined 'originary' place of belonging, 'in its real shape as a place, as well as in its symbolic imaginary form' (Georgiou, 2006, p.85). Much of the focus, across the available literature, has, however, been on an understanding of home through the lens of diaspora (often exploring the modes of settlement, in relation to senses of comfort, belonging, or familiarity in diasporic place). There is a point to be made, perhaps, for its self-evidence, as diaspora inherently involves the state of feeling 'at home' (Brah, 1996). There is, nonetheless, a need to understand home from a homeland perspective; both from the lived experience of those we construct as having not crossed borders (Brah, 1996) and those who have, for whom the 'staking [of a] claim to a place as one's own' (1996, p.190) might not be possible in areas of settlement that might be hostile. An understanding of a sense of 'feeling at home' or constructions of said home that is *collocational*, as I will show in Chapter 6, becomes useful.

Through such an understanding of home, we might, perhaps, conceptualise a continuous transnational space; with homeland and diasporic places connected through processes of transnationalisation that facilitate the production of co-created culture, and processes of digitalisation that circulate the meanings produced within this culture, through a connective place of social media convergences. As I have said, home emerges in the points of interconnection between homeland and diasporic places. A social media ecology, then, becomes important, in the interrelations of homeland and diaspora, for the constitution of home. Considering online African communities and Afrobeats culture, for instance, the norms, meanings, practices that engender the connective site span platforms such as Twitter, YouTube, and TikTok. While each of these platforms would offer their unique affordances, their use, in the way that they shape the culture, is fluid across all, with continuities manifesting across and through the technological features that enable convergence, as in a social [trans]media ecology.

For example, we might think of how the immediate connections that social media foster have created new meanings (such as 'virality') and practices (such as the 'challenge'), which have had tangible impact on Afrobeats culture. Here, internet challenges started with the use of old or obscure Afrobeats songs, which, upon attaining virality, received renewed attention from wider audiences within the transnational ecosystem created by the convergence of social media platforms. Apart from the promise of the increased visibility derived from going 'viral', the transnational space that these convergences create also encourages creators to perform their African identities and for those consuming their content to engage with these configurations. For example, in the vastly popular TikTok 'Don't Rush' challenge (see Jean, 2020), African women competed by stitching together two short clips; the first depicting themselves in plain Western-style clothes, and the second showing their transformation into 'African queens' draped in African print dresses. In the background was an Afrobeats song, '*Don't Rush',* by artists, Young T and Bugsey. A unique feature of the challenge was the theming of an African royalty trope, which led to a competition on which African country had the most colourful royal traditional outfits. Within those short 5-second clips, the participating women did not only reaffirm their African identities as their 'best selves', they also challenged other women to do same, and provided content with which those not actively participating could engage, circulating further those representations of Africanness. While these challenges tend to be celebratory in ways that reveal the interiority of Black joy (Sobande & Amponsah, 2019), we might see how the extended visibility could create certain possibilities for these African women's online performances of aspects of their everyday lives to become spectacularised (Sobande, 2021). The vast stretches of the ecology also increases the chances that they would be exposed, potentially, to compounded misogynist, racist abuse and/or violence (Sobande, 2021).

Participation in these challenges is driven by a need to *belong*; to be included in what is framed as communal activity, as a way of performing authenticity, and *being* a member of the viral group. Research (Lee-Won, Na & Coduto, 2017; Kim, 2018) suggests that virality is linked to perceptions of authenticity and informs intention to perform an action. Social media virality reinforces these perceptions, and creates conditions within which the sense of validation attached becomes desired—valued, even—until legitimacy of cultural products becomes dependent on whether or not they have attained virality. As the need to gain legitimacy increases, producers of cultural products direct their creative processes towards the goal of achieving virality (Sharma, 2013). It is not uncommon to find performers attempting to start their own viral challenges across social media platforms. A recent high-profile attempt by singer, Jennifer Lopez, which failed following heavy ridicule (Bowenbank, 2021), brings into view the ways that social media may be able to shape cultural engagement (Kim, 2018). We might also consider how their affordances, which are always optimised for algorithmic control, and are often directed toward achieving certain goals of capitalist extraction and exploitation, also may increase pressures on creators to self-brand (Sobande, Hesmondhalgh, & Saha, 2023) towards achieving higher visibility. But there are implications for (re)configuration of culture as well. Increased participation may relate to greater notions of authenticity (Sharma, 2013). The more the members of a cultural community that participate in its (re)configuration, the truer to the group dynamic the cultural form would likely be assumed to be. There is also the more basic matter of reach. The more viral a cultural product, the higher the reach, and, therefore, the impact it is likely to have (Kim, 2018). In the case of Afrobeats culture, in particular, virality played a crucial role in its popularity and later acceptance into mainstream Black culture (Royston, 2024).

In similar ways, places of origin (and those of resettlement) also cultivate their own norms, meanings, practices, and characteristics, creating distinct locales that are connected by—and become culturally integrated through—the mutually constructed transnational space. Each one of these locales is autonomous, argues Myria Georgiou, each possessing distinguishing dynamics, morality, and sociocultural meanings, but forming together 'spheres of belonging…where social relations, communication, and action take place and shape the meanings of identity and community' (2010, p.22). Arguably, this autonomy may be reasoned as that which creates the opportunity for co-construction of meanings of identity and the boundaries of community. However, despite the cohesions, there is also potential for conflict. We understand that the meanings inherent in transnational identities are shaped by their continuities and their tensions. We can understand also that these continuities are sustained—and the tensions, resolved—through the relations that are engendered within the transnational space. The unique meanings/practices/norms that make up the homeland and the diasporic places tend to converge within the connective place, are contested, reconfigured, and redefined into new nodes of meaning based on collective participation, intersubjective warranting, and the group-defined meanings of

being and *belonging*. These converged definitions of *being*, are, then, performed within the axes of the transnational space and are redistributed into other spheres of *belonging* through the connections this transnational space sustains.

Conclusion

This chapter is broadly concerned with culture and digital/social media, and the connections and space they engender for the (re)production of meanings of identity, as well as for their circulation, sustenance, and (re)negotiation. In the chapter, I have attempted to develop a conceptual basis for the argument that, the co-creation of Afrobeats culture among young Africans on the continent and those across its diasporas is shaping their notions of collective identity. I have broadly covered, in my discussion, three dimensions of co-creation. First, I have spoken about co-creation across space, where homeland and diasporic perspectives might merge. Second, I have touched on how co-creation might occur between producers and consumers of elements of music culture (i.e. musicians and audiences/fans/social media users). Third, I have suggested that co-creation may occur also amongst consumers (i.e. audience members/fans/social media users). I have also discussed how a collective African identity is validated within the Afro-cool cultural value that co-created Afrobeats is conceived to offer.

The chapter also focuses on processes of transnationalisation and of digitilaisation, drawing out their centrality to the circulation of meanings that become associated with this sense of collective identity, across homeland and diasporic contexts. It conceptualises an incomplete space within which these meanings circulate, suggesting that homeland and diaspora are inherently intertwined and are, in an increasingly globalised world, connected through cultural flows and, with more immediacy, through convergences of social media. This inherent interconnection can be understood by thinking through constructions of home; not only from examining diasporic imaginaries, as much of the literature has tended to do, but also from homeland perspectives. This understanding of home from both homeland and diasporic imaginations allows for a conceptualisation that makes sense of the continuous space, but also its individual constituent places that have their distinct features, characteristics, norms, practices. Such an understanding accounts for the many places that constitute space, and a further understanding of place as a 'meaningful site that combines location, locale, and sense of place' (Cresswell, 2009, p.169).

The chapter highlights the characteristics of homeland, diasporic, and connective places that distinguish them as sites, which, for the practical work of empirical enquiry, are useful. Based on these conceptualisations, I describe, in the next chapter, how I approach the field as continuous, with three distinct but interconnected sites, which will be the focus of the multi-sited ethnographic approach at the heart of the thesis' empirical enquiry.

Chapter 4

Multi-sitedness: a methodological framework

"Ethnographies that omit the methodology of doing fieldwork disappoint…because this information can reveal what a researcher was positioned to see, to know, and to understand."

Elizabeth Chiseri-Slater (1996, p.123)

Music culture is social practice, it is social process (Cohen, 1993); it is a set of impulses, continually travelling across the synapses of a social configuration, generating feelings of interrelatedness, and conducting the processes of meaning-making that come to inform modes of *being* and *belonging*. It 'is *the* thing'—music is never merely representational; it constitutes culture, enacts it (Back, 2023, p.450, emphasis added); weaves between bodies, carries every motion, every affect, every story, as it permeates, as it holds space. To understand it, therefore, is to know people; to know the stories that they tell about themselves, the ways in which they tell them, and how these stories are brought into relation with the ones they tell about others. It is an exercise in absorbing the space they constitute as their own—the space within which their stories circulate—and learning how they differentiate it, how they limit it. It is, in practical terms, an exercise in conducting a qualitative enquiry; one that relies on experiences, on observations, on conversations, and on context-derived interpretations.

This project makes an attempt at such an exercise. Because it works, as I have discussed in my theoretical discussion, to reveal how meanings produced within music culture might help clarify our understanding of the concept of identity; and, because it does so 'based on people's experience[s]' with the aim of making 'sense of the larger realm of human relationships', it demands a qualitative methodology (Brennen, 2012, p.4). Also, attempting to understand how these experiences and relationships are impacted by social media, makes a qualitative approach useful, as such an approach helps to 'render plausible the terms by which groups explain themselves to the world and to clarify the role that mass communication plays in such explanations' (Pauly, 1991, p.7). This chapter details the specifics of this methodology—'the integration of epistemology with method' (Faulkner & Atkinson, 2023, p.14)—and contextualises the project, with

discussions of the specific concerns around reflexivity and positionality that have certain implications for the knowledge it produces, as well as the ethical conditions which guide its production.

The chapter begins by describing the project's research design, briefly reflecting on the epistemological considerations that inform the choice of a multi-sited ethnography, before stating the research questions underpinning the study. The chapter, then, presents more detailed discussions of the decisions made toward sampling, data collection, and in data analysis, providing justifications for these choices in relation to the theoretical framework and the research context. The final parts of the chapter are dedicated to considerations related to reflexivity and positionality, as well as reflections on some ethical concerns. More specifically, the chapter presents an account of the methodological stages for this project, which involved periods of immersion within Afrobeats cultural locales, observing how young Africans engage with this music culture across space, eliciting accounts of their experiences of this music culture in relation to and in distinction from others, and organising these accounts into themes and subthemes, the most salient of which are presented in detailed, reflexive, and evocative narrative in the chapters that follow. Through these stages, I arrive at certain analytical conclusions, as I attempt to make sense of the complex mechanisms underlying the construction of a collective African identity.

Towards an interpretivist, social constructionist, multi-sited research design

We might think of research traditions as structured by principles emerging from the objectivist/interpretivist paradigm dichotomy (Faulkner & Atkinson, 2023). Interpretivist logics argue that, because culture and communication are human and social practice, they should not be subject to the objectivist epistemologies of the natural sciences (Lindlof & Taylor, 2017). Those epistemologies, typically favoured in quantitative research traditions, privilege a kind of determinism, an adherence to principles seeking to uncover a single objective truth, while qualitative research traditions often take an interpretive approach (Faulkner & Atkinson, 2023). I have suggested earlier that music culture is social practice; that to understand its role in the construction of meaning, we must know the human relations within which it is produced and which it helps conduct. I have also suggested that, because it requires a knowledge of people and their stories and the spaces within which both circulate, this project is, in essence, a qualitative enquiry. Both of these suggestions would imply that an interpretivist approach would be the more appropriate.

The overarching position of interpretivism is that reality is socially constructed (Berger & Luckman, 1966; Faulkner & Atkinson, 2023). Social constructionist epistemology approaches realist notions of an objective 'truth' with scepticism, viewing 'truths', instead, as contingent, existing within and outside of engagement with the experiential realities of the world (Moon & Blackman, 2014). People construct reality in group interaction; through group-defined processes that establish specific rules/agreements within a social order, which are fluid and are subject to change, as dominant cultural and social systems evolve (Rose, 2001). Social constructionism assumes that meaning (of the same phenomenon) is constructed in different ways by different individuals (Moon & Blackman, 2014) but also that this subjectivity is bridged through group interaction across space (Faulkner & Atkinson, 2023). Interactions across space become less obstructed by distance and time because of the interventions of mediated communication (Couldry & Hepp, 2017); and, in this bridging of subjectivity and of the constraints of distance/time, certain meaning structures are assembled, creating the conditions for the production of a co-constructed reality (Faulkner & Atkinson, 2023). Considering Afrobeats culture and the meanings derived in its engagement to be co-constituted across homeland and diasporic space; and conjecturing that these meanings become associated with notions of a collective African identity (within intermediating historical, cultural, and social conditions), this project relies on a social constructionist epistemology.

A social constructionist epistemology is useful for understanding the co-construction of meaning (Faulkner & Atkinson, 2023). Because it views all knowledge and meaning as produced through social processes within specific historical and cultural contexts, and as always relative to others, it opens up knowledge and meaning to comparison; lends itself to relational enquiry where representational and relative cultural challenges may be of scholarly interest (Faubion & Marcus, 2008). This project makes certain relational assessments of a complex phenomenon—collective identity—by scrutinising its manifestation across multiple contexts through the lens of a specific case—Afrobeats culture. First, it explores the continuities between the lived experiences of young Africans—in their engagement with Afrobeats culture and in their resultant construction of a collective African identity—within homeland African contexts and those in diasporic African contexts. Related, it compares these lived experiences to broader (re)presentations of Afrobeats-influenced African identity across social media, drawing out the patterns, frames, contrasts, similarities that emerge across these varying but related contexts. To achieve this, the qualitative approach that undergirds the project relies more specifically on a multi-sited ethnographic design (which I discuss in more detail in the next section), because it explores the ***construction of African identity*** among young Africans (in the homeland and those in the diaspora) in ***their exposure to/engagement with Afrobeats culture*** and how both are ***facilitated through their use of social media***. It seeks, first, to understand how African identity is constructed through Afrobeats culture; then, it works to identify the

confluences in its construction across homeland and diasporic contexts. It also looks to understand roles social media play in the (re)configuration/sustenance/expansion of Afrobeats cultural space, and in the circulation of the collective African identity constructed across this space, through that music culture. A third goal is to understand how meanings associated with this collective identity are reinforced, and the ways in which they might be contested. To do this, I ask:

> RQ1. In what ways do young Africans across homeland & diasporic space engage with elements of Afrobeats culture and how do these translate to the construction of individual/collective African identity?

> RQ2. How are young Africans in homeland & diaspora co-constituting/expanding/reclaiming a transnational space of identity through Afrobeats culture and social media?

> RQ3. What are the boundaries that define the collective African identity which young Africans construct through their engagement with Afrobeats culture?

Following the people, following the thing: on a multi-sited ethnographic approach

George Marcus' proposition of a multi-sited ethnography, located within 'spheres of interdisciplinary work, including media studies…and cultural studies broadly' (1995, p.95), embodied newer methodological approaches that drifted from the traditional anthropological dependence on the bounded single site towards the exploration of the fluid shifts and movements of objects, cultural meanings, and identities across space and time. These approaches, according to Marcus, emerged as researchers started to take 'unexpected trajectories in tracing a cultural formation across and within multiple sites of activity' (1995, p.96). Where single-sited ethnographic approaches maintained their partitioning of the lifeworld from the system, exigencies of evolving cultural and social relations necessitated new approaches that would investigate and ethnographically construct 'the lifeworlds of variously situated subjects' (1995, p.96). Marcus' review highlighted two ideas: first, that multi-sited methods became necessary as a result of the need to adequately understand the circulations of cultures and identities across contexts; and, second, that these methods were structured towards following not just sites/locations but the flows/connections within/among them, which meant that internet spaces became conceivable as sites. For Marcus, research that follows 'the thread of cultural process itself impels the

move toward multi-sited ethnography' (p.97) and a growing body of research *(e.g.* Best, 2007; Pasura, 2011; Kwon 2019) continues to do this: to explore the continuous cycles of cultures and identities beyond the single site. However, as Carney (2017) notes, the approach is still underutilised and there remains further opportunity for the use of multi-sited ethnography in research, particularly on topics surrounding race and ethnicity. I situate this project within this tradition, aiming to contribute to this growing body of work, by scrutinising the formative power of a transnational cultural phenomenon on the mobilisation of cultural, racial and/or ethnic identities across varied but interconnected contexts.

As is recommended for multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995, pp.106-107), I 'follow the thing'—Afrobeats music and the ancillary art forms and social cues that make up the cultural phenomenon—across three sites: a homeland site, a diasporic site, and a connective online site. In moving away from the single site, I work, here, to address the limitations of existing African identity research wherein single diasporic contexts are privileged in the exploration of the ways African identity is constructed (Koser 2003; Zeleza, 2008). As Marcus (1995) notes, multi-sited ethnographies require a design that would be based 'around chains, paths, threads, conjunctions, or juxtapositions of locations' and that are premised on 'an explicit, posited logic of association or connection among sites' (p.105). The logic of connection between the homeland and diasporic sites that I identify for the purposes of this project—and their interconnection through the connective online site—follows two observations. First, that Afrobeats culture is the product of creative collaboration between homeland African youth and diasporan African youth, maintained/(re)configured through the interconnections and communities they sustain across digital and social media. To understand articulations of African identity through Afrobeats culture would be to scrutinise the dynamics of those individual sites and the associations amongst them. Second, to adequately capture the complexities of African identity, experiences of both homeland and diasporic Africans have to be accounted for. The ways in which the distinctive contexts structure the nuances in their self-styling are of value, particularly in the convergences/contestations within and across sites. This is, of course, neither to suggest that there are neat demarcations between sites, nor that their connectedness exclusively manifests within the social media ecologies within which young Africans engage with Afrobeats culture. It is, however, to allow for the nuances of context and how the varying conditions of place might generate certain distinguishable features even in the continuities across space; and to consider how everyday social media interactions might make the already existing continuities more immediate, more proximate (Couldry & Hepp, 2017).

As a method of research, ethnography has a distinguishing function in offering the required strategies for following activities of people in a given 'field' and understanding the social meanings they produce within that specific setting

(Brewer, 2000). It is an approach that is characteristically suited to accessing social meanings, as it 'involves close association with, and often participation in, this setting' (p.59). Because it aims to observe behaviour and uncover social meanings, it often requires methods of participant observation and interviewing (Brewer, 2000), particularly in research contexts where the enquiry requires fieldwork 'in a number of spatially separated sites' (Boccagni, 2019, p.3). This is the work the project does. To offer a more cohesive, more organised account of the multi-sited ethnographic work, I present, first, the justifications and logics for the broader choices made in field and sample selection, as well as in data collection, before presenting the specific, consolidated accounts of fieldwork in each of the sites. This, I reason, would make the descriptions less disjointed, as there are multiple participant details, events, dates to account for.

Field

I relied on a fluid, unbounded field, based on an understanding of the site as spatiotemporal (Marcus, 1995; Bartlett and Vavrus, 2007); as a continuum of locations plus their cultural affordances; as the embodiment of physical locations and of the cultural events that they generate/foster/define across time. I considered both the locations and the cultural ecosystems within which Afrobeats culture was originated, is performed, and to which it continues to be connected.

My field, therefore, spanned the physical/cultural places of Accra (the homeland site) and London (the diasporic site), including and through the convergence of a social media ecology (the connective site). By 'physical places', I refer to the structural bounded settings (which, for Accra & London, were the geographic locations, and, for social media, the specific platforms); and, by 'cultural places', I refer to Afrobeats-related activity (which, for Accra & London, was meant to include events, concerts, festivals, celebrations, dance classes, *etc*., and, for social media, trends, fights, challenges, *etc*.)

I followed Alloatti (2019) in treating cultural places as components of field sites. By including cultural places as units of analysis, researchers are able to scrutinise them 'as configurations of the performances [of] and social disputes around' (p.3) identity and to map out and place emphasis on 'their specificity, their fluidity and how they spread through time' (Allaotti, 2019, p.6). Focusing on the cultural events, the individuals and groups, and the meanings that constitute the spatialities that construct Afrobeats culture allowed me to 'follow the thing' and observe how the culture is appropriated to define African identity (through collective practices) in the social world. Although the specificity is of value, as Alloatti (2019) notes, these practices gain reality in specific junctures of space and time, existing, often, in the ephemerality of the events within which they are given meaning. It becomes useful, therefore, to understand even the specific within contexts of the broad; within wider socio-geographical settings, where notions of Afrobeats culture can be juxtaposed

with competing notions of Africanness. Adding the broader locations as units of analysis also allows for the examination of the social structural conditions (such as gender and race) that may have potential influence on the construction or for the contestation of a collective African identity.

These broader contexts were defined within the geographical locations of Accra and London not only because the two are central points for the populations of concern (I discuss this in the next sub-section) but also because they had become hubs for Afrobeats cultural activity. Afrobeats music originated from Ghana and Nigeria and started to develop into a cultural configuration through its movements within the two countries and into the UK diaspora. Accra, the capital city of Ghana, is the centre of the country's Afrobeats cultural ecosystem, and, relative to other parts of the country, it hosts the vaster proportions of the music culture's producers, consumers, events, industries (see Asala, 2021, for context). The cultural life of the city was a core part the government of Ghana's 'Year of Return' initiative in 2019, which was marketed as 'a major landmark spiritual and birth-right journey inviting the Global African family, home and abroad, to mark 400 years of the arrival of the first enslaved Africans' (Year of Return, 2019, para 1). The initiative birthed a series of events, as additions to already established events in the month of December, dubbed 'December in Ghana' that sought to curate experiences of Ghana's cultural attractions, which included several Afrobeats concerts and festivals (see Visit Ghana). The popularity of these concerts and festivals drew the attentions of global Afro-diasporic celebrities such as Idris Elba, Cardi B, and Kendrick Lamar to the unofficial annual series of Afrobeats raves informally dubbed 'Detty December' (for background, see Dayo, 2022) that span the weeks leading up to the month of December each year and the weeks after. These, together with the city, made up my homeland site. By selecting Accra, I do not discount the equal significance of Lagos, Nigeria, in its role in the configuration of Afrobeats culture; however, many observers have suggested (see Ayeni, 2022; Dayo, 2022), that Accra tends to be the preferred destination amongst young Africans, from both homeland and diasporic contexts, who engage with Afrobeats culture. This made Accra a more appropriate locale for this project. Also, Accra's Afrobeats scene attracts a more diverse range of nationalities from across Africa, including a large number of Nigerians, who have suggested they prefer it to seasonal Afrobeats scenes in Lagos and in Abuja (see Ayeni, 2022).

I selected London for similar reasons. The city was at the centre of Afrobeats' formative diasporic links (Hancox, 2013), having the UK's and one of Europe's largest populations of African immigrants. London-based creators of West-African origin, in their collaborations with the Ghanaian & Nigerian originators of the musical genre propelled it to popularity (for a detailed account, see Hancox, 2013). The city's multiculturality lends it a unique history of shaping and fostering music cultures (Hancox, 2013; Melville, 2020), and has been central to the shaping of 'Black British' ethnic identities and the music cultures (such as grime and drill) that those identities have influenced and been (re)constructed from

(Barron, 2013). These identities were constructed to reclaim space within London's classed geographies, and in defiance of structural conditions that othered Blackness, positioning it as an imagined threat to whiteness (Barron,2013). These acts of reclamation of space were evident in the formative periods of Afrobeats in London, where creators performed flash mobs in public spaces, displaying elements of the African cultures they previously had been ridiculed for (Finney, 2018). Culturally, the city has become central to Afrobeats' global momentum, producing a series of international pan-African festivals such as 'Afro Nation' and 'Afrobeats & Brunch' (see Freeman-Powell, 2019) and becoming the hub for major Afrobeats concerts (see Williams, 2022). These festivals and events were my cultural places, which, together with the city as locale, represented my diasporic site. I also selected both cities for my personal connections to and knowledge of them, as I will explain later in this chapter.

My selection of the social media that constitute the connective site was less definitive. Although preliminary observation aided in constructing a foundational mapping of the potentially appropriate social media and their convergences, I was hesitant to prejudice the construction of the site based on limited personal observation (and, admittedly, some biases) alone, as it seemed more prudent (and empirically more appropriate) to base this selection on the social media habits of my participants. As Bayer *et al* (2020) suggest, social media behaviour is 'best understood when accounting for the personalised ecologies of users' (p.488). I, however, adapted my final selection of social media on a sort of aggregation of participants' preferences in relation to personal observations of broader trends. This strategy was largely based on an iterative logic, refining the field site based on real-world uses/experiences and adjustment of preliminary knowledge.

Sampling

In 'follow[ing] the thing', I also needed to 'follow the people', relying on 'the most…conventional mode of materialising a multi-sited ethnography (Marcus, 1995, p.106). Cultures do not exist outside of their people—and the interrelations amongst them—that define/reconfigure/sustain the elements, the meanings, or the boundaries of those cultures. While Afrobeats culture was originally defined by its West-African origins, the culture has taken on a more continental trajectory in its definition and a global (mainly Black diasporic) trajectory in relation to its reconfiguration and its sustenance. I, therefore, extended my population of interest to the more inclusive category of 'persons of African origin' (self-defined based on nationality/heritage/race *etc.*) which, although broad, was appropriately bounded, first, by the locations of the selected field sites, and, second, by the recruitment of participants from cultural locales, within which Afrobeats culture is actively engaged.

To be specific, I employed a mixed purposive and snowball sampling strategy focused on individuals who identify as persons of African origin that were known to engage often with Afrobeats culture or were found to do so based on their participation within the selected cultural places. As is the convention, the technique of 'follow[ing] the people' required that I 'follow[ed] and stay[ed] with the movements of a particular group of initial [participants]' (Marcus, 1995, p.107). I constituted this initial group of participants using purposive sampling. I purposively identified and recruited three (3) participants from my homeland site and three (3) from my diasporic site. These were the focus of my ethnographic work, which involved significant participation in their everyday engagements with Afrobeats culture. I, then, relied on these initial participants to recommend others in their real-world social circles, who they thought would have been of value to the study. The intention was to build a snowball sample of an additional 12 participants from each of the physical places, based on the recommendations of my purposively sampled participants, and from further recommendations from those that they had recommended (see Appendix 1 for summary participant profiles). These additional 12 participants were the focus of my field interviews. Sample size decisions were based on recommendations from previous ethnographic work in a similar field site (Guest, Bunce, & Johnson, 2006), where 12 interviews were enough to reach saturation. These sampling strategies have been used extensively in ethnographic research. As Howard (2002) notes, 'ethnography often begins with a purposive sampling of people worthy of close study and proceeds with combinations of variation, extreme, snowball, and theoretical sampling' (p. 558).

I extended the sampling strategy in my construction of a population of focus across social media. Researchers (Caliandro, 2017; Wang & Liu, 2021) recommend that social media ethnography extend beyond the identification of a specific online community and become more concerned with mapping out practices within their broader contexts involving a larger body of users and the platforms' affordances, scrutinising how these may structure social formations around specific focal objects. This extended approach yields broader perspective and deeper knowledge of the object of study that may be lost within potentially convergent intragroup dynamics such as backgrounds and biases. I, therefore, began by progressively, over the course of offline fieldwork, following the 30 participants sampled from the physical places to create an initial focal group on different social media. From that focal group, I, then, built a population of social media accounts across platforms that they engaged with (and accounts those accounts engaged with) on Africanness, Afrobeats, and related topics. The larger population allowed me to follow the various online configurations of African identity and the varying engagements with Afrobeats culture that existed beyond what likely would have been observable within the focal group. This allowed for observations of trending internet challenges, for example, that the participants within the focal group did not directly engage with. Observing broader conversations around Afrobeats and Africanness across

platforms allowed for additional analytical insight into what participants tend to engage with and what they do not, which provided some structuring background information for further direct interaction during interviews and participant observation in the homeland and diasporic sites. These broader conversations were only used directly in analysis, when my participants engaged with them directly.

Data Collection

I collected data across the three sites within a 12-month period using an adapted intermittent time mode (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004) strategy. In its original format, this time mode requires a minimum of three months of fieldwork, with flexibility in the number of times the researcher would need to visit the site; a choice that is dependent on the focus of the study and the relevant events the researcher selects to focus on (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004). I made a small modification to the time structure expected of this strategy. While I maintained uninterrupted presence in the connective site, I split my presence for periods of 6 months in each of the homeland and the diasporic sites, making a single visit lasting the span of that period. I generally spent the first month recruiting participants, the next 3-4 months conducting participant observation (which included unstructured interviewing) and the final month conducting semi-structured interviews. As discussed earlier, the homeland and diasporic sites under this project were constituted of both the locales of Accra and London, as well as their respective cultural places. For each cultural place, there were certain events specifically curated for engagement with Afrobeats culture (such as festivals, club nights, gigs, parties, *etc.*), which occurred within specific periods of time. These events typically spanned between 2-3 months (late November to mid-January for Accra; and the summer months for London). There were more traditional events (such as weddings, naming ceremonies, cook-outs, *etc.*) that, although not as specifically curated for Afrobeats culture, also always had manifestations of engagement with Afrobeats culture. These events also occurred across and beyond the duration of each stay in both sites. Staying 6 months in each of the sites, therefore, allowed for extended observation of activity that occurred outside of the expected window of 2-3 months for the events directly curated for engagement with Afrobeats culture.

This went to address, perhaps, the most recurring objection to multi-sited ethnography: the question of depth (Boccagni, 2019). The concerns, here, are usually around how sufficiently 'thick' the knowledge could realistically be, with multiple sites involved, and the constraints relating to time needed to negotiate access, develop contextual competences, and come to terms with the contextual specificities of each site (Boccagni, 2019). By maintaining a presence in each of the sites, spending 6-month periods in each of Accra and London, I was able to 'experience the full range of the events and

activities in the setting' (Brewer, 2000, p.61), and, as these events peaked within specific seasonal time frames, there was enough time to collect data, sufficiently saturated for the development of applicable analytical categories (Jeffrey & Troman, 2004).

I combined participant observation with interviewing as I collected data across the homeland and diasporic sites. This combination of methods has been employed extensively in ethnographic research (Boellstorff, Nardi, Pearce, Taylor, & Marcus, 2012; Howard, 2002; Wutich & Brewis, 2019). While I aimed to observe broader group engagements with Afrobeats culture and expressions of African identity, my focus was on the three initial (focal) participants across each of the physical and cultural places of Accra and London (see Table 1.0 for details of participants). Observations of these focal participants offered important insight into broader group patterns, particularly within the cultural places. As Marshall & Rossman (2006) suggest, participant observation involves 'the systematic description of events, behaviours, and artefacts in the social setting' (p.79). It offers the researcher a way to carry out observation of a phenomenon while playing an established role as a participant in the scene studied (Atkinson & Hammersley, 1998). As what might be considered a member of the observed group, my role as participant did not require any significant adjustments for my participants, as they did not have to alter their natural modes of engagement with Afrobeats culture. I adopted the role of participant observer (Gold, 1958), prioritising, as far as was in my control, observation over extended engagement. The extent of my engagement was usually to maintain the rapport I had built with my participants, usually actively participating in group dance, for example, at the beginning of nights out, and then slipping into the background to document my observations, as my participants had become fully immersed. In many instances, however, I found that my participants were comfortable enough with my presence that they simply carried on without seeking my active participation. This offset some of the disadvantages that the role might present (see Kawulich, 2005), where concerns around confidentiality tend to interfere with the depth of data revealed to the researcher. My participants did not indicate any concerns about confidentiality, and were often open in their usual rituals of engagement, offering depths of data that did not suggest any substantial degree of hesitance. I documented, to the extent that they allowed me to, their routines, as they engaged with Afrobeats culture, relying on audio-visual recordings, where consented to, and on a systemised note-taking strategy, given the fast-paced nature of the contexts within which these observations were made. Note-taking was particularly important where standout patterns emerged. I took detailed notes (see Appendix 2) on my iPhone's native note-taking application, mainly because traditional note-taking approaches would have likely been intrusive to my participants' experiences of the cultural places wherein I had observed them. The Notes app is particularly useful, as it allows for attachments of still and video photography, which allowed for supplementary pictorial cues, in

the fast-paced situations where thick narrative descriptions were infeasible. Another advantage of using the Notes app was that, using my phone typically fit within the conventions of engagement within the cultural places.

Field Site	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Class[29]		Heritage
				Class Background	Class Position	
Homeland (Accra)	Yaw	39	Male	Working class	Working class	Ghanaian
	Stacey	23	Female	Upper-Middle class	Upper-Middle class	Ghanaian
	Dusk	27	Male	Working class	Upper-Middle class	Ghanaian
Diaspora (London)	Rayla	26	Female	Working class (2nd gen)	Middle class	Ghanaian
	Abena	22	Female	Working class (2nd gen)	Lower-Middle class	Ghanaian
	Dukes	27	Male	Working class (1st gen)	Lower-middle class	Ghanaian

Table 1.0 Demographic details of focal participants

I employed an informal conversational interviewing approach (following Back, 2023) with my focal participants, as I had gained certain degrees of access into their everyday lives, which meant a conventional interviewing style felt somewhat unnatural to the rapport I had built with them. These conversations were not structured but, because of its near-ubiquity across the locales of our everyday orbit, they often featured topics relating to Afrobeats culture. These conversations were useful in documenting other aspects of my participants' everyday lived experience within their specific contexts, to which they related a collective Africanness and/or elements of Afrobeats culture. Audio recordings and note-taking were useful strategies for documenting these conversations as well, although parts recorded were mainly those I subjectively, in real time, assessed to be significant in some way to the main theoretical concerns and the research questions underlying the project. These conversations, as well as insights from my field observations guided an iterative process of refining a set of open-ended questions, that made up an interview guide (see Appendix 3) for the semi-structured interviews, which I administered adaptively to the 12 other participants, in each site, that I recruited through snowball sampling. This guide

[29] Class descriptions are based on subjective assessments of participants current class positions and assessments of class backgrounds based on anecdotes participants shared about their backgrounds. These are intended only to offer a picture of the depth of their lived experiences, and current class positions alone do not tell this story.

was originally designed in alignment with the project's conceptual framework to serve as a kind of starting point for the semi-structured interviews.

Semi-structured interviews are useful for harnessing the knowledge-producing potential of dialogue because they offer more opportunity for following up on whichever angles the interviewee may make salient (Brinkmann, 2014). Here, the interviewer is more 'visible as a knowledge-producing participant in the process itself' (Brinkmann, 2014, p.286), which, in investigations of broad concepts such as identity, can be useful in narrowing focus and in engaging more deeply with the meaning structures that people find foundational to their constructions of *being* and *belonging*. An interview guide was useful in maintaining some of this focus; however, the interviews, while remaining largely within the key conceptual areas (i.e. identity, Afrobeats culture, space) of the project, often ranged topics outside of what the preset questions had anticipated. Rather than derailing the interview process, these topics added further depth to the conceptual focus. My interviewing patterns were adjusted as a result, without major changes to the thematic range of the topics themselves, and the sequence of questions was adapted to the responses of my participants. Possessing contextual knowledge of a range of the topics broached by my respondents aided their deeper engagement with the topic, as many of my follow-up questions prompted further reflection and produced thicker descriptions for most of the interviews. After my first few interviews, however, this made me more conscious of my position as a knowledge-producing participant (Brinkmann, 2014); and, although this might be considered a weakness of the method in some cases, it becomes a strength in cases where 'meanings…arise dialogically in a process that centrally involves the interviewer as co-constructer' (p.288). This, of course, does not suggest any interference in the knowledge-producing process for my participants, who were always in control of their own narratives. It is, however, an acknowledgement of my role in inducing the thought-processes that may have led, in some instances, to the construction of meanings locally, in the context of the interviews themselves, and in relation to broader historical, social and cultural cues. For example, a contextual follow-up question such as "*Who is an African?*" produced certain competing meanings, as I will show in Chapter 8, as my participants contended with its implications, in real time, relative to their preceding articulations of the notion of Africanness. My knowledge-producing role was, therefore, only a collaborative one, and I ensured follow-up questions were always open-ended and not directly introducing contextual information that may have prejudiced my respondents' positions on any given topic. Interviews were recorded with my iPhone's native voice recording app, and supplementary notes highlighting important points in each interview were taken.

I adapted practices that have been recommended for social media ethnography (Postill & Pink, 2012) and reclassified them, for data collection across my connective site, into three broader processes of *immersion*, *participant observation*,

and *documenting*. Internet-based ethnography (variously referred to as cyber-ethnography (Hallett & Barber, 2014), virtual ethnography (Hine, 2000), digital ethnography (Lane & Lingel, 2022), netnography (Kozinets, 2015), among others), involves the application of traditional ethnographic methods towards 'enagag[ing] with internet practices and content directly, but not exclusively' with the purpose of 'creat[ing] deep, contextual and contingent understandings produced through intensive and collaborative sensory, embodied engagements, often involving digital technologies in co-producing knowledge' (Postill & Pink, 2012, pp. 125-126). For online places, in order to build a 'thick' account of a social phenomenon (Geertz, 1977), researchers benefit from 'following the people' (Marcus, 1995) who use the digital technologies under investigation, observing how these people respond to and within the social interactions that are structured by these technologies, and experiencing, themselves, the events or contexts within which these interactions occur (Emerson *et al*, 2011; Airoldi, 2018). This fluid process of following, observing, and experiencing necessitates practices of 'catching up, sharing, exploring, interacting and archiving' (Postill & Pink, 2012, p.128).

'Catching up' involves the routine of maintaining a presence on social media platforms, subscribing to participants' feeds, and keeping up with their updates; and 'sharing' involves the dissemination of new or existing content across those platforms and feeds (Postill & Pink, 2012). I understand both practices as constitutive of a process of *immersion*, which requires 'a substantial amount of time on the site on a regular (often daily) basis' where the researcher works to become familiar with the site's users and discourses (Wang & Liu, 2021, p.980). This is the process of immersion that I adopted for the initial stages of data collection across my connective site. Specifically, following the receipt of their consent, I followed my participants across their preferred social media platforms, where I spent multiple hours daily within a 12-month period keeping up with the content with which they engaged or which they produced. I set up new social media accounts to ensure that feeds were dedicated to what my participants engaged with, and I worked to synchronise this process of immersion naturally with my own habitual use of social media to ensure the process was not experienced as intrusive for the participants, and that I kept up with updates as regularly as possible.

'Exploring' refers to the routine excursions from the 'base' feeds of focus, as the researcher takes brief glances at embedded links 'or in longer, more meandering explorations of a potential research site, participant or initiative' (Postill & Pink, 2012, p.129). These explorations could be guided by external hyperlinks or hashtags or trending topics that are directly or indirectly accessible/readable from the content (re)shared by participants. 'Interacting' refers to the routine engagement—varying in intensity—that the researcher would maintain with research participants. Engagements could be as direct and active as keeping regular exchanges with participants or as indirect and passive as an occasional 'like' on participants' (re)posts. I classified both of these practices of exploring and interacting as elements of the *participant*

observation process, which also, sometimes, included practices of relatively disengaged monitoring of their online behaviour. I applied these practices to my observations of participants across the connective site, monitoring their content production and/or engagement behaviours, while also unselectively interacting directly and indirectly with their posts, and exploring the secondary links, hashtags, and/or trending topics their posts may have directed to. By doing this, I attended to the individual ways in which my participants engaged with Afrobeats culture online and how they performed their Africanness through this engagement, as well as the collective performances their individual posts may have directed to (through hyperlinks, memes, hashtags, trending topics, *etc.*). By making these individual performances anchor points into collective manifestations, I was able to observe the ways in which Afrobeats culture was multifariously engaged with, and how these various modes of engagement (re)configured the meanings and collective practices that were associated with it. This approach also allowed me to investigate how collective codes of identity were (re)framed, (re)negotiated and (re)circulated, as individual modes of being came into cohesion and into contestation across online discourses/practices/trends. To ensure that the data collected remained within manageable boundaries (Postill & Pink, 2012), the main focus of my observations remained on participants' engagements with (or related to) Afrobeats culture and/or identifiable codes of Africanness, as well as any other relevant related discourses, with the aim of monitoring if and how these conversations were brought into relation with one another.

Postill & Pink (2012) identify 'archiving' as the final routine practice in the online ethnographic process. It involves the storage and systematic tagging of posts according to thematic categories developed as the researcher observes patterns across participants' content production and engagement behaviours. I think of this practice as a part of a larger process of *documenting* for two reasons. First, as Postill & Pink (2012) note, the practice of 'archiving' can tend to privilege data accumulation over other equally important forms of field coding such as diary-keeping and reflection. I understand notetaking to be as vital to the process of data accumulation as these forms of field coding, and I suggest that all these forms together become useful for the researcher, as they *document* not only the content of interest, but also key details or latent meanings that the content may mark in context. Second, because of the multi-format nature of modern social media content, the practice of 'archiving' would also need to cover live feeds and ephemeral recordings (on SnapChat, for example), which may not be available for storage. These kinds of social media content would, therefore, need to be *documented* in other ways such as through narrative summaries or preliminary qualitative coding/analysis. As Airoldi (2018) demonstrates, preliminary qualitative coding of empirical materials can be useful in a digital ethnography for identifying narrative facets of the phenomenon under observation, which can subsequently be categorised for final analysis. This is the extended practice of *documenting* that I applied throughout the data collection process across the connective site. Individual posts were collected and stored using a combination of content retrieval methods, including

screengrabs, direct content downloads, and the use of free online social media scrapers (also used in Rens, 2021) with the aim of collating a cache of posts (in photo/video format) across the various platforms, which I categorised according to broad thematic groupings. I generated these groupings from the observed online conversations under which they fell and saved them in appropriately labelled photo albums. Although the content stored in this cache was (re)analysed at later stages of the research process, initial value judgements on their fit for further analysis were made (before they had been stored) based on their relevance to the general themes related to the research questions.

Data collection across the connective site focused mainly on the individual social media feeds generated by the study's 30 participants, with interest on the content they produced and/or engaged with, as well as the broader conversations, trending topics, challenges, *etc.*, that this content was assessed to be connected to. I also observed the activities of others my participants had recommended to me, but only as supplementary sources to gain further understanding of what was typically trending online. The content that ended up in analysis was exclusively that which my participants engaged with. Observing individual content engagements allowed for assessments of personal expressions of African identity, and exploring broader conversations allowed for observation of some group narratives/performances of African identity. This offered additional insight into wider implications/meanings/motivations Afrobeats-related content might have had for collective understandings of Africanness.

"So, your PhD is basically just enjoyment?": on the endeavours of researching while partying

It was always recognisable, that shift from initial scepticism to visible excitement which often followed my participants' realisations that an academic undertaking could be, as one of my participants in Accra put it, "*basically just enjoyment*". I was met with variations of that reaction each time I came to the end of my careful elaborations of what the study would entail, as endeavours to obtain informed consent became the beginnings of rapports characterised, for the most part, by friendly banter. Admittedly, despite the rigours of exhaustive empirical work, fieldwork *was* mostly enjoyable; despite the physical exertions of recurrent party nights, mostly an overwhelming visceral experience of Black joy (see Sobande & Amponsah, 2024). I attempt, in the empirical chapters that follow, to capture these manifestations of collective joy; however, with the constraints of word limits, I must admit that it becomes challenging to compose an adequate account of how widely and deeply that joy permeated every arena, every hall, every backyard.

As participant observer, I was in the midst of it: the thundering sing-alongs in the packed arenas, the synchronous group dances in the clubs, the intimate pairings under the dim lights at the house parties; contorting myself to fit the aesthetic of these places, learning to shed old tastes to blend into the convivial crowds, my body working overtime to shape up to the heavy schedules of party people, and finding myself, in relation to most of my participants, on the wrong side of youth, a decade of exuberance becoming another feature of the banter that yoked us. Near-failings of a body barely able to keep up with heavy party schedules aside, there were also, of course, a few of the expected challenges of qualitative fieldwork—of the time- and resource-intensive processes of recruiting/contacting participants (Seidman, 2006), and the unpredictability of their personal circumstances (Boccagni, 2019), for example.

For the most part, however, sampling strategies were generally efficient in dealing with those problems encountered in recruitment. Because focal ethnographic participants were mainly recruited purposively, much of the groundwork had been completed on ensuring the participation of at least two out of three before arrival at the field site. The first month of fieldwork was, typically, therefore, dedicated to recruiting the third and one more participant designated as back-up, in the event of any contingencies. Also, as the rest of the sample was populated based, essentially, on recommendations from participants who tended to communicate that they had found the process unproblematic, there appeared to be less trepidation for newer recruits. Personal circumstances were harder to plan for, but having back-up participants was useful in one situation where one participant communicated a need to withdraw consent. Fortunately, one back-up was sufficient, as there were no further withdrawals. Cancellations for interviews were more frequent; however, because the recruitment of respondents was mainly based on recommendations, replacements were found without extended strain, again with the help of my earlier participants who, in many ways, became something of para-ethnographers (Marcus, 2012) for the project.

Other common challenges such as difficulty negotiating access and establishing practical knowledge of the field sites (Brewer, 2000; Seidman, 2006) were not as much of an exertion, as I was seen as a member of the groups I observed. Also, as a Ghanaian, I had established long-term knowledge of the Accra site, which aided fieldwork there; and, in my two years scouring London for Ghanaian food and a decent barber, I had established relationships and a knowledge base prior to the start of fieldwork in the city. I detail the specifics of this fieldwork in the sub-sections that follow.

Fieldwork in the homeland site

Fieldwork in Accra commenced in late September 2023, with the initial recruitment of my three focal participants, with whom I populated a calendar of cultural events, based solely on their intentions and prior arrangements to attend. My focal participants were two males—a 27-year-old contemporary highlife/Afrobeats star and a 39-year-old taxi driver—and one female, a 23-year-old Afrofusion (Afrobeats/coupé-decalé/hip-hop/dancehall) dancer. The calendar of events largely spanned a period of four months, between October 2023 and January 2024. Events for the Afrobeats star and the dancer (excluding one wedding) coincided with calendar for 'Detty December', cumulating in two Afrobeats festivals (including one full weekend rave), three gigs, and (between two to three) nights out each week at clubs/bars/pubs and rehearsals. Events for the taxi driver were largely outside the 'Detty December' calendar (excluding a family gathering for New Year's Day), with one traditional wedding and one naming ceremony in October and November 2023. A few times across the four-month period, I joined the taxi driver and a group of his friends in a bar at which they were regulars. I recruited one of his friends, a 27-year-old barber who moonlighted as a local DJ, as a back-up participant; however, as there were no withdrawals, data collected on him were not included directly in my analysis.

While I completed a few interviews within this period, out of eleven interviews in total, most (seven) were completed between late January and late February. Participants were recruited using a snowball sampling method, beginning from my three focal participants and three others I met at Afrobeats events. A twelfth interview was rescheduled for March 2024, as the respondent, a Ghanaian-born enlisted man in the United States Army, was required to leave for Kenya on short notice. A back-up interview with a Ghanaian entertainment journalist was cancelled due to difficulty in scheduling. Fortunately, this was also not needed. Age range for respondents was between eighteen and mid-thirties, with most of the participants falling within the late twenties/early thirties range. This demographic was expected to be more active in its engagement with Afrobeats culture, being the culture's pioneering generation. Average interview duration was around an hour, with the shortest lasting about 35 minutes, and the longest about 90 minutes.

Out of the 15 participants in Accra, seven (7) were female and eight (8) were male. Although I interacted with people of various nationalities in Accra, all but one of my participants was born in Ghana—a Jamaica-born woman, who identified as a person of African descent broadly and as Ghanaian specifically. While the intention had been to include interviews with a Kenyan woman, a South African man, and two Nigerian women, a heavily packed, occasionally impromptu Detty December roster disrupted scheduling. Fieldnotes from interactions with them while they engaged with Afrobeats were, however, included in my analysis. I adapted my recruitment focus for London, as a result, to maintain balance.

Fieldwork in the diasporic site

London fieldwork started in mid-March 2024, with the recruitment of the first two of my focal participants, both female; the first, a 22-year-old digital marketing professional and the second, a 26-year-old who works in banking. Both were born to Ghanaian parents in London. A third participant, male, 25, also born in London to one Ghanaian and one Seirra Leonian parent, was recruited in May 2024, but, after he withdrew from the study, he was replaced with a 27-year-old man, who, although born in Ghana, had gained British citizenship. I had originally recruited the 27-year-old during my first attempt at fieldwork in London in the summer months of 2023, which was disrupted by unstable (and, on certain days, adverse) weather conditions leading to multiple event cancellations. Upon my return to the London field site in summer 2024, I had designated him as one of my standby participants, having decided to compose a focal sample of second-generation migrant Ghanaians. The initial motivation for this decision was to have a full group of those who had never lived in homeland. Following the withdrawal, however, his inclusion proved a useful addition of a varying but *necessary* perspective.

Much of the focal 4-month period of participant observation was spent at house parties (in Brixton, Peckham, Streatham, West Green, Seven Sisters, Hackney, and Mitcham), and on weekend nights out to Afrobeats clubs across London, which also often included bar-hopping in Soho. Of the events that were directly curated for Afrobeats, I was at two concerts, five gigs, two brunch parties, and an annual community-focused event dubbed '*Ghana Party in the Park*'. I was also at three cookouts and two weddings. One highlight of my London fieldwork was at one of the cookouts, when, under the threat of unforecasted rain, some of the guests decided on a spontaneous road trip to Nottingham, where the group (including the participant I had been following) joined another group of young Ghanaians at their barbecue. It was one of the standout displays of conviviality, as a group of mainly strangers only needed to show up to find community in a different city.

I completed all of my semi-structured interviewing in late July and throughout August 2024. As with interviews in Accra, I relied on snowball sampling, and while my respondents were mainly second-generation immigrant Ghanaians, three were first-generation immigrants and one UK-born woman of Caribbean descent, who has lived in Ghana since she was 3 years old, and who identifies as "*fully Ghanaian*". One of the 11 interviews I count for the London site developed into a kind of impromptu focus group with two of my participants, making the total number of respondents 12. Although there were three of its kind across my London fieldwork, only one is analysed, as the other two included persons who

had not agreed to be a part of the study. I do, however, include an anecdote from one of these impromptu focus groups in my narrative, which only reveals details of the participant from whom I obtained consent. Age range for interviewees was 18 to 34, with most falling in the mid- to late-twenties range. Average interview length was similar to Accra; however, the shortest interview in London lasted about 40 minutes and the longest, a little over an hour.

Out of the 15 total participants, eight (8) were female and seven (7) were male. As with the Accra site, although my focus remained on the 15 participants, who were all of Ghanaian descent, my interactions in London included people who trace their heritage to various countries across Africa. Among these, only observations of those interactions which also involved my participants were included in my analysis.

Fieldwork in the connective site

Most of my participants relied on multiple digital and/or social media in their everyday engagements with Afrobeats culture, travelling across each, based on their specific affordances. All of my participants found music on either YouTube or at least one music streaming service. Conversations about Afrobeats and active engagements in its cultural elements were mainly on various combinations of social media. Many of my participants reported floating across "*the big three, innit? Insta, TikTok, Twitter*.", as one of my interviewees in London put it. Others relied on combinations of Snapchat, Instagram and Twitter. I refer, here, to the microblogging site as Twitter because all of my participants referred to it as such. I found it worked most conveniently to maintain this reference for consistency and ease in presenting my narrative. Others also named any combination of, at least, two of Twitter, Snapchat, TikTok, and/or Instagram; and many reported that they would often find content from other social media on Twitter. I, too, observed this. It was not uncommon, for example, to find trending TikTok videos shared on Twitter, attracting commentary that differed from those on the original video. Afrobeats-related challenges were also often generated from discourse on Twitter. Twitter was, therefore, often at the centre of the ecology, which encapsulated all four of Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, plus YouTube, and the music streaming services. Only two of my participants reported irregular use of Facebook.

Based on these preferences, I progressively created accounts on Twitter, TikTok, Instagram, and Snapchat, as I recruited participants. In the course of doing this, I eventually constituted a social media ecology, which became the focus of my online ethnographic work. As the first few participants had reported using certain combinations of the four, I had already curated small followings on each by the time I had completed my full sample of participants. Although focused on those

participating in the study, my following across the ecology was diverse, with accounts from across multiple geographies beyond but related to those of London and Accra. This allowed for observation of broader discussions related to Afrobeats and African identity. I, however, kept this following sufficiently bounded, with a maximum of 53 total followed accounts on Twitter, 47 on TikTok, 42 on Instagram, and 39 on Snapchat. The logic, here, was to maintain sufficient focus on my main participants' activities, and to ensure these activities were not overshadowed by others more active than they were. Also, as they engaged with content produced by users from broader geographies, my observations covered a significant scope, even with a bounded following.

I started my observations in early April 2023 (during my first attempt at fieldwork in London) but most of the data used for analysis were collected between late September of that year until October 2024, when final data analysis began. While my observations were focused on the content my participants engaged with within this time frame, some of the content contained reshares of older posts or, sometimes, rehashed conversations/fights/trends. The corpus totalled 473 screenshots and 132 videos (including content downloads & screen recordings) from across the four social media apps. Screenshots documented textual content, and screen recordings or downloads were used in documenting those which had relevant video content.

Compiling, sorting, thematising: analysing multi-sited data

To extract as complete a picture as possible about who people believed they were, from the stories that they told about themselves and about others, and from how these stories were brought into relation with one another, patterns became essential. My task was to draw these patterns out from field notes, audio recordings, and screenshots/screen recordings. Patterns map out the existing ways people make sense of their *being* and *belonging* in the world; pointing, in essence, to the established meaning structures upon which this presence is made sense of, explained, theorised. But patterns also lead the way to the new and the unexpected, the ongoing processes of construction that present, clarify, shape these stories into a kind of 'truth', which people come to attach to themselves. Constituting that complete picture, therefore, required a tracing from the existing to the ongoing, a '[leading] away from old to new theoretical insights'; an unravelling rooted in abductive reasoning (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p.170).

We might think of abduction as 'an inferential creative process' of continuously 'conjecturing about the world' that is preconditioned by 'socially cultivated and cultivatable ways of seeing' (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p.172). It offers a kind of middle ground between deductive and inductive reasoning, in the sense that it 'conducts parallel and equal engagement with empirical data and extant theoretical understanding' (Thompson, 2022, p1411). In an enquiry about identity, such as this project sought to conduct, an abductive approach allowed for the engagement of existing theories 'as sensitising notions that inform [the] research' at every stage, without determining 'the scope of perceivable findings' (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012, p.173). It was, therefore, an iterative and recursive (Timmermans & Tavory, 2012) process that involved the continuous juxtaposition of theoretical knowledge with emerging patterns within the empirical data. In this iterative process of abduction, patterns eventually reveal themes. We understand that a theme 'represents some level of patterned response or meaning within [a] dataset' (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.82). We might, therefore, consider the process of conferring meaningful structure to patterns that emerge from raw data as a process of thematic analysis (Thompson, 2022). More practically, this might entail categorising 'data according to commonalities, relationships, and differences' (Gibson & Brown, 2009, p.127), which, ideally, would carry through the entire data collection process (Flick, 2019).

There were three data sources to account for: field notes, audio recordings, and screenshots/screen recordings. I carried out forms of analysis at different stages of data collection. The process of writing fieldnotes itself was a kind of primary analysis, as I made assessments over what was relevant to the study, based on existing theoretical knowledge and the research questions, before producing descriptions of them. This was an aspect of my role as a knowledge-producing participant (Brinkmann, 2014), which also applied to decisions over what social media posts I would document out of all the posts my participants engaged with or produced. This preliminary analytic process also extended into decisions over categorising the posts selected, based on elementary assessments of their fit into the broad conceptual blocks that guided the interviews (i.e. identity, Afrobeats culture, space). I saved each screenshot/screen recording, based on what I assessed to be its most dominant conceptual fit, into folders labelled in line with the conceptual blocks, using my phone's native file management app. There were overlaps, of course, for which sub-folders were created based on which combinations those posts most accurately represented (e.g. 'Identity+Space', 'Afrobeats+Space', *etc.*). These categories were useful as they provided a basis for identifying similar overlaps in offline participant observation and in key points across interviews. Interviews were more difficult to categorise in this manner; however, I made notes of how the blocks emerged in participant narratives, and how they may have overlapped. This ongoing process of analysis allowed for intermittent (re)evaluation of research strategies, of assumptions, and of the analytical process itself (see Flick, 2019).

The next key step of my analysis was more structured. It required the compilation of all the data collected into uniform, analysable formats. As field notes were in textual format, I converted them into Microsoft Word documents. Interviews were transcribed manually and saved as Word documents, with insights from notes taken during each interview added as comments. Screenshots/screen recordings did not need to be converted as these were supported by the qualitative analysis software, NVivo. The files were, then, imported into NVivo, where I organised them into nodes and child nodes, corresponding with the folders and sub-folders I had created for the social media posts. Because the transcripts were produced manually, I had achieved familiarity with the dataset, which aided the coding process; however, it was still a painstaking process, given the multiple data points. I did not find it particularly valuable to do any separate systematic analysis of the short video content from the screen recordings as they were mainly complementary data sources, and I primarily needed to make assessments on the nodes they corresponded with. In many cases, these videos were tagged, captioned, or superimposed with text that included sufficient data for making these assessments. Their value was in the additional demonstrative power they provided. Coding was iterative and recursive, leading to the refinement of coding categories, stemming initially from the conceptual blocks and their overlapping combinations to the identification of more specific codes (see Appendix 4 for codebook).

Codes were, then, sorted into themes, which I defined based on theoretical knowledge and the patterns that emerged from the data (Thompson, 2022). The main strategy for developing themes was finding connection between codes that, together, explained portions of the data in relation to the main theoretical concerns and the research questions. These, then, aided in the development of initial conceptual/analytical categories, which were further organised based on their utility in explaining the theoretical cleavages of *being* and *belonging*, which became the foundational blocks of the thesis' empirical chapters. I presented these in ethnographic narrative form, including evidence from all data sources, and attempting to find a balance between that narrative form and a thematic/conceptual discussion.

"Uncle, it's past your bedtime, eh?": on being 'old' and other things

'All researchers are positioned', as Elizabeth Chiseri-Slater (1996, p.115) reminds us. To think of this positionality and how it places us in relation to the knowledge we produce is 'a process of opening ourselves up to scrutiny' (Corlett & Mavin, 2018, p.383) that requires that we question the way we conduct research and how the research process itself

shapes its outcomes. This process of reflexivity involves critically appraising our own research methods and engaging in a form of self-reflection that scrutinises our role and relationships with the context, participants, data, and resulting reports we produce (Corlett & Mavin, 2018).

One of the key features of the banter that characterised my relationship with most of my participants was the running joke we maintained over my relatively 'old' age. It was endearing, it was easy, and it appeared to dissolve my position as a PhD researcher into an informality that made participants, who were predominantly close to a decade younger than I was, more comfortable to be themselves around me. My age positioned me in the world of most of my participants as the 'Ghanaian uncle'; at the expense of whom they could make light jokes, and with whom they could feel an ease to remain unfiltered. However, this position was also one of a kind of mild power, as, for many young Africans, the uncle is also a figure of (soft) authority. It was, therefore, a balancing act of maintaining enough distance as to avoid breeding an overfamiliarity, and enough proximity as to avoid conferring, on my participants, the feeling of being surveilled. I acknowledge that this might have had some impact on their behaviours and on their responses, as well as on my own interpretations of these behaviours/responses. Much of my effort was directed at curtailing this outcome by using more than one source of data, diversifying the range of perspectives I included in my observations, and observing broader behaviours outside of, but in relation to, those of my participants.

A constructionist approach to understanding African identity had bearings on the kinds of observations I expected to make, privileging the underlying collective meanings and the cultural, historical, and social structures that shaped participants' constructions of their identities. I am conscious of the fact that, although, theoretically, I made room for a spectrum of identities, I still placed these within a broad collectiveness, which risked presenting a diverse group as homogenous. I acknowledge that, although justified, my sampling choices privileged a set of experiences that may not be representative of all African experiences; that my focus on youth excluded older generations; and that the narratives I based my analyses on were drawn through the lens of my own subjectivities. I maintained a consciousness of these as I incorporated iterative processes into all phases of this project, aiming to refine method and theory in relation to the contextual specificities.

While by no measure an exhaustive list, I think of the limitations of the project: its ethnographic approach, its specificity on a selected group or context, and my role as the ethnographer, as a knowledge-producing participant in processes of data collection and data analysis. The analyses I have made and the meanings I have assigned to the categories I have identified in the data are all subjective, all situated within frameworks of socially located knowledge. Certain alternative

interpretations might have been made within other traditions of knowledge production or in differing contexts, even if this project does not claim to generate generalisable results or to produce objective, quantifiable or reproducible data about African people. The intention, however, was to contribute knowledge about how a collective African identity is constructed among a specific group of young Africans whose sense of *being* and *belonging* were mediated through their engagement with Afrobeats culture.

The ethics of following the people, while they do the thing

The project required my presence in the personal lives of six of my participants. I was, therefore, ethically bound to take into account their safety, comfort, privacy, and to ensure I safeguarded their right to give/withdraw consent throughout and after the research process. As a heterosexual male, I also had to ensure that my female participants felt safe to have me in their company. I checked in with them intermittently while they were engaging with Afrobeats to ensure they were still comfortable with my presence.

I worked, first, to minimise any direct impact on their safety by participating only in contexts in which they had already intended to place themselves. This included all events and all locations for interviews. To ensure their comfort, I left the level and duration of involvement in the research process completely in the hands of my participants. I continued to maintain all agreements made on boundaries, ensuring to give participants as much personal space as they required at every stage of the research process. Participants had the freedom to redefine the nature of the arrangement at any point during the study. I tried to be mindful of the potential for emotional distress, and I communicated frequently with participants to ensure that their involvement did not bear any strain on their mental or emotional comfort.

I ensured participants' identities were kept strictly confidential to prevent any potential identification, by employing confidentially agreed-upon pseudonyms and by cautiously using quotes to avoid the detection of personal information that could lead to easy association. Some participants insisted on having their names unchanged. As no sensitive data were used, I obliged in such cases. All communication, project-related or otherwise, was kept strictly between individual participants and the researcher. The fact of their involvement was kept confidential and any direct interactions on social media were kept in private or in direct messages inside their personal inboxes. Participants were made aware that their

information was voluntary, that they had full control over its use, and that, if, at any point, they wished to withdraw this information from the study, all of their data will be deleted.

Finally, and essential to the project's use of human subjects, I obtained full informed consent from each participant. At every stage of their involvement, participants were given free, easy-to-understand, and full information on the subject and aims of the project, its duration, and the roles they were expected to play. I ensured that participants had access to the full meaning of the information on consent forms, which I presented to them via email/WhatsApp *and* in person before their inclusion in the project. I explained the details surrounding the maintenance of their anonymity, access to interview transcripts, and other commitments I hold towards them, detailing the limits of responsibility and liability.

For social media data, I tried to obtain first-degree informed consent, and, where impossible, I blotched out names and other highly identifiable information from the dataset when storing, processing, and presenting the data, among other ethical steps recommended in franzke *et al* (2020).

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed the motivations for and justified the choices I have made towards the completion of the empirical work. I started by offering elaborations for my decision to situate the empirical enquiry within a qualitative research methodological framework. From there, I discussed the project's research design, briefly reflecting on the epistemological considerations that informed the specific choice of a multi-sited ethnographic method, before stating the research questions underpinning the study. I, then, presented a more detailed discussion of the decisions I made toward sampling, data collection, and data analysis, providing justifications for these decisions in relation to the theoretical framework and the specific research context.

Following this, I reflected on how my role as a participant-observer shaped both the research process and its outcomes, as I also reflected on my positionality in relation to my research participants and to the subject of enquiry itself. As I considered my obligations to my participants, I also discussed the steps that I took toward ensuring critical ethical concerns were addressed and I elaborated on how I ensured the safety and privacy of participants were safeguarded.

More specifically, I detailed, in this chapter, the methodological stages for this project, which involved periods of immersion within Afrobeats cultural locales, observing how groups of young Africans engaged with this music culture across space, eliciting accounts of their experiences of the culture in relation to and in distinction from others, and organising these accounts into themes and subthemes. The most salient of these are presented in detailed, reflexive, and evocative narrative in the chapters that follow.

Chapter 5

Afrobeats culture: *everywhereness* and the logics of *being*

"Music, then, represents…a basis of self-identity (this is who I am, this is who I'm not) and collective identity (this is who we are, this is who we're not), often in the same moment."

(Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.2)

A rare breeze transports the distinctive aroma of roasted corn to the back of my taxi, sweeps me into another childhood memory; another Proustian moment reminding me that I'm *truly* back home. Almost muted, the radio is tuned to one of Accra's local-language mid-morning talk shows and there is some chatter about another government corruption scandal. My driver is visibly annoyed. I'm briefly distracted by a hawker who saunters past my window. She is singing along to the remix of '*Case*', a hit Afrobeats song, which is blaring from the side of the highway over a roadside sound system set up in front of a music equipment shop. It turns my attention to what else is outside of my cab: the searing heat that I am quietly embarrassed to be having to readjust to, the cacophony of a seemingly endless traffic jam—revving engines, rackety car horns, expletives heralding impending fist fights instigated by the simmering road rage—and bus conductors yelling destinations as pedestrians hurry across footbridges towards the make-shift bus stops. I think of how Afrobeats occupies the spaces in-between; floats across the clamour of the city, almost dissolving the chaos in its ebb and reverb.

Music does this. It becomes an often-backgrounded part of daily life (Martin, 2013), almost subliminal, 'train[ing] the unconscious for conditioned reflexes' (Adorno, 1976, p.53) and facilitating 'social calm and the conductivity for social navigation' (DeNora, 2000, p.109). It settles 'in the very midst of things' (Cook, 2000, p. ix), working subconsciously to numb anxieties in contexts where conditions could be experienced as unsettling (Carlson *et al*, 2021). In the punishing humidity of a typical 30-degree Accra mid-morning, we—the hawker, who semiconsciously sings every note as she scans traffic for potential patrons; the young passenger tapping his fingers to the rhythm on one of the half-open windows of the crammed bus next to my cab; the sweating bus conductor in the distance moving his body to the beat as he ushers approaching passengers into his waiting van; and I, whose body has forgotten how to endure the heat—find, in the music, some manner of escape from our various discomforts.

But this function of music is not solely the product of its sonic characteristics. It is as well the product of the ancillary rituals of performance and of engagement (Martin, 2013)—of dance, of fashion, of community. As the 'inextricable combination of audible elements and social processes' (Martin, 2013, p.10), it is music's position within a 'catalogue of cultural materials' (DeNora, 2000, p.109) that works to structure some of the affective routines of everyday life. Music associates with, and, in many contexts, as ethnomusicologists have widely documented (see Rice, 2013), can become a structuring element of other cultural devices of social ordering (DeNora, 2000). There is often a circularity in the ways that music works with other elements of culture. It informs sets of complementary cultural symbols such as dance, fashion, and language (Rice, 2013) that, in turn, inform its production, as well as its social, political, and intellectual attributes (Gilroy, 1991).

"*Chaley, me dwom nie!*" [translated: Chaley[30], this is my jam!]. His exclamation brings my attention back to my taxi driver who, beaming now, is reaching for the large volume knob on the car's old cassette player/radio system. The talkshow host is filling an intermission with a different hit, '*Terminator*', an Afrobeats song that shot to popularity in August 2023 following a custom dance routine that grew into a viral TikTok challenge. My driver begins to perform the routine in his seat. Excited, I ask, without thinking, if he likes Afrobeats. He looks back at me, a raised eyebrow and a half-smirk on his face immediately signalling to me that this was a stupid question. We both laugh. I take out my phone and open my Notes app. I note how, following the initial enchantment with their novelty (as for my taxi driver), these dance routines settle into the conditioned reflexes (as for the bus conductor in the distance) that become almost as backgrounded as the music, almost as quotidian. There is a quiet habituation around me to both—neither the loud music nor the dancing is perceived, as far as I can observe, to be odd—as they merge into the natural routine of things. Completing the note, I reflect over how both have become such a given, such a naturalised part of social interaction that they are rarely ever out of place, fitting seamlessly within the unremarkable routines of vocation and in the enrapturing rites of celebration. It is just as natural to encounter strangers dance to Afrobeats in traffic as it would be to watch the bridal train choreograph its entrance at the marriage ceremony the traffic jam is, now, definitely going to make me late for. I think about how the seemingly mundane routines of the *everyday* un/subconscious engagement with Afrobeats encode a normality that instructs *collective notions* of how to *be*.

[30] 'Chaley' is a Ghanaian colloquialism that performs multiple functions in chiefly informal interactions. Its meaning is heavily contextual, often functioning versatilely to address an acquaintance or a stranger (in similar usage as the American slang 'dude'); or as an interjection that can communicate, among other emotions, agreement, excitement, frustration, empathy, anger, resignation.

These are the concerns of this chapter. It, generally, focuses on the aspect of identity characterised by *being*, which, as I have discussed previously, I understand, based on Stuart Hall's (1994) 'being' and 'becoming', to be an internalised active process of self-knowledge that reconciles experience with aspiration, memory with change, and older embodied practices/meanings with newer modes of self-representation. To demonstrate how this process might settle into a sense of *being* African specifically, I consider how existing cultural meanings are (re)interpreted within and as part of everyday engagements with and encounters in Afrobeats culture and how these become associated with collective meanings and practices. For this endeavour, the concept of the everyday becomes a useful starting point, as it might be thought of as a site—'common denominator of activities, locus and milieu of human functions'(Lefebvre & Levich, 1987, p.10)—where individuals employ 'innumerable and infinitesimal transformations' in the 'collective activity' of reconstructing culture 'to their own interests and their own rules' (de Certeau, 1984, pp.xiii-xiv). It is in the miniscule features of the quotidian that cultural consumers 'make' or 'do' their own interpretations of culture; interpretations which, then, settle into the normal, as they 'infiltrat[e]…*everywhere* and becom[e]…more common' (de Certeau, 1984, p.29, emphasis added). In constituting the common—that which becomes normalised—therefore, everydayness relates with *everywhereness*.

Everywhereness has, however, attracted less of the conceptual work that has been put into illuminating everydayness as an analytical tool (Peters, 2014). Its sparse deployment across somewhat disparate contexts leaves some incoherence in its conceptual framing, with its most consistent use being in relation to a multiplicity of location in space. For my purposes, as I have suggested in Chapter 3, *everywhereness* can be thought of as presence—not just its multiplicity, but, as well, its significance; not only about location in space, but also about weight in meaning. I have suggested that, in the second sense, 'presence' might encapsulate the imprint, the impact, the inheritances that are (imagined to be) inherent in a thing that makes it (re)claimable for its value relative to its expanse/compass/stature. I have loosely drawn from Stuart Hall's (1990) 'presence', which highlights how 'Africa was, in fact *present everywhere*: in the *everyday* life… musics and rhythms of…society' (1990, p.230, emphasis added). Here, too, the everyday emerges. As Peters (2014, p.1) observes (regarding media), 'it is important to accentuate' *everywhereness* alongside everydayness. If everydayness informs the configuration of routine experience, it is *everywhereness* that confirms it as a substantive feature of any perception of normality; if practices and meanings become normalised because they manifest within the everyday, it is the presence of multiple resemblant everydays, in the (observed or assumed) everywhere, that comes to define them as constituting what is 'real'. My aim, in this chapter, therefore, is to draw out how the (assumed) *everywhereness* of Afrobeats becomes defined within the everyday—an everyday (imagined to be) inscribed within the material cultural elements (re)produced in/for/around Afrobeats, that carries the meanings that become constructed into narratives of collective identity.

First, I will relate how *everywhereness*—experienced and/or cognised through the everyday—becomes associated with what is understood to be *normal*; how, to be specific, Afrobeats is thought to be so ubiquitous that it becomes unnatural to not encounter it, to not connect with it, to not be partial to it. I will also consider how this *everywhereness*—and the normality it constructs—is taken as confirmation of a collective reality; how, if the everyday experiences/practices/values transported in the music/dance/fashions are present everywhere, it becomes the logical starting point from which to build collective assumptions of what 'real' Africanness must be. Second, I will show how elements of Afrobeats culture become central to these assumptions, and how they become the basis for the construction of a collective African identity. I will discuss how young Africans make sense of their *being* through specific elements of Afrobeats culture and how this sense of *being* is extended to the collective.

'It's everywhere now; it's become part of us': routine, everywhere Afrobeats, and the construction of a 'real' Africanness

In the middle of an Accra traffic jam, the role of the everyday in the normalisation of Afrobeats culture was illuminated within the seeming ordinariness of song and of dance; and, although it had not yet become fully salient in my inchoate analysis, there was also the centrality of the *everywhere*. In hindsight, Afrobeats had always been present—from my own playlist as I picked out the 'African print' outfit I would wear to the wedding; in the shops scattered along and across the kerbside from where I would hail my taxi; on the giant billboards that featured colourful posters for upcoming 'Detty December' events; all around us, as we drove past Zongo Junction and Lapaz, two of Accra's busiest bus-terminals-cum-market-centres; and in the traffic jam with Yaw, 39, my Afrobeats-loving taxi driver in whose cab I would later travel the eclectic Afrobeats places of Accra. There was always the *everywhereness*. It emerges as a particularly productive analytical tool for understanding how the everyday engagement with Afrobeats culture translated meanings of collective African identity. Following the earlier conceptualisation of *everywhereness* as presence; I focus, in this first section, on how the significance of Afrobeats becomes amplified because it is encountered and/or engaged with while conducting the routines of everyday life. I work to show how Afrobeats culture becomes associated with what is thought to be normal, and how this sense of normality becomes expanded and related to what is assumed to be collectively 'truly' African.

Weeks after my encounter with Yaw in Accra's punishing traffic, I am at a friend's apartment inside a private, gated cluster of townhouses inside East Legon, an affluent quarter at the centre of the city. It is meant to be a quiet residential part of the quarter, which has, on its edges, a few medium-to-large size malls, some night clubs, several shops, and restaurants. It is 4 a.m. and we are both awoken by a sudden spike in the amplitude of the music that, before we went to sleep, had been playing in the distance. It is Afrobeats so I am prompted to make a note about *when* and *how* I have encountered it. My friend asks why I am typing, and I explain how I have been thinking about how Afrobeats backgrounds everyday activities (as basic as waking up) and is encountered even in the most personal spheres of the everyday (even those as intimate as not waking up alone); and how we do not even notice it anymore—we have been awoken at 4 a.m. and we are not even upset. She can relate, she tells me. There is a pub "*where the ashawos*[31] *typically stand*", and they play music all night every day until morning and, "*…I open my eyes, I don't even get a little irritated…I end up singing along or something and then, somehow, I fall back to sleep*", she adds. "*It's everywhere now; it's become part of us.*"

Many of my participants extended similar forms of connection from their acceptance that Afrobeats was now everywhere around them to what they experienced as normal. They, too, determined that their experience of the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats meant that it had become a part of 'us', often contextualising this correlation within the ordinariness of their everyday routines. It was in their 'routinised practices' that 'everyday life preserve[d] its predictability and [took] on the appearance of normality' (Misztal, 2001, p.315). However, these practices only become rationalised as normal because they are encountered in situations similar to but external of those my participants engage with in their own routines. Put differently, my participants typically normalised their engagement with Afrobeats in the knowledge/assumption that it is everywhere and for everyone, the same. Senu, 33, who I speak to outside a popular bar in Accra where a live band performs Afrobeats, for example, uses a similar frame of reference, when he describes his engagement with Afrobeats:

> Senu: First off…I play and enjoy Afrobeats myself… in my house, in my car, at work sometimes… and, once in a while, I visit pubs as well to…to enjoy it. Yeah… pubs, parties, hangouts…yeah… Afrobeats is played almost everywhere…Yes. It's become part of us. I think almost every day, you would listen to an Afrobeats song…almost every day.

In listing the places where he would typically engage with Afrobeats, Senu extends his own routinised experiences of these places, no matter how few, to the *everywhere*, and, in doing so, constructs a normal where (the generic) 'you'—or, more directly, anyone—*should* encounter Afrobeats almost every day. Afrobeats is so everywhere, so normal, that anyone

[31] Sex workers.

should encounter it in their everyday. This, for him, as for many of my participants, is common sense, and, as Lefebvre suggests, 'the everyday, established and consolidated', becomes a 'common sense referent and point of reference' (1987, p.9). Making a similar generalisation, Miranda, 25, who drives to her graduate school classes most days, and is active in Accra's nightlife scene, first situates her extended and routinised engagement with Afrobeats in her affective attachment to it. She, then, deploys its *everywhereness* to assert the normality it creates (for her and for the generic 'you') as always having been stable, and still continuing to be so. When I ask how often she listens to Afrobeats, she tells me with sustained excitement:

> **Miranda**: Oh…every day [chuckles]. Every day, when I wake up, I play something to start my day [chuckles]; when I'm moving around, I play it; before I end the day, I play it. Yeah, I love Afrobeats, so…[e]verywhere. It's always been everywhere, and it still *is* everywhere so…yeah. I think you can't walk or drive for five minutes without hearing some place playing Afrobeats so…yeah [laughs].

The centrality of the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats to the construction of the normal for Miranda, who has lived most of her life near and in the University of Ghana, is further intimated when she tells me she discovers new Afrobeats songs "*from hearing it played in the neighbourhood…because I used to be a [chuckles] white-people music kind of person…you know…and then I heard people in the neighbourhood start playing…Nigerian music, actually, before I liked the Ghanaian Afrobeats…yeah…*". There are considerations to be made, here, about what she decodes as 'white' (Hall,1980; Meghji, 2017) and the distinction she makes between Nigerian Afrobeats and Ghanaian Afrobeats (both of which I shall discuss later in Chapter 8); but, it becomes readable in her conversion—from a lover of music decoded as Western to the music 'people play in the neighbourhood'—that, because of its *everywhereness*, she develops a taste for Afrobeats; actively rehearses an attachment to it; and becomes partial to it. There is also an observation to be made about the dependence of her attachment to Afrobeats on the routine or repetitive engagement other people had maintained (and continue to do so) with the music. As de Certeau reminds us, 'everyday life invents itself by poaching in countless ways on the property of others' (1980, p.25). The more Afrobeats was played by her neighbours—the more it became their 'property'—the deeper Miranda was drawn into discarding her original 'Western' tastes and adopting, into her own everyday routines, the tastes she had begun to encounter more 'locally'; *everywhere*. Because Afrobeats is everywhere, it becomes logical, if not justified, to appreciate it. This was a logic that was also observable online. Often, when the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats—in terms of the multiplicity of its presence across space—was brought up, it would be in justification of why it was appreciated (as in Figure 1.1) or in attestation to or affirmation of its position as a norm (as in Figure 1.2 and Figure 1.3).

Figure1.1

Figure1.2

Figure1.3

Predominantly on social media, however, when people referenced the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats, it was deployed in the second sense—in terms of the magnitude of its presence; its significance. It is a similar kind of presence (or, at least, the sentiment that it invokes) that Stuart Hall draws our attention to in that 'profound cultural discovery' that led to the amplified sense of pride in and a re-signified attachment to a (re)'discovered' African heritage across 1970s Jamaica, 'mediated' through (among other interventions) 'the culture of Rastafarianism and the music of reggae' (1990, p.231). There were, online, often indirect references to the magnitude of the impact of Afrobeats because of its *everywhereness*. In a tweet liked by one of my participants (Figure 2.1), an account with a large following, that appeared to be operated by an individual living in the UK, relates their everyday encounters of Afrobeats, in places they do not ordinarily expect to, such as in legacy media and other places decoded as white ('*oyinbo*'[32]), to the global reach and the value they estimate this reach—its *everywhereness*—has accrued for it. Here, we see how a claim over Afrobeats' cultural value (which I have discussed in Chapter 3) is made in its *everywhereness*. Another tweet (Figure 2.3) contextualises this *everywhereness* in historical hostilities in relation to Afrobeats' erstwhile perceived value—before its increased reach, its

[32] In the way that I have encountered it in use, 'oyingbo' (or, sometimes, oyibo) is a Yoruba colloquialism that translates to 'white person'.

more recognisable stature. Again, in both tweets, we find what is decoded as 'other'. This, perhaps, is not out of place, as 'cultural forms associated with societies in the Global South are often considered less worthy than those of the North' (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.4), and because, grounded in long histories of racism and colonialism, those Global North cultural forms are often 'elevated above them on dubious grounds' (Hesmondhalgh, 2013, p.4). In an invocation of these historical power relations (more directly, perhaps, in the second tweet than in the first) that devalued African music, both accounts situate their affective attachments to the perceived change in this cultural power dynamic. In the other two tweets (Figure 2.2 and Figure 2.4), differently contextualised affects are deployed (I will speak about affect later in Chapter 7), with both situating their feelings of gratification and pride in the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats.

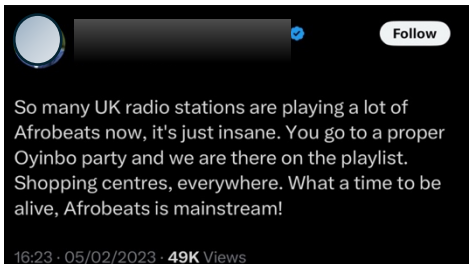

Figure 2. 1

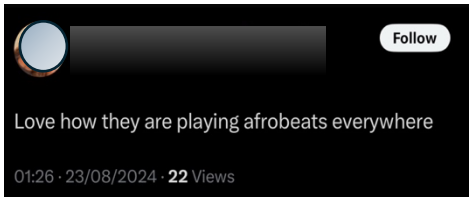

Figure 2. 2

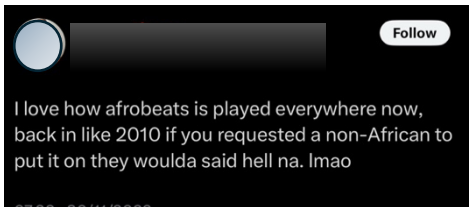

Figure 2. 3

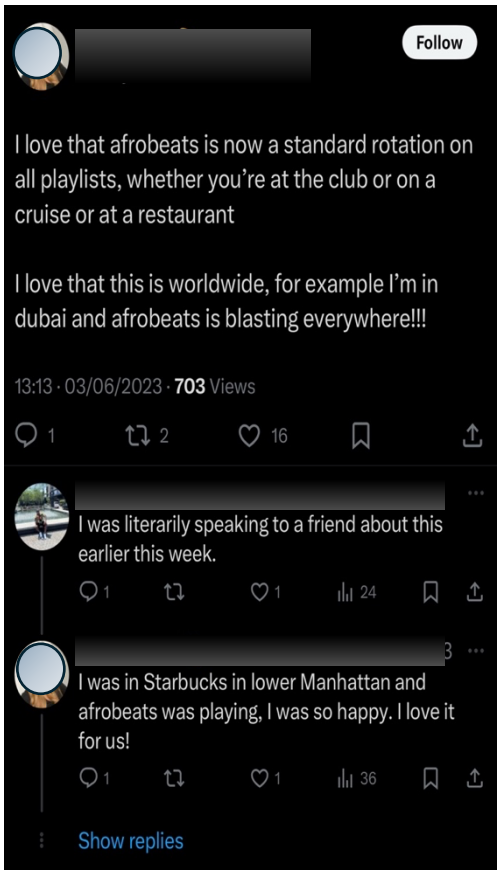

Figure 2. 4

A potential reason for the difference in deployments of *everywhereness* could be the fact that, in these instances, most of the contexts within which the *everywhereness* was experienced were diasporic. In addition to the multiplicity in space of its presence, the magnitude and/or the significance of this presence became more pronounced, perhaps, because these were contexts that ordinarily would not belong to them, and that, historically, have not been accessible to the kind

of presence—non-'*Oyinbo*', African—they understand Afrobeats to have. I found the distinction illuminated more clearly in part of a conversation I had with Rayla, 26, who I recruited at a house party in Streatham, and who had just travelled back from 'Detty December' in Accra. We had just walked a short distance to Denmark Hill station, following a separate night out at a different party around Peckham, when, on noticing the sculptures of *adinkra* symbols at the entrance (see Figure 3.1 and Figure 3.2), she started to tell me about how proud she felt that more Ghanaian cultural artefacts were beginning to receive wider visibility in London. It was not the first time either of us had seen the sculptures, but it was the first time we both had done so in the researcher-participant context. Naturally, Afrobeats came up and we had this exchange:

> **Rayla**: Emm...when I went to Ghana, it was *everywhere*…even in church [laughs]…you know…at weddings and stuff…
>
> **Researcher**: [interjecting] Yeah. They even have gospel Afrobeats now [laughs]…
>
> **Rayla**: [laughs] Exactly! There's this one they play at all the weddings [sings]…it's everywhere. Sometimes, you can even hear from the Uber when you are in traffic or something…like…from the roadside or when you go past a church or something [laughs]. But…yeah…everywhere—the clubs, the beaches, even in the salon [chuckles]. I'm just thinking about it, and it really is everywhere.
>
> **Researcher**: Yeah [chuckles]…and what about in London?
>
> **Rayla**: In London, I think it isn't as everywhere as in Ghana…like…don't get me wrong…like…I think it has become more popular…like… in the past, you would have needed to be in South or something to hear it…you know…like Brixton or something…but, now, it's…like…a couple of weeks ago, I was with my girls at this party in Mayfair and they had Afrobeats… in Mayfair!

Figure 3. 1

Figure 3. 2

It becomes discernible how the two meanings of *everywhereness* are contextually deployed when Rayla speaks about Afrobeats' presence in Accra and in London. In Accra, it is in her everyday encounter of Afrobeats in all the places she finds herself—the *everywhere*—that the normal is defined. It is a settled normal, one which means Afrobeats becomes expected in the Ubers, in the clubs, at the beaches, in the salon. The context is its natural sphere; everyone engages with it, she reasons, even the church people. In London, it is not the same kind of presence. It is a less settled normal; a 'now'-normal which, when placed in the context of the past, is one she has just started to *expect*; one whose significance is more immediately salient. In this *everywhereness*, the normal is new. But these meanings are never fully demarcated; never completely separate from one another. There are always overlaps. For example, although Zero, 28, who is a London schoolteacher and an Afrodance content creator, experiences the *everywhereness* more definitively than Rayla does, his experience also draws out, more pointedly, the significance of the presence of Afrobeats. He tells me that, in London, "*...it's widely accepted because, back in the day, as I told you, if you told me that Afrobeats is going to get to this point that it's at [now], I would tell you you're lying…but, it's got there, do you get what I mean? It's now everywhere, it's widely accepted.*" Like several others in diasporic contexts (examples in Figures 2.1--2.4), he is more certain than Rayla of the multiplicity of Afrobeats' presence across space—it has got there; to the point that it is now encountered everywhere—and, like Rayla, he finds its significance in the now-normal of its wide acceptance. In similar ways, the manners in which Senu and Miranda experience the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats are not completely removed from any significance they may assign to its value. For the two, as for others in homeland contexts, the significance of the presence of Afrobeats is in community; in the people around; in the fact that it has become such a norm, a "*part of us*".

My aim, in working, so far, to draw out how the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats is connected to its everydayness (and how this interrelation helps construct a sense of normality) is to highlight how the *everywhereness* underlies assumptions of a collective 'reality'. This 'reality' materialises in the 'us' that, through its *everywhereness*, Afrobeats is perceived to have become a part of. As Tia DeNora notes, the everyday can be thought of as 'the temporal location where realities are brought into being and into focus in ways that matter – to *us*' (2014, p. xx, emphasis added). Thinking through Goffman's (1983) ideas of normality, we might understand that, even though normality is often imaginary, its appearance counts for more than its actual occurrence (Misztal, 2000); or, in other words, that, the appearance of a reality matters more to 'us' than whether it actually manifests a truth. The collective reality the everyday engagement with Afrobeats constructs is in the logic of its normality. It is not an untenable logic: because Afrobeats is everywhere in the everyday routines, it is a normal 'part of us', of 'our' social worlds; and, because it is a normal 'part of us', it makes sense to encounter it, to connect with it, to be partial to it, and to feel an attachment to its value, to its content and its ancillary cultural forms. The

logic of normality, here, takes on an extended scope: if Afrobeats is everywhere, and it is a normal part of 'us'; then, it is a normal part of 'us' everywhere. 'Normal', here, then transforms from the ordinary—the everyday—to the real. A real 'us' emerges, and its characteristics are defined within the everyday routines that are imagined to be everywhere. As I have pointed out, it is in the everyday routines that people 'make' or 'do' their own interpretations of already existing cultural configurations (de Certeau, 1984). In the everyday engagement with Afrobeats, elements of and meanings associated with existing cultural configurations already imagined as African are co-opted into, transformed and/or contested within a collective sense of Africanness situated within Afrobeats.

When I first met to discuss my research more formally with Abena, 22, who I had semi-recruited a little over a week prior in a Ghanaian restaurant in Forest Gate, East London, it turned into a sort of impromptu focus group session with three of her friends, who had been curious about my research because, as Abena had explained, they also loved Afrobeats, and they were also of African descent. Abena had just started a new job in digital marketing, and the four had just enjoyed a celebratory brunch at a restaurant in a large mall in Stratford, not far from the quiet café, where she and I had agreed to meet up. What was intended to be a discussion about her role in the study and my ethical obligations to her, became a fun, open conversation about Afrobeats, jollof, and why my '*old* [behind]' was looking to go jumping around at concerts instead of cozying up in bed at nighttime '*like old people do*'. Punctuating the light-hearted banter, however, was an often-subtle, often-subtextual, passing reference to a 'real African' other. This was not an othering in its now most noted sense (see Spivak, 1985). It resembled more, a proximation, a sort of latent aspiration toward what has been referred to, mainly in psychoanalysis, as 'the idealised other' (see, for example, Morrison, 2009; Riker, 2022). This 'other' is different (because they 'must stand above us in some way') but are also proximate (because they must not be 'a mere fantasy') in the sense that they possess 'some kind of likeness with us in order to give us the strength and security we desire' (Morrison, 2022, p.19). There is, therefore, an aspiration to be this idealised other, in the sense that the aspirant 'could be just like' the other if the aspirant 'developed well' (Morrison, 2022, p.19). All four women, all born in the United Kingdom, made references to, at varying points in our conversation, an 'actual' or a 'real' African, even while asserting their own grounded sense of *being* African. They variously articulated, for example, increased appreciation for social media Afrobeats content "*when the real Africans make the dance videos*" or the retrospective "FOMO" (fear of missing out) they often feel "*when the actual Africans talk about azonto in secondary school or stuff like that*". This idealised 'real African' other did not have to necessarily be one that had to *still* be living within the geographical borders of Africa, but they needed to have had formative experiences within those geographical borders; experiences that could be correlated to some manner of superlative knowledge of or tastes in Afrobeats, particularly, since/in/from childhood.

Across social media, similar observations could be made. Although appearing sparsely among the posts my participants engaged with, whenever the *direct* referent 'real African' appeared in the context of Afrobeats, it was in the often-related valorisation or validation of their tastes/sensibilities (example, Figure 4.2), or their formative knowledge of Afrobeats (example, Figure 4.3). In most of the posts referencing tastes/sensibilities, such as the second tweet (Figure 4.2), 'real Africans' were portrayed as the veritable connoisseurs of Afrobeats culture and, therefore, valuable reference points for recommendations, histories, *vibes*. Relatedly, in posts referencing formative knowledge of the culture (e.g. Figure 4.3), 'real Africans' were those who had encounters with Afrobeats in its earliest phases. In the case of this specific TikTok, the original video featured superimposed text suggesting that, 'Oliver Twist', presented in the TikTok as one of the earliest Afrobeats songs, reminded the account holder of their childhood; with an additional caption suggesting that only 'real Africans' would relate. Occasionally, other posts would refer to 'real Africans' in contextually different but thematically similar ways. In some posts (example, Figure 4.4), in reaction to some negative opinions about the quality of Afrobeats, the 'real African' referent would be deployed as a way of valorising their tastes as unique; i.e. real Africans have superior tastes so only they know its quality—if anyone does not like it, therefore, (in this specific example) they are admonished and, because they are not forced to engage with it, are told to "*leave [A]frobeats to the real Africans*". In other posts (example, Figure 4.1), 'real African' was contextualised in logics of originality; that is, the construction of an original group of Africans that always asserted their Africanness without the incentivisation enhancements in Afrobeats' value would have offered, at points in a past preceding its popularity, among constituencies that were pedestalised (such as, in this specific example, among *"the light skin girls*").

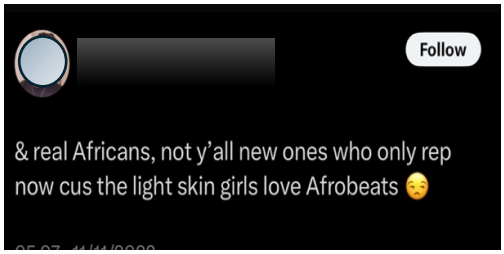

Figure 4. 1

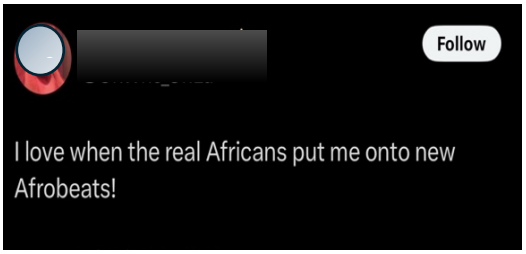

Figure 4. 2

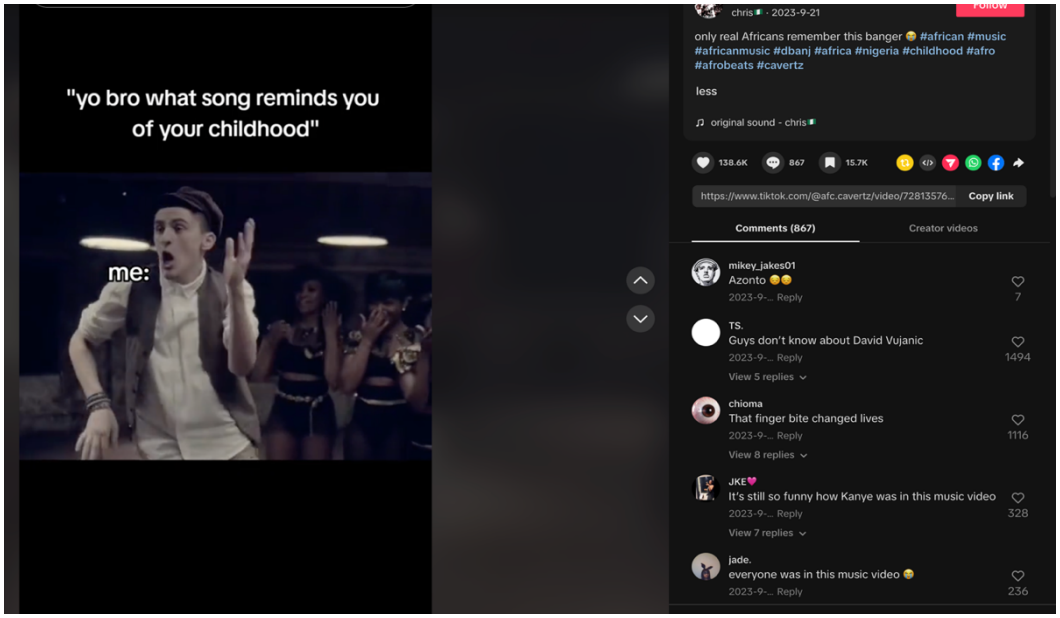

Figure 4. 3

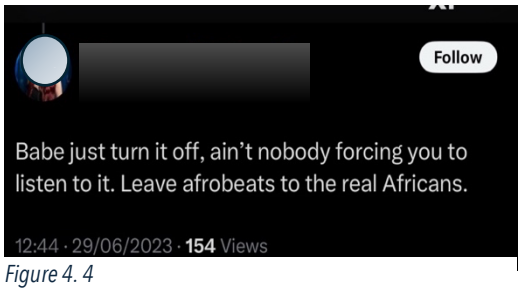

Figure 4. 4

This logic of originality also emerged when Kwaku, 27, and Kwesi, 25, spoke to me about their experiences in school, growing up in London. The two men, cousins of Zero, had been in his company when I met with him near Liverpool Street station, where they had been shooting a choreographed Afrodance routine with two other dancers for Zero's social media pages. Scouring the busy area for the perfect spot—one hidden away enough amongst the towering steel-glass structures, so not to make our presence a nuisance; and unenclosed enough, so to catch the final rays of 'golden hour', before the cowering sun snuggled back down into the grey London sky—they quizzed me about my research and, after we had found a suitable spot, contributed to another informal, impromptu focus group discussion. Zero who had been simultaneously performing for and recording his Afrodance video in the distance, chimed in infrequently. The notion of a real/original African was implicit in Kwaku's analysis of what both men agreed was the unprecedented popularity of Afrobeats—its *everywhereness*—particularly among young Black people in London. After describing the transformation

he had observed in attendances at Afrobeats concerts, and the differences he believed there were between those and concerts for older African music genres, he reflected (with Kwesi):

> Kwaku: Like...that's crazy…So, again, I think the identity also comes in something to be proud of, do you know what I'm saying? Because, we've always had the identity that was...people was...not scared but was ridiculed...
>
> Kwesi: [simultaneously] I feel like... it was, it was...
>
> Kwaku:...for being who we were...so, if you're not...unless you're proud...because, don't get it twisted, I know Africans, yeah?, I don't know...[directed at Kwesi} correct me if I'm wrong...I don't know if you had kids that were in your school, yeah?, they were freshies, yeah?...[directed at researcher] okay, we say 'freshies' like fresh-off-the-boat, innit?...it might be derogatory, sorry yeah? [both chuckle]...but them lot, yeah?, in school they were freshies but they didn't care...
>
> Kwesi: They didn't care...yeah
>
> Kwaku: Like...they fully didn't care. They'd all be the type of freshies that would be like [mimics Africanised accent] 'Please, I don't care!'...those are the guys that, through thick and thin, they were African.
>
> Kwesi: They were African...yeah...

In Kwaku's analysis, despite an attachment to and a quiet acceptance of their Africanness, second-generation migrant pupils in his school, who had been reticent to openly assert that Africanness, were not as *truly* African as those first-generation migrant pupils, who had remained undaunted by the ridicule they faced for being 'who they were'. This qualitative measure of calibre of Africanness is determined by the degree of pride demonstrated in the embodiment of their African heritage. There is a suggestion, here, therefore, that the ideal 'real' African is not too distant from the position that Kwaku, and others like him, inhabit as Africans; however, because their pride in asserting their Africanness coincided with the increased value Afrobeats is thought to have accrued globally, this idealised other is still more African than they are, and, so, is set apart from them, is different from them. Two points, then, become salient: the feeling of pride (which I speak more about in Chapter 7) before and after Afrobeats' enhanced status, and the matter of heritage. We know that matters of *shared* heritage can be central to the construction of collective identities (Hall, 1990; Smith 1992). The construction of a 'real' or a true, original African, based on *how* and *when* a shared heritage is asserted, suggests, also, the existence of a 'real' or true collective Africanness, based on the composition of that shared heritage. If we understand heritage to refer to the meanings and the representations conveyed from the past through artefacts,

landscapes, memories, mythologies, and traditions onto the present (Graham & Howard, 2008); then, it would be conceivable that Afrobeats would be imagined as (a vehicle for transporting this) heritage; that the existing meanings attached to the geographies, cultural artefacts, stories, norms that are already assumed to be African can be imagined to be contained in and transmitted/represented *everywhere* by Afrobeats. This is largely how my participants perceived Afrobeats. When asked simply to tell me about Afrobeats, nearly all of them described it, in some form, as 'African music'; when asked why they believed it to be African, they variously referenced a collective culture, highlighting artefacts, memories, traditions and/or myths that they suggested were embedded in elements of Afrobeats culture.

At the rehearsal session where I first met Dusk, 26, an Afrobeats star, who had agreed to become one of the participants of my ethnographic focus in Accra, I notice that Kwame, a saxophonist on Dusk's band, has a string with a single cowry shell tied around the bell of his saxophone. After the session, while all the other musicians are hanging out in an open-air space just outside the studio, I ask Kwame about the cowry shell. He shows me his bracelet of cowries, tells me he loves them; that he also used to have a necklace made of them; that he loves them so much, "*I use them for my brand*". When I ask why, for his brand, he makes a connection between a saxophone and cowries, he explains that the sax is not an African instrument, so he felt he needed to attach something Ghanaian, as, for him, it was "*important to showcase my African culture*". As an Afrobeats musician who played a non-African instrument, he used the cowry shells to signify his Africanness, "*because, it's Ghanaian. It's a symbol of being Ghanaian.*" As I complete my note, he adds, "*I love everything African*." Marking the saxophone out as a non-African aspect of what he wanted to highlight as a strong African persona by centring the cowry shell, a recognisable symbol of Ghanaian spirituality and wealth, was his exercise in reinforcing his position within a collective Africanness. The assumption he makes, here, is that, because it signifies those meanings in Ghana, the cowry shell *should* also be a representation of spirituality and wealth everywhere else across Africa; and that it *should* be, everywhere, inside and outside of Africa, recognisable as such. Instruments were also a key feature of the conception of Africanness that Dusk connected with Afrobeats:

> Dusk: I think Afrobeats is a new thing that is evolving and it stems from Africa as a whole and....it has...like...elements of every tradition or every...yeah...it does have elements of every culture that you would find in Africa…from our rhythms to even the instruments. I think Afrobeats itself is African music, right?...and then it keeps evolving all the time...yeah.

Afrobeats, for both men, as for many of my participants, is not only a representation of a collective African culture, it is also constituted by representations of that culture; by symbols that are assumed to be everywhere in Africa. It is a logic that was also observable online. For example, in one Instagram post (Figure 5.1), a clip of Afrobeats artist, Davido, who

is speaking on a popular US radio show about Afrobeats and the recent spate of collaborations with mainstream US artists is reshared. In the clip, he speaks about an African culture that the mainstream US artists are enamoured with, because of Afrobeats' symbolisation of this collective culture. Also, across TikTok, my participants often engaged with content that presented, in various ways, this manner of consolidation. In one such post (Figure 5.2), representations of Edo cultural symbolism featured in music videos for a recent album are presented as representations of a collective African culture. This kind of projection was most common across Twitter (see examples in Figure 5.3; Figure 5.4). In both, references are made to the 'roots' of Afrobeats, from within this collective African culture, even though the accounts took their reference points from contexts that are specifically Nigerian.

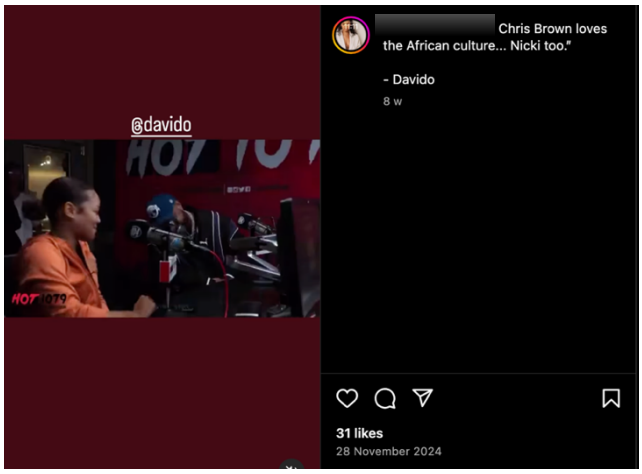

Figure 5. 1

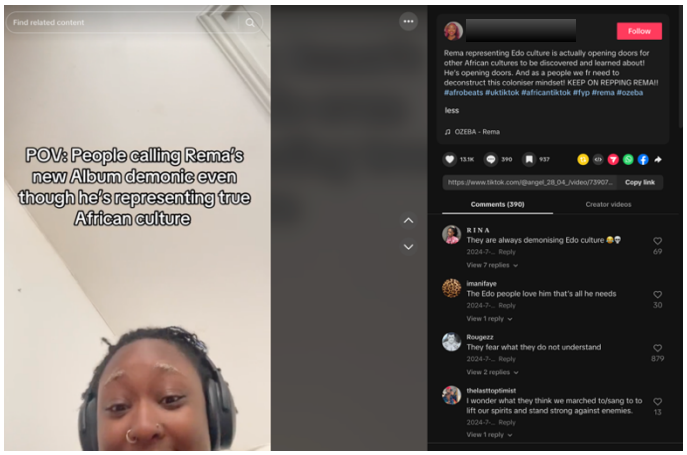

Figure 5. 2

Figure 5. 3

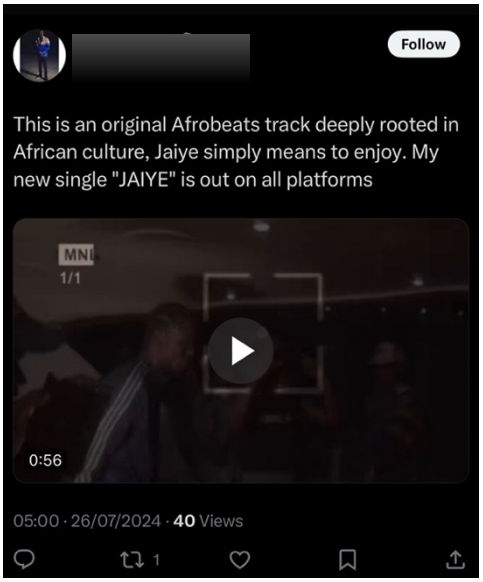

Figure 5. 4

It is the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats that informs these kinds of generalisations. As young Africans come to recognise, in Afrobeats culture, certain everyday artefacts, practices, values, norms, landscapes and stories that are similar to those they encounter in their everyday worlds, notions of a collective way of *being* African become validated. That is, if these features of everyday life can be identified in Afrobeats culture, and they are articulated or represented in similar ways everywhere Afrobeats culture is originally produced, then it becomes rational to assume that these must be the ways all African people live their everyday; this is how all *true* Africans must *be*. In the next section, I discuss this in further detail, demonstrating how the main elements of Afrobeats culture with which young Africans engage (i.e. music, dance, and fashion) become central to these assumptions, and how they become the basis for the construction of a collective African identity.

'African cultures blending': *everywhereness*, commonality, and collective identity

As I discussed earlier in Chapter 2, conceptions of collective Africanness are often based on certain commonalities that might be traced across African cultures; on assumptions (or observations) of shared histories, cultural artefacts, practices,

and shared heritage. In this section, I consider how these commonalities are thought to be represented within and by Afrobeats culture; how elements of the music culture become ways to authenticate a collective Africanness.

When I ask Dusk why he says Afrobeats is African music; why he believes that it has elements of different African cultures, he tells me it is because of "*the rhythm... even our normal lullabies are being made into bangers...you know...worldwide hit songs...and, probably...it's somebody's lullaby in a certain village in a certain African country somewhere...*". While we are hanging out at a studio session on a separate occasion, he tells me that, "*sometimes, even the lyrics are describing something that you would realise most African countries experience on a daily, you know?... sometimes, it's something that we can all relate to…in our normal everyday lives*". By finding similarities in the sonic properties and in the content of the music, Dusk constructs his idea of what must be 'African'. Afrobeats culture offers to him a picture of life in a typical African village, which resembles the one with which he is familiar; the one he encounters in his 'normal everyday' life.

My participants in diasporic contexts also described this feature of Afrobeats as a way to validate a *true* African way of life. Both Rayla and Abena, for example, told me they could grasp, more concretely, experiences of homeland contexts that had only been narrative or notional growing up in London, because they had started to engage with social media 'Come With Me' videos (which I will discuss in more detail in the next chapter). Both women authenticated their modes of participation in Afrobeats events through the videos they watched of 'actual' Africans engaging in those rituals of performance. Zero, who moved to the UK from Ghana as a boy and is now a creator of the kind of content the two women said they relied on, intimated the logic for making these videos, when I asked him to tell me about Afrobeats:

> **Zero**: I would say...like...to me, Afrobeats is...a culture and it's the people...like...a way of life, that's how we've been brought up. For someone that has to live here...Afrobeats, to me, feels like a way of still understanding and knowing where I'm from...because people actually speak...of the culture and how we do things has helped us kinda...like...get insight [into] how it was like in the past… So, for me, Afrobeats is like a way of creating...a way that creative people can tell their stories. I'm a creative, I dance. My way of actually...like...pushing the story of dance is through Afrobeats. So, it kinda helps me explain things...yeah...Afrobeats, to me, is another way of communication and a way of life for us...
>
> **Researcher**: Okay...
>
> **Zero**: [interjecting]…that's the best way to put it...but...it's not just music; it's culture...like...I'm from Ghana... I teach classes where I teach them about where I'm from--azonto stuff--do you get what I mean?...like...teach them moves, teach them how you can develop….everything… Music, to me, or just say Afrobeats is more closer to home, because it's...like...it's something we, as

> Africans, we have as our own. It's... what we have to show that 'okay, cool, this is what we can do'. So...it's nice...because, I feel like what we do is cool, do you [chuckles] get what I mean?

Zero weaves into his conception of Africanness, the centrality of a collective culture, whose authenticity is coded into a heritage that Afrobeats helps uncover; helps clarify and transmit through stories and other modes of expression such as dance. Afrobeats culture is heritage; it is how he articulates his sense of self, but also how he makes sense of that self, which he ties to the collective. It is through Afrobeats that Africans can show who they are—that *he* can show who he is. There is an extension of an Afro-cool value in Afrobeats to a collective African 'cool', which must be shown (I shall return to this in Chapter 8). For Zero, this coolness is in dance.

Of the artefacts to which my participants connected their sense of collective Africanness, dance was the most prominent. Esi, 35, a designer who runs her own fashion brand in Accra, highlighted the importance of dance to Afrobeats and, thinking through her own experiences of dance, to the feature of both Afrobeats and dance that Zero references; to the stories of everyday Africanness that are often carried through both the music and the dance:

> Esi: Yes, I think it goes hand-in-hand. I remember when azonto first came [chuckles], and, it was actually my mum who was very excited about it [chuckles]. She was telling us…there was this dance called azonto and they have all these movements, and then I read an article that said the azonto movements mimic chores like...ironing...like...washing...and I was like 'I never thought about it that way'. I didn't repeat it to anybody because it made sense, but it sounded crazy. But, since then, I kind of look at every African dance like...whoever came up with it...one person is coming up with it and then it's just going everywhere...this person just did something in their everyday life and then it's like 'oh this is a nice move' [laughs]. So, it's like I can't think of the music without the dance. Because, it's like the music starts the story and the dance completes it. That's how it feels like to me. Like...the music is not complete without the dance.

Also unable to divorce dance from the music, Nana Yaw, 19, an undergraduate student in Accra, who tells me he "*lives for Afrobeats*", insisted, that I note that dance is "v*ery important! Very very important…because the dance...Afrobeats dances are different; they are unique to Afrobeats... So...yeah...dance is very important to Afrobeats...yeah...it even adds some spice to the song you're listening to*". For Nana Yaw, dance isn't only complementary, it also contributes to the inimitability he ascribes to Afrobeats. Dance adds something more to the experience of the music, makes it different from other forms of music. This was a conclusion that was also prevalent in posts across social media; that, because of the specific dance styles that were organic to Afrobeats, it provided a different experience from other genres. The sonic properties and lyrical content of Afrobeats were also thought to make it uniquely suited for a dance experience different from other genres. Across online discussions, trends, and debates (I discuss these in more detail in the next chapter),

for example, it was common to come across commentary on choreographies and dance performances (such as Figure 6.1, which shows a post that, in reaction to a stage performance of Afrobeats artist, Asake, declares the inextricability of dance from Afrobeats and African music culture). It was common also to encounter reactions to viral synchronised group dance, featuring dance moves organic to Afrobeats culture (which I discuss also in the next chapter). There were also often posts referencing a collective African ability to dance (as in Figure 6.2), with organic Afrobeats dances implied to be the exemplar of this collective ability. Here, a submission to a TikTok trend on what all 'Africans love to do' features an individual performing a dance generated within Afrobeats culture. In these trends, there is the assumption of the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats through its coupling with dance. As Dusk tells me, "*...especially with my performances, I'm always adding dance; and most of them, you'd see, you'd realise I'm doing a lot of African dances and, now, we even call it Afrobeats dance, you understand?, because there's elements...there are elements of other dance moves or dance cultures...it's like a mixture of dance cultures...so, in that form, it's...you can refer to it as Afrobeats dance*." Because the dances are a combination of dance moves from everywhere across Africa, they are African dances; they represent all of Africa, all Africans.

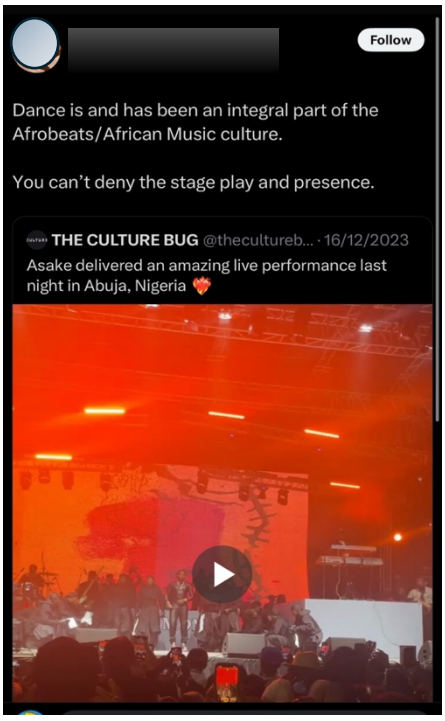

Figure 6.1

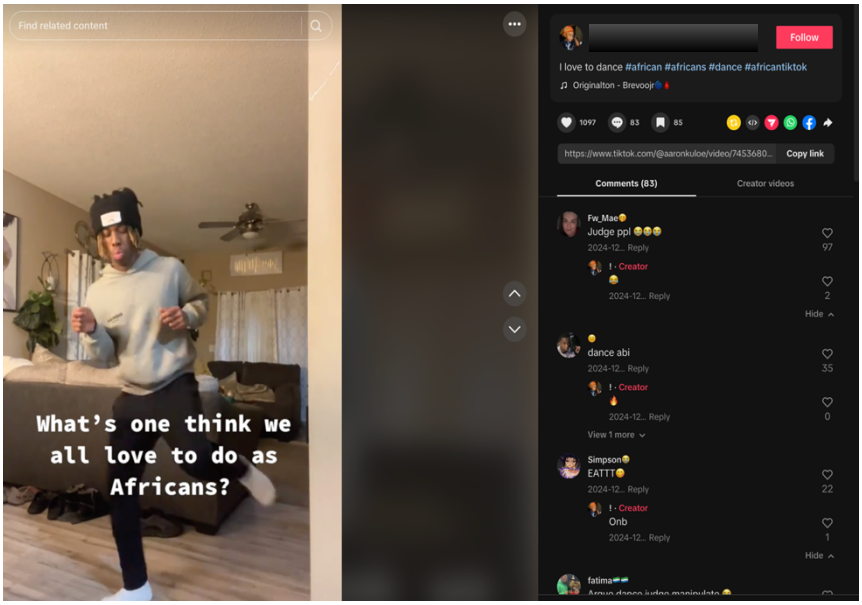

Figure 6. 2

As I have already discussed, dance, as one of music's core rituals of performance (Martin, 2013), does not only structure the sonic properties of Black music forms (Gilroy, 1991), it also contributes to the collective engagement with music that forms and reproduces meanings of collective identity. While, like Nana Yaw and Esi, all my participants considered dance a core aspect of Afrobeats culture, it was the sense of interrelatedness, mediated through dance, that most of them linked most concretely to their sense of collective identity. As Adina, 25, whose apartment was below mine and who played Afrobeats every day throughout my time in Accra, put it, "*…one thing that always goes hand-in-hand with the music is the dance; so…that plays a very very huge part. And, especially now, everybody is doing legwork…like…or some other African dance…like… you're just scrolling on TikTok…and, every two minutes, you're seeing some new challenge that has…like…a lot of African moves and everybody is doing it. Yeah, so I think that also fosters that, you know, sense of connection*." Dizzie, 33, who was born and has lived most of her life in London but visits Ghana often, described Afrobeats in similar terms. For Dizzie, Afrobeats is "*music that feels…relatable. I think it's… I feel like with Afrobeats, you can dance to it, and I like dancing. So, as soon as I hear Afrobeats, I wanna…it gets me on the dance floor. So, I would say, yeah. I think it's that connection as well---the fact that it's* ***Afro****-beats, it's African music---we are Africans…or I am African.*" Senu also thinks Afrobeats is uniquely African because of its ability to connect people in dance. He tells me he thinks "*Afrobeats brings… people together. It has created some kind of…it unites people. When Afrobeats is played anywhere, it brings people together to dance… People from diverse cultures all together come together and enjoy. So, when I think about Afrobeats, not only the music but the way it brings people together.*"

This was a sense of community I recognised; one that I had experienced at every party, at every gathering. It is a sense of community that manifests always in the convivial ecosphere of Ghanaian weddings; in the anxieties of preparation, of unreliable tailoring on custom coordinated traditional outfits, of shabbily choreographed bridesmaid-groomsman pairings; in the thrills of the congregation of old friends; in the excitement of making new ones; and in the collective indulgence of nostalgia—that enthralling freedom in performing, together, throwback dances to throwback music. For two weddings—the first in Accra and the second, not far outside London, in Bicester—Afrobeats dance was integral; for both, it was the first responsibility assigned to the groups of bridesmaids and groomsmen, matched in pairings for a bridal train. Each pair was required to select a song to which it would perform an entry dance on the wedding day, and to choreograph a unique routine. It does not need to be made explicit, but we all know to select Afrobeats songs and to choreograph Afrodance routines. The paired routines dissolve, at the end of both weddings, into unstructured free-form group bopping, everyone flaunting their Afrodance moves; moves originating from different nodes across the network of Afrobeats' producer/consumer constituencies. In those singular locales in Accra and Bicester, Afrobeats and Afrodance connect multiple places, multiple people; reflecting the *everywhereness* that structures collective modes of *being*.

In, perhaps, even more discernible ways, these collective modes of *being* emerged out of the unrestrained contexts of house parties, of concerts, and of the clubs/bars/pubs. In both Accra and London, dance was appropriated in similar ways as in the weddings; with the spontaneous, often collectively synchronised, performances of Afrodance routines. On one night out with Abena and her friends in Shoreditch, London, there is a long queue to get into an exclusively Afrobeats club; so, the women decide to go to another club that is more generalist in their music themes. Within the moderately diverse crowd, we find another group of Africans, when the DJ switches his set from a mix of pop and EDM to Afrobeats, and their group starts to scream as loudly as ours simultaneously does. As the music settles amongst the crowd, we find ourselves drifting towards one another, floating over the cadence, legs and arms shuttling into and through Afrodance moves, as we do so. Abena and I are Ghanaian; our group also has a Nigerian, a Ugandan, and a biracial woman who is Cameroonian. The other group, we find out later, has two Nigerian women, also in their early twenties, and a Gambian man in his mid-twenties. At different moments, after we have formed a dance circle, we perform synchronised moves, as different songs alternate. It feels almost natural, almost telepathic. We become so submerged in the moment, in the music, we do not even notice we have drawn a small audience, and at points, pockets of cheers. At the end of the night, the women exchange social media information, and I strike a conversation with the Gambian man; ask him how he knows those dances, many of which are originally Ghanaian. He tells me he sees the dance moves on social media and just picks them up, but they feel familiar to him and so do not feel foreign when he

performs them. He adds that he goes to parties where there are often a lot of other Africans, and "*I don't know…it's just the way we dance.*"

In a club that might have been outside of its most natural domain, dance was the marker with which a group of young Africans recognised, validated, and performed their collective Africanness; one which had been constituted elsewhere—in interactions with others like them, across different constituencies where Afrobeats culture is (re)produced. Within the connections they create, there are the quiet workings of the *everywhereness*—in the fact of the presence of the music inside a club curated to cater to a different kind of audience; in the value they attached to and accrued from it, signified by the visible, almost reflexive celebratory reaction as the music is heard in rotation, and the appreciation their dancing attracts; in the interconnectedness their multiple nationalities settle into, through a set of dance moves gathered from around Afrobeats' constituencies; and in the external locales, where those dance moves are practiced, validated, become embodied. In Accra, too, this bond that Afrodance created in the diasporic context was always as discernible; however, because it was always a context that would be considered Afrobeats' natural domain, it also always felt, as Miranda and Senu described, normal—in its place, everyday, *expected*. However, another artefact remained to mark out this sense of collective Africanness—fashion.

When I first meet Stacey, 23, a semi-professional dancer in Accra, it is at a lounge in Osu's Oxford Street, a stretch of the city, which is almost synonymous with its night life. I notice, first, that she is wearing African-print fabric, fashioned into, as she tells me later, a "*halter neck plunge corset top*", matched with a pair of black leggings and black-and-white Chuck Taylor Converse sneakers. Inside the lounge, a few others are similarly dressed—in any combination of Western-style tops with African-patterned bottoms or the reverse. I'm quietly embarrassed because, while I typically prefer African-print shirts, I had decided to wear a t-shirt over a pair of jeans. I do not look out of place, however, as most of the patrons are dressed in Western clothing. My embarrassment was less about not fitting in, which I did, than it was about not standing out, the way Stacey did. She tells me her "*cute African-print tops*" make her feel more like herself, more African. I know exactly what she means. Fashion 'comes easily to serve as a kind of visual metaphor for identity'; it is often what first marks, in social interaction, the corporeal self, framing 'much of what we see when we see another' (Davies 1992, p.25). In that first encounter with Stacey, in her African print top, I see a metaphor for a collective Africanness. It is an observation that is entrained, of course; one that relies on existing meanings that both she and I excavate from socially constructed representations, wherein 'African print…become[s] the ubiquitous exemplar of African fashion' (Jennings, 2015, p.47). Like Kwame with his cowry-shell bracelet and necklace, Stacey uses fashion to say something about herself (Stone, 1962); representing, visually, a collective Africanness that she feels a part of.

This is not uncommon. Across Africa, following the end of colonial occupation and its attempts at erasure, fashion became a means through which many African projects of rediscovery encouraged expressions of a renewed sense of cultural identity (Jennings, 2015). Earlier, I discussed how people reconstitute existing cultural products/logics/systems towards the normalisation of newer collective meanings (de Certeau, 1984), suggesting that this normalisation occurs in the everywhere. It was, perhaps, in fashion that this process of reconstitution was most visible—in the renegotiation of social demarcations of 'formal wear' from 'casual wear' to new hybridised forms for both. My participants drew from existing norms around fashion and determined the impact they believed Afrobeats to have had through assessments they made of newer modes of representation through fashion. In Ghana, for example, an existing fashion norm would be the typical reservation of clothing made from African-print fabric for what is considered traditional—and, therefore, formal—gatherings such as weddings, naming ceremonies, and funerals, often in contrast to more 'casual' or 'official' Western clothing. Traditional clothing, then, become representative of Ghanaianness; of the existing customary cultural configuration that becomes reasoned as the old African way. Many of my participants considered fashion an important marker of that Africanness, often speaking about it in considerations of form and style before and after Afrobeats. Esi, for example, who designs clothing she markets as African, situates these fashion sensibilities within that dichotomous timeline:

> Esi: I find it interesting also because of…how African clothing has evolved to become more…at first, it was very formal…very *kaba*-and-*slit*[33]. Then, at a point, it became a bit boring in my opinion, and I remember this when I started my brand, it was maxi dresses…it was very hard for me to get a customer base that wanted more fitting clothes. It was just maxi dresses everywhere and then men's button-down shirts. But…it became more adventurous, as the music became more out there. And, then, it became more abstract. Now, when I think about African music, I don't think about it in one way. It can come in so many forms just like African clothing. Now, when I think about African clothing, my mind doesn't immediately go to a *GTP* or *Woodin* or *High Target*; sometimes, it goes to leather, sometimes it goes to…you know how bogolan fabric is becoming more popular. Now, even…*fugu*[34] from the North. The colour palettes are simple; it's not very complicated but, now, it's not in-your-face *adinkra* symbols. Just the way, now, African music isn't what we thought of African music…maybe 20 years ago.

Like many of my participants, Esi demarcates African fashion into the old—to which she delegates a formality, even a certain ennui—and the new—to which she attaches audaciousness. She contextualises this evolution in the concurrent

[33] A two- or three-piece tailored ensemble, consisting (in its traditional style) of a puff-sleeved blouse, an ankle-length skirt with a slit, and a third folded piece used as a shoulder shawl.
[34] Hand-woven smock from northern Ghana.

evolution of African music. When I ask her if she believed Afrobeats had played a role in this evolution, she tells me she believes so; that "*it all comes down to…Beyoncé started wearing more African prints; then, it became more popular. Then, at some point, Africans…kind of took over and made it a global thing. African music—Afrobeats—becoming more adventurous, more out there, bolder, more daring, and incorporating African fashion into it, it's like it propelled African fashion to become more daring, and more like…something crazy…just… be African in a more conspicuous way, more daring way. Not just kaba and slit.*" For Esi, Afrobeats' impact is in the breaks with tradition it offers, because of its global reach, its *everywhereness*, which, for her, meant less of a conservative influence in the styles in which African fashion was imagined. Araba, 25, who spent most of her life in Accra before moving to London in her early twenties, considers Afrobeats' impact more experientially. For her, Afrobeats' impact lies in the changes in attitude towards African fashion she observes among those she believes are within its constituencies. Traditional symbology does not represent, in the way it does for Esi, something to break from; but it does, she believes, benefit from the enhancements in form and presentation that Esi identifies. Araba tells me:

> Araba: You know back then, you hardly saw people use African prints in fashion but, even with the men now, you see them use African prints as coats and things. Now, everybody is representing where they are coming from and actually making good designs out of the prints. So…we are holding on to our heritage and, for me, when I see that, I'm really proud…because we are trying to unlearn all the things that we've been told and…we are not trying to let someone dictate what they…the perception they have of us. We are trying to make our own…through our fashion and even our hairstyles…our choice of jewellery…with Ghana, we have…like…the *adinkra* symbols, now being made into earrings, jewellery…you have some Nigerians even putting that on. So, just…like…the *kente*; see how *kente* is trending! [A] lot of people might not know where *kente* originated from, you see? But, when… you say 'mention an African fabric', the first thing they would say is *kente*. Yeah, so, in that sense…it has travelled, and people are noticing it and we, ourselves, are taking pride in it as like 'yeah, this is ours'

Both women, like many of my participants, refer to a hybridity of traditional styles and Western styles that they find has enhanced the fashion styles and added an Afro-cool value because it is represented in the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats. Nana Yaw, for example, tells me he likes Woodin, a pan-African fabric brand, "*because, if you have seen Woodin, they…mix African-wear with urban…like…designs; so, you have…like…African print but…like…a jacket, like a puffer jacket. Or some cargo pants that are mixed with African fabric or…yeah.*" The hybridity represents the departure from the old, the unrecognised, the ridiculed, to the new, the cool, the globally valued collective Africanness that my participants constructed within Afrobeats culture. This is also observed amongst Afro-Dutch youth, who also attached this hybridity to their sense of collective Africanness (de Witte, 2019).

Stacey tells me that this hybridity represents her Africanness, but it is not a removal from her African grounding, because it is a "*specific African kind of cool*". It is a hybridity that she sees in the Afrobeats music videos, on TikTok, and when she goes out. Online, my participants often engaged with posts that included various (re)presentations of this hybridity. In some posts, there were direct mentions of the work Afrobeats artists do in collaboration with African designers to create this hybridity. Figure 7.1, for example, shows a tweet announcing such a collaboration, highlighting how Ghanaian artist, Black Sherif, works with noted diasporic fashion brand, Labrum London, to "*bridge the gap between western and West African culture*". Also, there were often references to the value—the global reach—that Afrobeats lends to African fashion, producing moments of pride for the Africans that identify with it. In Figure 7.2, for example, a TikTok user shares a video of African women doing Afrodances while modelling African clothing on the runway for a global fashion show, with the caption "*AFRICAN QUEENS KILLING IT*". In most of the content my participants engaged with online, however, references of the hybridity were less direct, often manifesting in the ways that content creators would be dressed (for example, TikTok (Figure 7.3) and Instagram (Figure 7.4) dance video creators pair African print clothing with Western ones).

Figure 7. 1

Figure 7. 2

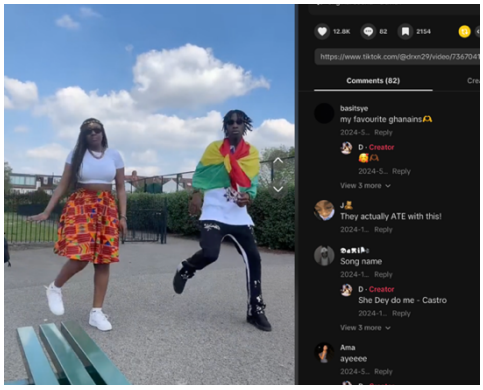

Figure 7. 3

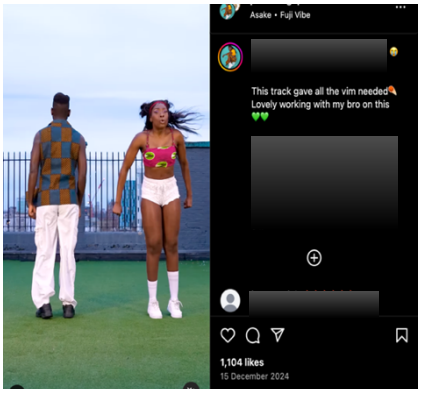

Figure 7. 4

Some of my participants, however, did not think of this hybridity as the kind of collaborative endeavour that most others did. Kwabena, 36, for example, had certain anxieties about the loss of the original African fashion styles, although he admitted the new styles were not displeasing. He insisted *"if you think about it, Afrobeats…it has changed our fashion style; because, if you look around now, many of the young girls are copying the Afrobeats musicians, and their fashion style is more in the form of Western culture, not our African culture. So, yes, the fashion has changed. Not that it's bad…it's not bad; but, maybe, we also have to keep what makes it African more*". There is something to be said of the gendered reasoning he offers, and the politics of respectability and decency, as these anxieties reflect certain gendered narratives around hyper-sexualisation of female Afrobeats stars (I discuss this in further detail in Chapter 8). However, this hybridity is not exactly new. African fashions, because of and in resistance to colonial histories, have always, in the postcolonial period, '[made] reference to or borrow[ed] from local clothing practices, often melding these forms with international influences' (Rovine, 2009, p. 135). It is also a hybridity of various 'traditional' African fashion styles, merging influences from various sources within the continent as well as outside it (Jennings, 2015). As Adina and Dusk tell me, the mix of African styles is what makes the hybridity work; what makes it natural to the various constituencies within which it is produced. When I ask what else they think makes Afrobeats African, they tell me:

> **Dusk**:…fashion is very, very important…it's very important because I feel like we have our own style, we have our own way of…looking and…it's a beautiful style and it keeps evolving and…what I love so much is other African cultures blending…like…we blend so much…we blend and it goes so well. So, you can always have us integrating with other African cultures and I think it's a good thing and it preaches…our oneness…and how strong we can be when we come together.
>
> **Adina**: We portray a lot of things because it's visual, we can portray everything in our space, basically. That's from our food…fashion…even hairstyles and…like…if you really break it down, we even showcase our art, we showcase our hobbies and all these things; things that are peculiar to…like…Africans or a particular place…like…you know…so, even without stepping foot in

> another country, you can watch music videos and you still have an idea of what, maybe, somebody living in this part of the country would be doing day to day--sometimes, how they commute; how their structures look like...all those things...yeah; how they dress; how they talk...yeah...I think the music--especially, the videos--they show a whole lot and it's very non-obvious, right? So, it's a very subtle way of...and, before you realise it, "oh, I know Nigeria". Yeah.

Both Adina and Dusk extend the hybridity of the fashion to other aspects of the collective culture within which they situate their sense of *being*. In both these extensions, we see how the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats structures logics of commonality; of similitude in the everyday across the constituencies that produce and consume it. Because Afrobeats is visual—whether in the lyrical content (as Dusk points out in an earlier conversation) or in the music videos (as Adina suggests here)—Afrobeats mediates the everyday of multiple locales across the space imagined to be African, conferring an apparent coalescence on 'realities' that may largely be disparate. Both dance and fashion do this, as I have shown; and, as they are carried through, reproduced by, and reconstituted in the music, they become vital to the constitution of the co-created Afrobeats culture that, assumed to be *everywhere*, instructs the logics of connection which define a collective identity.

Conclusion

My aim, in this chapter, was to draw out the *ways in which young Africans across homeland & diasporic space engage with elements of Afrobeats culture* and how these underlie *the construction of individual/collective African identity*. By demonstrating how the everyday individual engagements of and encounters with Afrobeats inform assumptions of its *everywhereness*—its presence, in location and in significance—I revealed how elements of the music culture come to be normalised as part of the everyday, part of the fabric of a common '*true*' African way of life. I demonstrated how these assumptions also concretise notions of a real/true African and of a collective African culture; and how, because Afrobeats is thought to convey representations of this collective culture and of everyday life across Africa, elements of the music culture become ways through which young Africans articulate a collective African identity.

Unravelling these logics, then, reveals how African identity is constructed in *both* individual and collective terms; how young Africans construct their own identities in relation to their notions of what the collective *is* or should *be*. In this sense, there are manifestations of the kind of communal selfhood (Gyekye, 2010) that, as I have discussed in Chapter

2, are centred within African traditions of thought such as the Nguni: "I am, because we are" (Venter, 2004). Also, in the assumption of commonality and of a collective African culture, there are reflections of Pan-Africanist logics (e.g. Sow *et al*, 1979) within these constructions of collective identity. As found elsewhere (Alakija, 2016; Chacko, 2019; de Witte, 2014), the collective identity that young Africans are constructing through Afrobeats culture is tied to the geocultural imaginary of Africa, rather than to a strong notion of cosmopolitanism as propounded within Afropolitan logics.

The analysis, here, offers a varying perspective to the dominant constructivist approaches that tend to focus heavily on individuality (Block, 2022) and on the 'self' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). At the same time, it offers insight into the logics and processes underlying the construction of identity, which 'soften' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) notions of inherence and 'essence' within essentialist conceptualisations of identity, without discarding the importance of commonality to the construction process. In the next chapter, I explore how the meanings associated with this collective African identity are circulated across the space imagined to be collectively 'African'.

Chapter 6

Home: space and the mediated rituals of *belonging*

"Space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, and temporalize it."

Myria Georgiou (2010, p.17)

There is a certain inconstancy in the climate of a London Spring that brings, to the senses, a heightened receptiveness to contrast. It greets me—this contrast—in the draughty arrivals hall at Heathrow, as I work to re-justify my presence to border control, on my return from Accra in early March, after having been away for half a year. It stays with me, weeks after, in recurrent reminders of the polarity between the two cities—from the sweltering heat of relentless sun to the biting chill of erratic rain; and from the dynamic makeshift market stalls of Lapaz to the identic artisan coffee shops of Holborn. Contrast is expected; it is necessary. It is a tool, a by-product of travel *across* field sites. What is unexpected is a secondary layer of difference; one that emerges as my friend, my colleague, Limichi, walks with me to a noodle bar near Leicester Square, where we had been regulars before I had travelled for fieldwork. We hurry through another of London's characteristic unforecasted drizzles, past a less eventful congestion (compared to the ones in Accra) along the Kingsway stretch. In the traffic jam, a young white couple looks to be attempting to sing along to Ayra Starr's '*Commas*', which is playing semi-loudly from inside their luxury sports car. "That's Afrobeats!", I interrupt Limichi, from the depths of my surprise, "In Holborn!". It is unexpected, Afrobeats, this close to the heart of Westminster; to Central London—because, six months prior, I would have needed to be a few miles farther away in Southwark or in Hackney to hear Ayra in traffic. It would have been even more unexpected in July 2022, as I remind Limichi, when he and I joined another colleague and a group of her Jamaican and Namibian friends in Clapham, at a niche mixed dancehall/soca/Afrobeats event, which, at the time, was the only combination that would have drawn a moderate enough crowd to even make it worth the club promoters' efforts. And, even farther back in late 2021, when I had just started my doctoral journey, I would have needed to be farther still in Thornton Heath or in Tottenham to hear Afrobeats anywhere near the streets. What was unexpected was the sort of spatio-temporal transformation that had occurred, in the short time I had been away, *within* the London field site, of the place of Afrobeats, of its *everywhereness*.

It is a transformation that my participants would later also speak about with surprise. Their various astonishments, like mine, were conditioned impulses, procedural memory of sorts, indexed within and by the lived history of ethnocultural segregation in London (see Back, 1996; Daley, 1998; Phillips, 1998), which banished Black/African cultural life to the margins. The colloquial knowledge of this history, always already observable in the social compositions of various geographies within the city, reinforced conventions of place; of the perimeters to which Black presences could naturally lay claim (Garbin & Millington, 2017). The centre of the city—of political, social, and cultural power (Lefebvre, 2014)—is always 'charged with meaning' (Garbin & Millington, 2017, p.144), with prescriptions of who and/or what belongs. Their surprise marked the contours of what my participants had come to know did *not* belong; but, later, in the moments that we encountered Afrobeats in the same centre of the city that had historically sequestered their Africanness to a place of derision, I witnessed their astonishments dissolve into pride. To be certain, this was a pride that was not indebted to validation from/of whiteness; it was one that bore the recognition of inclusion; of a kind of extension of *home*, for most; and, for some, the beginnings of a long-hoped-for settlement into it.

This is the focus of this chapter. It works to understand the various ways in which 'home' becomes constructed as situated space (often imagined within the geographic landmass of Africa), that becomes extendable through everyday rituals of cultural performance, of collective connection, and/or, symbolically, through the reclamation of dispossessed place. As I have said in Chapter 3, I understand space as the fluid interconnection of multiple *places*, constituted by 'intersections of mobile elements, assemblages and meeting points' (Georgiou, 2010, p.17). I have also suggested that place refers to site, to location; but, also, to an ensemble of the 'experiences and aspirations of a people' (Tuan, 1979, p.387), to their stories (Massey, 2005), to an interweaving of the meanings they (re)produce, to their logics of *belonging*. To think of situatedness, therefore, is not to suggest fixity. If space is to be thought of as not static (de Certeau, 1984); as the active creation of the everyday practices and movements of people within and across its multiple places, then situating can be an exercise in *mobility*, in extension from one place to another, in simultaneity. As Annemarie Mol observes, 'these days places are no longer local. Situating does not only have to do with where you are, but includes where you come from and where you may go. The question is what travels where…' (Mol, 2008, p.29).

What travels is *people*. My body moves across field sites, crosses national borders; I carry fragments with me, learn the sutures and ruptures between places. So, too, do my participants. Their bodies travel inside field sites, traverse municipal limits; they carry moments with them, memorise the shape and feel of places. So, too, do I. Even within the contrasts, people are constant; their motions are given. Whether in the clammy humidity of Osu or in the piercing cold of Soho, tireless legs run the bar-hopping *pre-game* marathons of concert nights; no matter how receptive the context or hostile

the environment, there is the ritual of synchronised dance; and, even in the variable stasis of traffic jams, bodies move to Afrobeats.

As I set out in Chapter 3, people move across space, physically and/or virtually, through processes of transnationlisation (Welz, 2009) and digitalisation (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016), (re)inserting themselves into the places to which they relate (Massey, 2005); and, as they do so, their cultures find ways to travel with and, often, beyond them (Hannerz, 1996). As cultures circulate, meanings of identity circulate with them; and, as I have attempted to demonstrate with Afrobeats culture in Chapter 5, these meanings settle into assumptions of collective ways of *being*. We understand that diasporic worlds are inherently deterritorialised (Appadurai, 1996) and that, because of their situatedness between homeland and areas of settlement, life in these worlds is, in many ways, liminal (Bhabha, 1994). In this sense, diaspora already 'embodies a subtext of home' (Brah, 1996, p.187); a 'there' either to return to or to reimagine in the 'here' of the area of settlement (Blunt & Bonnerjee, 2019). If, following Avtar Brah (1996), we are to understand that those constructed or represented as 'indigenous' are as constitutive of the space implicated in diaspora as those who have migrated, then we might think of home as also a 'here' to be returned to (or as one to connect with) from the 'there' of the area of settlement. However, in the convergences of internet, digital and social media technologies, home worlds, too, can become deterritorialised, and certain aspects of (especially cultural) life can become more liminal, as home worlds and diasporic worlds become more mutually accessible, more co-constitutive. And, as they find deeper, more immediate confluences, demarcations related to their 'hereness' and/or 'thereness' become destabilised.

Understandably, matters of home have been explored predominantly, across the available literature, through the lens of diaspora; and this chapter inescapably does same. After all, diaspora does present an obvious case for observing the changing dynamics of home (Georgiou, 2006). The chapter, however, also attempts to demonstrate how homeland perspectives contribute to the construction of home, aiming towards assembling a fuller understanding, particularly in the context of, as I have been arguing, the tapering boundaries between home worlds and diasporic worlds. To arrive at such an understanding, the chapter examines the extendibility of home through logics of familiarity that, as I will show, become core to a sense of what I want to call *collocational homeliness*.

Here, I extend the notion of *homeliness*, which has been deployed largely as a descriptive category for the condition of 'feeling at home' and/or the process of replicating elements of (an imagined) home, specifically in diasporic contexts (see, for example, Georgiou, 2006; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). As I have explained, although an integral part of diaspora, this sense of homeliness is not unidirectional; not only outward-looking from diaspora toward homeland. Home is often

somewhere else, and that somewhere has to relate back in either direct or symbolic ways for it to remain meaningful in the diasporic imagination. As bodies travel across home worlds and diasporic worlds, those constructed as 'indigenous', who are often collaterally assumed to be immobile, relate back; recognise portions of home where it might be replicated in diaspora. Meanings of what home looks and feels like, then, become co-constituted, informing a sense of homeliness that might be thought of as *collocational*. I want to understand 'collocation', first, in its primary sense[35]—as the coupling, the going-togetherness of things. As I have attempted to point out, we understand homeland to be an inherent part of diaspora; we understand the two to go together, to be collocated. There is, therefore, a kind of interdependence in the construction of a sense of homeliness in the diasporic and homeland imaginations: what home means in either is often in relation to or in contention with the other. In a second sense, I want to think of the service of collocation in computing, wherein a single space is built, allowing multiple actors to locate their own network, server, and/or storage equipment (or pool these together) within a collectivised infrastructural set-up, where mutual needs for resource management and maintenance are provided for (for a more comprehensive explanation, see Equinix, 2025). Similarly, we might think of a sense of homeliness that is co-constituted, as distinctive diasporic and homeland modes of knowing/making home (or those that are shared) come to shape and/or be shaped by a single space of *belonging*; a space where cultural codes are originated, circulated, tapped into, or brought into relation to co-produce collective meanings of home. By focusing on narratives and manifestations of the experience of *collocational homeliness*, therefore, we might be able to uncover articulations of how people make sense of where and with whom they belong.

Within this context, the present chapter thinks through the aspects of identity concerned with *belonging*. As I suggested in Chapter 3, belonging involves a process of identification with others, externalised; an alignment predicated on points of similarity; a positioning within group-defined meanings, within narratives of particularity; a clustering of multiple resemblant states of *being*. Demonstrating how *belonging* is reinforced through practices of *collocational homeliness*, I will aim, in the first section, to demonstrate the continuities in this space, even within the contrasts in place; tracing how proximity to elements of Afrobeats culture (as well as other cultural artefacts such as food) recreates home within hostile diasporic/ 'non-African' elsewhere(s), and how the active performance of Afrobeats culture positions home in these places.

In the second section, I discuss the role digital and social media play in the co-constitution of this space. I will consider the ways social media are appropriated in the production/circulation of digitalised culture, as elements of the culture

[35] Oxford English Dictionary (meaning 1a: https://www.oed.com/dictionary/collocation_n?tab=meaning_and_use)

are circulated across space; and how processes of digitalisation begin, pass through, and end in physical places, as elements of Afrobeats culture are reconfigured online, when they come into collaborative contact with others.

'Always reminds me of home': collocation, familiarity, and the shape of home

Home illuminates fundamental aspects of human living; the geographies of clustering, the conditions of (im)mobility, the architectures of interrelation. Thinking through home, we are able to trace the relationships between/among place, *being* and *belonging*; all three, considerations that are core to questions about human life and (dis)connection within an increasingly globalised world (Blunt & Varley, 2004). One strand of this area of enquiry tends to understand home as a 'fixed, bounded, discrete place', centralising concerns with the specificalities of place-attachments that are thought to be grounded in the material characteristics that make a location feel like no other (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p.518). Another strand tends to favour home's 'threshold-crossing capacity…to extend and connect people and places across time and space' (p.518), with a focus on its more symbolic characteristics (Blunt & Varley, 2004; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). We know that both the material and the symbolic are foundational to constructions of notions of home (Brah, 1996); and recent attention has been directed at understanding those constructions as simultaneously material and symbolic. As this chapter's overall aim invariably positions it within this recent scholarship, I will work, in this section, to contribute a kind of synthetic perspective, by tracing, at points, how the material might come to define notions of home; how these notions might take on certain symbolic attributes, and how the material merges with and into the symbolic. My main aim, however, is to draw out the specific features of this home, taking into account how it becomes identified, made sense of, set apart as African through elements of (Afrobeats) culture and the ways they are wrought into the meanings attached to situated space.

Hindsight reconjures an irony; the image of MCs, hypemen, and artists belting out the refrained salutation "Africa, stand up!", casting its reverberations across the packed halls, the vast fields, the endless beaches, and the sold-out stadiums, at crowds that were always already standing. One of many common features of the Afrobeats festivals/gigs/concerts in both Accra and London, it was nearly omnipresent; almost as heavily echoed as a different salutation, "Welcome to the motherland!" or its alternative "Welcome home!", that would come to mark a significant contrast between the two sites. In Accra, MCs rarely failed to offer it as their entry remark, a ritual of hospitality, directed at non-local festivalgoers and

for the benefit of audiences following live streams, as if to hold their gaze for the authentic home-grown Afrobeats, the authentic Africanness that was raring to be displayed. In that framing of Accra—and, by extension, of Africa—as the root, the 'motherland', *home* was made prominent across these opening declarations.

It was a framing that was prevalent across my observations and my interactions. For almost all of my participants, there was a clarity in the *somewhere* (rather than the everywhere or nowhere) of home, even if there was some forfeiture of precision in its open placement within the undefined geographic boundaries of Africa. Mainly articulated in the context of relations with diaspora or what was constructed to be the "outside world", Africa was imagined as the beginning point of the collective identity that, as I have demonstrated, is validated by and within Afrobeats culture. Asked to elaborate further their use of the language of origin and indigeneity (in the context of their descriptions of Afrobeats), for example, both Esi and Kekeli, both of whom I speak to in Accra, describe home in juxtaposition with diaspora or the world thought to be 'elsewhere':

> Esi: I think of them kind of like...siblings who are...away from home. Or cousins...you know? I feel the connection to them; but...I feel like the Africanness is for sure more concentrated in Africa. It's just... an objective fact. I don't know how somebody can argue against this. You could be African-something, and you are African for sure, but you are several...you know...to whatever degree... away from the source. It's still home, you still come back to...but...I mean...when you are far away from home... but...like...you're in the next town...but that's still family...I still feel...like...a kinship with them, but...there are degrees of separation there that..you have to address. And I don't think it's a bad thing. It's just the way it is.

> Kekeli: …it's like where we are all from, you know? All Black...or let me say...all Africans. No matter where you go in the world, Africa is your home---we're all from here. That's what I mean when I say 'indigenous'. The things we do here are different...like...very different from elsewhere in the world and...like...we carry it with us even when we are outside, you know? Even Africans who live there, they still do some of these things there...like...because they know...they know that this is still where they are from; it's still their home.

Like others, both Esi and Kekeli place home *somewhere* and construct it as a kind of 'origin'. There is also an elsewhere against which, when juxtaposed, this somewhere becomes discrete, producing a hereness and thereness within which home takes shape. For Esi, it is the 'here' to which Africans 'there' can still lay claim; and, for Kekeli, it is a 'here' that they carry with them 'there'. In both constructions of home, although those Africans are removed from this 'here'—the source, the 'origin'—it is still theirs, still their property to return to or to replicate. It is a logic of possession that might be expected within the, perhaps, self-evident dualism of homeland and diaspora; however, it is also invoked in the construction of

home *within* the undefined boundaries of this 'origin' to which all Africans are imagined to be able to lay claim. When I ask Adina, with whom I speak in Accra, to explain her use of the language of indigeneity, for example, she identifies the meanings, as do most of my other participants, that construct the consolidated, collective African home:

> Adina: Okay...[chuckles]...I don't know...so, to me, 'indigenous' means...like...people native to a particular land or place and, for me, that's Africa. [M]aybe we all stem from some central point in Africa---but, be that as it may, we...just...spread throughout the whole continent; so...I think, from that, we all have a lot in common and, also, we just strongly identify as...a people---we are Africans, even though there are...like...big differences across the different sections like...North Africa, Southern, West, East...big differences, but, still, there are so many things in common that, if...an African person---aside from the colour of our skin---...is in another place, you could probably tell that this person is African. Mhm...even the way we talk---it's interesting...like…the way we gesture, our faces.

Here, the meanings drawn from collective culture, from race, and from commonality are made core to the construction of a home that is not only composed by an African collective, but is also the property of all Africans *inside* the continent, even as potentially competing knowledges (the awareness of human evolutionary theory and the acknowledgement of the diversity of the parts of this African home, in Adina's case) are discarded. The different parts are made whole through and within commonality, so that people from each part are still 'native' to the others; so that any part still feels like home. It is a rationalisation that was repeated online. In a tweet (Figure 8.1) describing his experience of 'Detty December' in Ghana, South African rapper, Casper Nyovest, who collaborates on some Afrobeats songs, deploys this logic, suggesting that he had felt at home (in a different part of Africa) because all of Africa is (and should be considered) home. Here, we are able to observe experiences of transnationalisation that, as I have highlighted in my theoretical discussion in Chapter 3, come to engender imaginations and assumptions of cultural homogeneity.

Figure 8. 1

These experiences also come to define home for those that may be away from that which is constructed as its immediate boundaries within the continent. For many in the diasporic context, the 'homing desire' (Brah, 1996) is one that locates home in the 'there' of the African continent, even if (although rare across my observations and interactions) it is not a yearning for return. The placing of home as a beginning point is rarely ambiguous: it is in Africa, it continues from there. It is the *somewhere* one looks back to, returns to; it is (as suggested in Figure 9.1 and 9.2) the root. In a TikTok post (Figure 9.1) captioned "there is no place like home", a lesser-known UK-based music artist performs his new Afrobeats song for a crowd of his family and friends. The attached video has superimposed text suggesting that this song, which is implied to be their best work, constitutes a return to the artist's "roots". Both the caption and the text are followed by an emoji of the Gambian flag. Among the hashtags is 'Afrovibes', relating the specified Gambian 'origin' to a broader African vibe. A more established Afrobeats artist, Rema, who has achieved worldwide fame, is quoted in a tweet (Figure 9.2) that reshares a video of an interview in which he suggests that Afrobeats needs to return to its "roots" in accommodation of dissenting voices "back home", that are communicating a disconnection with the increasingly Westernised sound of newer Afrobeats songs. Both artists are speaking of home from diasporic contexts; each connecting Afrobeats to Africa as the root. Afrobeats culture is associated with the diasporic construction of home because it is imbued with the images and experiences that, as I demonstrated earlier, become evincive of the commonality imagined to define a collective African life. For those that have encountered these experiences, Afrobeats reminds of home, as seen in a TikTok (Figure 9.3) in which a former diasporic beauty contest participant of Congolese descent dances to an Afrobeats mix. The post is

captioned "Always reminds me of home" and hashtagged "African" and "Afrobeats". There are suggestions, here, that not only is home *somewhere* (in Africa), but that it is also reachable through the music attributed to its boundaries; and that it is recognisable or experienceable through the cultural attributes of this music. Home becomes retrievable from sound, becomes potentially familiar inside its cadences.

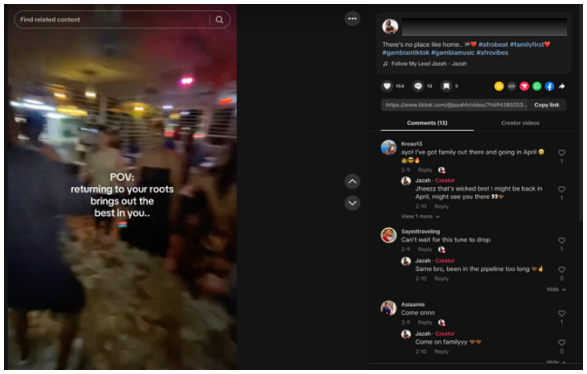

Figure 9. 1

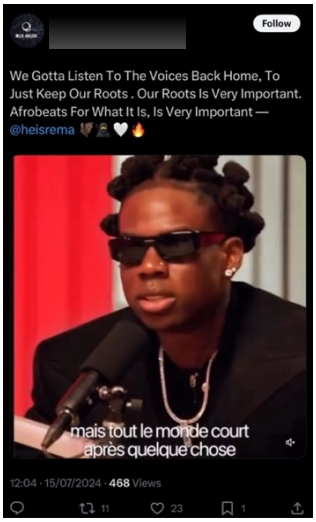

Figure 9. 2

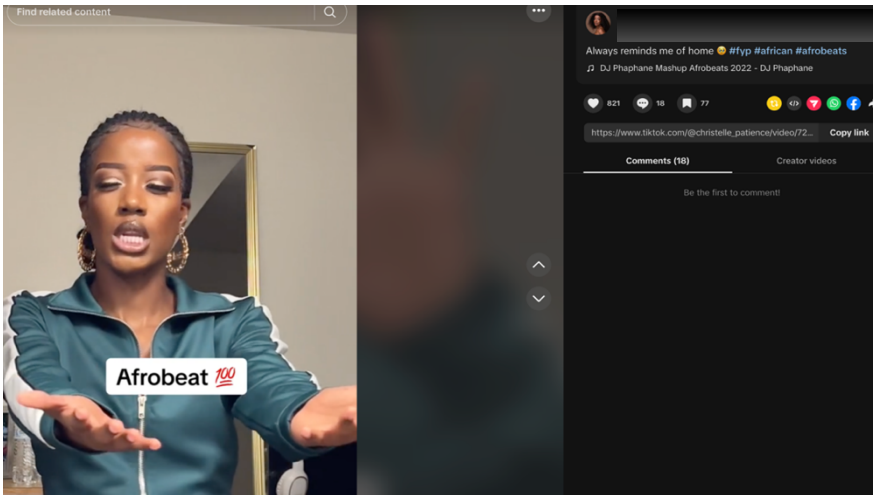

Figure 9. 3

What is familiar often becomes structuring of the feeling of being at home. Home is 'the lived experience of a locality' (Brah, 1996, p.188-189), the memory of its specificities. It is the objects a person associates with loved ones and 'valued experiences and activities' (Sarup, 1994, p.90). In the diasporic imagination, 'homing desire' is driven by either a return

to these experiences, these memories, these objects, these activities that are familiar or to replicate them in a new place so that it, too, would become familiar (Brah, 1996). As Dizzie, who was born in London tells me when I ask her why she had said she had felt so attached to Ghana after visiting for only three months:

> **Dizzie**: ...it just feels like you're connected and...everything just feels familiar---you're at home. I could go to this aunty, this uncle, grandma here, granddad here...you eat home-cooked food every day [laughs]. Yeah...and, me, my obsession is waakye [chuckles]...so, I could just...go somewhere and go and get waakye. If I wanted...I could wake up in the morning, I don't have to have...like...a regular breakfast, I could have waakye. That's a big deal for me. Big big big deal but...yeah...I'm obsessed with Ghana [laughs]
>
> **Researcher**: … what I'm picking from what you're saying is that...you felt at home because you felt connected to...
>
> **Dizzie**: [interjecting] Yes...yeah. To the food [laughs]...the everyday routines, you know? The things that people there---back home---take for granted, you see? I felt...connected to those things more than the things I grew up with here.

It only took three months for Dizzie to begin an obsession with the routines and relations of home, after having returned 'there' as a 19-year-old, more than a decade after she had lived 'there' for two years as a child. Even though she was born in London, and lived her first five or six years in the city, her sense of familiarity—of home—was tied to Tema, to Ghana, and, as she uses interchangeably throughout our conversation, to Africa. It is a comparable sense of familiarity and of interchangeability that Hazel experiences when she arrives in Ghana after years of living in the US and in Spain, having moved from Jamaica to those countries for higher education. She tells me that it is a sense of familiarity that immediately satiates a feeling of loss for something she never quite owned:

> **Hazel**: Okay...so, you know when...they say people are separated at birth...like twins...and then they come back together and it's like everything about them feels familiar even though...or you meet somebody that you've never met before and you automatically connect, right? Or you go somewhere and it feels like home...it feels like somewhere you want to be. Or, it's one of those things that...I think it's kinda inexplicable but, if I try to explain it, it's a sense of deep, internal soul-knowing...like...for a fact, without any proof [laughs] or evidence. Yeah....I feel like I'm also probably from many different parts...of [chuckles] the continent; many different cultures and tribes and ideals and personalities and all the things...but I do also believe in the oneness of Africa...in spite of our differences, you know? So, when I think about *my* Africanness, it's complex; it' multi-layered, it's also unknown [laughs]...I really don't know to the full extent...because, I've been in places here that feel familiar...like I've been here before at some point...doesn't feel foreign or strange...like... I have that experience pretty frequently.

Three observations might be made. First, while home is specifically located within Ghana for both women, Hazel also imagines it to extend beyond it, to other parts of an undefined yet bounded geography of Africa. Through the logics of familiarity, one part can make home; can become representative of the others. Second, the *somewhere* of home is constructed in relation to the *otherwhere* of diaspora. They go together; they are *collocated*. Third, attachments to home are formed on symbolic meanings; but, there is also a kind of latent attachment to the material. Dizzie articulates this attachment to the material more directly, later, when I ask her what aspects of home she most connected with; as does Esi, when I ask if she uses Afrobeats as the background music of her African fashion business videos on purpose:

> **Dizzie**: Emm...I think...just the fact that, if you're...on a Saturday, you could just go to a local chop bar and sit there with your friends and just talk and just have a bit of fun and then go back home. It's the easy access to places that you can go to and not having to travel that far to go to places...yeah, and I think it's just being around...I think it's being around people that look like you, being around people that speak the same language as you...yeah, that's just where the connection is. I'm not having to second-guess how I look; how do I come across; is anyone...you know...not going to talk to me because of how I look, you know those things...yeah...it's just that belonging feeling---this is where I'm supposed to be.

> **Esi**: [interjecting] It's...it's deliberate...I think that it just goes...if... say I shoot a video---and I shoot it on purpose with the landscape of you know...the greenery or whatever... like...would I choose jazz? I mean [chuckles]...It just doesn't [kisses teeth] feel…natural. [Y]ou could, if you wanted to do something shocking or jarring...but I think just for everything to be very harmonious, we just put in an Afrobeats track. So that, when you wander onto the page, you would see that you've wandered into Africa...like a part of Africa. You'd understand what's going on here. Yeah. I do that on purpose.

For Esi, the Accra landscape, coupled with music, offers a representation of home that would be unmistakeably African. Again, Afrobeats validates these meanings. Esi uses Afrobeats in her videos to reinforce the Africanness of the landscape. It is a similar identification for Senu, when he looks out for "*the location*" in Afrobeats music videos and is unimpressed, as "*some of the Afrobeats musicians do songs and they shoot the videos outside, not showing anything African about it*"; or for Nana Yaw, when he connects with "*the African setting*" in the Afrobeats music videos, and would refuse to "*listen to Afrobeats in an American setting; except...like...I see a lot of Black people or something...like...I don't know, the setting really matters to me; it adds to the video. So, yeah, it has to have like an African-based setting...*". For Dizzie, as for many others, elements of the built environment such as a 'chop bar' come to represent home. They are material features of home to which the symbolic can be attached.

When I first connected with Abena in the Ghanaian restaurant in East London, it was while I had been delivering a light-hearted complaint to the manager over the outcome of recent renovations. The restaurant, I had felt, had lost some of its charm after it had traded the look and feel of a typical 'chop bar'—inelaborate, unassuming local eateries in Ghana—for something attempting to resemble some of the more high-end ones in London. Abena, who had been waiting at the counter for her takeout order, agreed. Having never been to Ghana, she had constructed an understanding of what it might look and feel like based on the descriptions, narratives, and images she had encountered in her interactions with other Ghanaians, virtually and in person. Because of its old layout, the restaurant had previously offered *some* semblance of the visceral experience of a chop bar as she had encountered it in some of these interactions. For me, the old interior was a tiny reminder of home; for her, it was a small part of an experience of it; and, for both of us, the homely feel of a chop bar was as important as the custom of getting Ghanaian food in London, which, in itself, was an act of feeling at home or attempting to replicate some feature of it.

In the differing positions that we occupy in our experience of and attachments to (the idea of) home, we co-constitute a *collocational homeliness*. While she looks from the inside of the diasporic *otherwhere* towards the *somewhere* she has come to imagine as home, I look from the inside of that *somewhere* toward the *otherwhere* I am trying to make feel like home. This *otherwhere* does not have all of the smells, or all of the sounds that the *somewhere* does, but it suffices; it still *feels* like home, even if only a piece of it. From different positions, we both extend home, as we seek out terraformed places—Ghanaian restaurants, barber/hair salons, church; or Afrobeats concerts, clubs, house parties, barbecues—in the *elsewhere* of London; the "outside world". In my insistence that the chop-bar-style interior be reintroduced, I reinforce her assumptions of what the *somewhere* must look/feel like; in hers, she validates my claim, in some small measure, to ownership of the diasporic *otherwhere*. Home is *some*-where, *some* known place that, even if not unambiguously defined, is discrete. But it can also extend *other*-where, some *other* place that, even if separate, is familiar, is additional. Home is the space that encompasses *some*-where and all its *other*-wheres; and it is bounded, distinguishable from *else*-where—some place *else*, some place different.

This mode of being at home was also evident in the cases of Araba and Dukes, who both had lived the greater parts of their lives in Ghana; and of Kwaku and Kwesi, who had both been born and had lived all of their lives in London/the UK. Araba and Dukes both have only ever lived in areas in London with large Ghanaian/African communities; both have cultivated intimate relationships or close friendships with Ghanaians/Africans born in London; and both actively seek out places where they would connect with some of the artefacts or activities they associate with home—that is, their loved ones and 'valued experiences and activities' (Sarup, 1994, p.90). Dukes, for example, maintains a weekly ritual of

getting Ghanaian food, with his mixed group of friends (two born in Ghana and one born in the UK), at a 'chop-bar' in Walthamstow (see Figure 10.1). Kwaku and Kwesi, who, for most of their childhoods, had struggled to fit in within the broader Black-British community, having been ridiculed for aspects of their African heritage, tell me they started to feel more at home, as the popularity of Afrobeats gave those cultural artefacts more purchase and they could express their Ghanaian identity more openly:

> Kwaku: Like...my identity was 'I'm from Hackney'...you know what I'm saying? My identity was 'he's a Hackney boy' or 'Hackney is a cool place' because a lot of barbecues go down there... our identity was in our area; whereas, now, it can be in our… country
>
> Kwesi: ...[simultaneously] country, the music...
>
> Kwaku: ...because, when I tell people I'm Ghanaian, they're so interested...
>
> Kwesi: Yeah, they're so happy to hear all of that, bruv...yeah
>
> Kwaku: So interested...years ago, coming from... you know what's funny? I was one of the people that faked being half-Jamaican [Kwesi giggles]...yeah. Yeah. Yeah. I've said it before, I've said it...I always...people always say on social media "oh, no one ever done that"; it's a lie...I did it!
>
> Kwesi: It's a lie...yeah...[laughs]. I know people who done it...
>
> Kwaku: [laughing] I know a lot...
>
> Kwesi: Even our own Davido does it still...[laughs]
>
> Kwaku: ...oh, [adopts African-American accent] "Davido from Atlanta", innit? [all laugh] Come on, bro! It's okay, you are Nigerian, bro [all laugh].

There is another manifestation of the relation of place to identity in the two men's association of Hackney to their sense of Black-Britishness; even as they worked to hide their Ghanaianness, their Africanness. Hackney represented a kind of mix of Black cultures, within which they were able to dissolve the stigmatised aspects of their Africanness, and find some familiarity, so that it was plausible to claim a half-Jamaican identity, however false. Like Hazel, who, while growing up in Jamaica, had always felt a connection to Ghana before having moved there as an adult, Kwaku identified parts of home in one of its *otherwheres*; in what he identified as the heavily Jamaican-influenced Black-Britishness of Hackney. And, as Afrobeats accumulated more cultural value, more parts of home became claimable; became more replicable in these *otherwheres*. Afrobeats, again, is facilitative: in the extension of home to familiar *otherwheres* and in the active work of making home *elsewhere*. As exemplified in one experience (see Figure 10.2), for instance, Afrobeats becomes

the node of familiarity that finds home in the *otherwhere* of Jamaica, and it is in its collective engagement (as might be seen in Figure 10.3) that Africans make home, despite unfamiliar conditions in the *elsewhere* of temperate "zones". Again, not all the features of home are required; only enough of home as to be or feel familiar is needed to extend it *otherwhere*.

Figure 10. 1

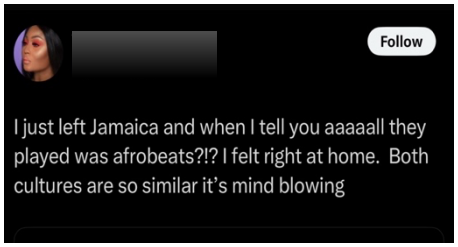

Figure 10. 2

Figure 10. 3

In all of these instances, home is constructed in the confluences and juxtapositions of places. Home starts *somewhere*; it begins within the geographic boundaries of Africa, and it moves with the bodies (Friedman, 2004) of those who have learned its features. And, in the negotiated memory of these features, logics of familiarity engender its replication, as home extends *otherwhere*; becomes *situated* within the space left in-between. It is negotiated memory because it is not consummate—recall does not encompass all of the features of home; and it typically involves a process of authentication and validation between those bodies that move; those in the *somewhere* of home and those in its *otherwhere(s)*. In this space of negotiation, a *collocational homeliness* is constituted: the sense of being or feeling at home is co-produced in the knowledge of home and in the memory/imagination of its features. Thinking about home within such a framework allows for an understanding of migrants' experience of belonging as expanding 'outwards to distant and remote places, while also squeezing to embed them in their proximate and immediate locales', as home takes on characteristics that are 'mobile, but also…grounded and sedentary' (Ralph & Stahaeli, 2011, p.518). As Ralph & Stahaeli suggest, this 'better reflects the ways in which many migrants understand and experience home' (2011, p.518). I suggest, here, that

this also reflects how those who have not migrated conceive of and differentiate home: in relation, as I have shown, to its *otherwhere(s)* and in juxtaposition with *elsewhere*.

But there are also those for whom the *elsewhere* of the 'outside world' would represent a separate home; one to which they may feel a desire to lay claim. In this configuration, the diasporic *otherwhere* can, at times, become a site of duality (Friedman, 2004); as it is for Scrippz, who was born in London and who feels as (Black-)British as he does Ghanaian. Home, for Scrippz, is situated in the imagined community of Africa (as homeland) in the same way it is for my other participants, and it extends into the imagined African community in the UK (as diaspora). It is a home he "reps", one he can relate with through the cultural elements he finds in Afrobeats. But the UK, in the broader sense, also feels like a different kind of home, a separate one, to which he can claim membership through that same African community, which has now found settlement into a larger Black-British imaginary. To illustrate, he offers the example of UK grime/drill rapper, Stormzy, who he believes embodies both homes. He tells me Stormzy "*reps his Ghana side…he talks about it…like…growing up with an African mum…shows in his videos…like jollof and that…*" but he also talks about the Black-British life: "*the ends…you know…you see that vest with the black-and-white flag?…mad…*".

Scrippz's invocation of this imagery reveals the divergent features he associates with the two homes: the more familial, social features of the African home, and features more reflective of exclusion and struggle in the British home. However, his referencing of a performance by Stormzy in his historic 2019 headline of the Glastonbury festival for which he wore a black stab-proof vest, designed by street artist, Banksy, with a near-monochrome Union Jack graffitied across its surface reflects how, he tells me, he settles into this exclusionary home. The artistic replacement of the blue in the Union Jack with black becomes a symbolism for the insertion of Blackness into the notion of Britishness (Jones, 2019); and the figure of Stormzy, who has been vocal about his Ghanaianness, a metaphor for the incorporation of Africanness into that Black-Britishness, which had, for a long time, been majority Caribbean (Melville, 2020). Also, as the first Black-British solo act to headline Glastonbury, a festival colloquially framed as white (Phillips, 2022), Stormzy's presence was a kind of symbolic reclamation, a resistance to 'the violent economic reordering of…space, and the narrowing of…options for [B]lack working-class youth' who often had little 'access to spaces of security and sociality' and had 'often been excluded from school…employment and access to the zones of vibrant multiculture' (Melville, 2020, p.241). This reclamation is one that is directed at integration, in resistance to histories of dispossession; to institutional and interpersonal racisms; to the 'fiction of white superiority' (Anzaldúa, 1987, p.7), which allocate value to culture within hierarchies of race.

I walk up Appold Street toward the point on my map app where it merges with Worship Street and Curtain Road. Zero had shared a live location with me to make it easier to find him and the four others he was shooting dance videos with, in various spots around Liverpool Street Station. They are setting up by the time I arrive; a small tripod stand, an iPhone, and a Bluetooth speaker their only equipment. I greet everyone quickly and dissolve into the background, sitting warily on the elliptical surface of one of the truncated cylindrical bollards lined diagonally across the middle of the intersection. I watch as the first soft orange hues of golden hour wash over the tucked-away intersection, the perfect complement to the varying tones of sweat-glistened skin and the brick walls of the building Zero and two others are using as backdrop for their video. Kwesi is manning the tripod and the iPhone, Kwaku co-directs with Zero, who is also spearheading the choreography. Every misstep means a restart. It is hard work, but all five do it with a smile, as though they could never be tired of doing this, of repeating this routine of quick steps, flailing arms, gyrating waists; of scouring the concrete-and-glass city for the perfect spot, where the white gaze might still lurk but can no longer banish. One would struggle to tell that, only moments ago, a white security guard attempted to drive the group away from their previous spot. One would struggle to tell that the encounter, which they met with vehement resistance, with refusal to budge, had left them exasperated. Later, when the group scouts a little farther towards Bishopsgate, settling at the small open space between Spital Square and Bishop Square, Kwaku thinks with me about how that act of defiance had felt like an assertion of their equal claim to ownership of the 'white places' of Liverpool Street:

> Kwaku: That's the thing I love about this Afrobeats too...it's not just 'oh, wow, Africans they've got this thing now and it's good', it's actually a good thing...it's talent. Look [points at white people watching, filming as Zero and Angela dance], you see they got that lot smiling? Because, people see it...like...that's another thing that…I love seeing is that people see it and they love it. So, again, when I said that thing about...like...the guy that came...it's proper like a metaphor of authority that comes to try to get rid of this thing or tries to...like...police it; whereas now, we're reclaiming it because this is what is here, this deserves to be here...it's good.

Like Scrippz, Zero, who is a second-generation migrant, also felt a strong attachment to a Black-British collective. He tells me he has "*a British passport...like...I know I'm settled here, and I don't have to...I can stay here for as long as I want but I would identify myself as a mixture of both. As much as, yeah, I'm Ghanaian, I'm also very immersed in the Black-British culture*." Abena, Kwaku, and Kwesi also feel an attachment to their Black-Britishness; however, they express less of an ambivalence in the duality that this evokes, each of them employing clear cues to highlight a stronger connection to their Africanness. This was the more common manifestation among those of my participants who may have had any claim to Britishness. Dizzie, Rayla, and Amanda, 26, who works in hospitality in London, all spoke about a lack of a sense

of *belonging* in the *elsewhere* of the British context beyond their possession of legal citizenship. Mainly, their various disattachments were rooted in contexts of racism and/or xenophobia. Amanda, for example, tells me:

> Amanda: ...It's like you are a citizen and everything...you know?...like...you have the passport, you have the documents...but you don't really belong, you know? Like...growing up, there was always...I don't know how to...like a feeling that this place is not fully yours, you get me? And...it's not even just the thing with the racists saying things...it's not even...just the fact you had even... like...waist beads or something...now, I see the girlies wearing it to be sexy and all [laughs] but, growing up, other girls did not understand it...like...they used to think it was...like...voodoo or something, you know? [laughs].

Like Dizzie, who tells me "*I'm British at some...I actually say that I'm British because of my passport, that's it*", or Rayla, who says "*...it feels kind of like a foster home...you can feel comfortable here, but you are...like...reminded some things about you just don't fit in*", Amanda makes a distinction between what she conceives as home and a place where she is allowed to live. This, of course, is suggestive of the tensions between locations of residence and locations of belonging (Gilroy, 1993). However, it is also a place, to certain extents, wherein they are also able to extend home; and all three find ways—as Abena, Araba, and Dukes do—to connect with home, by bringing pieces of it to this British *elsewhere*.

For most of my participants, home is a space *somewhere*; it is situated between places, co-constituted based on what is made/imagined as familiar. Familiarity extends the hereness and thereness of home; defines its *otherwhere(s)*. But how is the familiar brought into realisation; how are certain features made more salient than others across this space, and, therefore, more representative of home? I have attempted to demonstrate, in this section, that transnationalisation plays a significant role. I want to attempt, in the next section, to show how digital/social media help to transmit a sense of togetherness that is often encapsulated in the collective performance of Afrobeats culture, and that, when continually circulated, leads to modes of co-constitution of not only the culture itself, but also the space of *belonging* that comes to concretise ideas of what an African home must look/feel like.

'Makes me feel like I belong': digital connectedness and a sense of *belonging*

Stacey disassembles her tripod stand and buries it in her large custom African-print bag, her focus switching, now, to the iPad on which she just recorded her latest choreography. She is about to edit the video using the TikTok app. She is excited because she has integrated a new dance move she learnt from one of the other dancers, who studies traditional dance at the University of Ghana. It is a short two-step they adapted from the *Baamaaya* dance originated by the people of Dagbon in Northern Ghana. As she edits, she becomes distracted by a Snapchat message notification on her phone. An Afrodance content creator in Switzerland she exchanges choreography ideas with has noticed the new dance move from the live snippets Stacey had shared earlier on Snapchat, and is asking if she could use the moves in her next video. Within minutes, years of the academic study of traditional dance, compressed into five seconds of a 40-second routine, filmed in multiple takes over the better part of an hour, are transported from the amphitheatre behind the University of Ghana's Commonwealth Hall to a dance studio in Lausanne. I think about the connections and the flows; the ways our bodies move physically across the campus and, when we have found our destination, to the music; and, virtually, to the many soils our feet may never touch.

One of the underlying motivations for this study's multi-sited ethnographic approach was the need to account for the specific depths, the rhythms, the ruptures in the ways that young African people have engaged with and encountered Afrobeats across important constituencies responsible for its production, circulation and sustenance, and how they have mobilised its cultural value within and across these constituencies towards constructing a collective identity. This, to certain extents, implied that there was always, at play, certain bearings on geography—on space, on the confluences of multiple, but connected, places. Accordingly, I have, so far, dealt with the various constituencies altogether as a single, fluid, continuous space, and have attempted to construct an empirical discussion that mirrors this fluidity. I have demonstrated earlier how this space begins *somewhere* and extends to familiar *otherwhere(s)* through processes of transnationalisation. What remains would be to consider, in this section, more specifically, how the *somewhere* and its *otherwhere(s)* might be interconnected, mapping out the processes of digitalisation that sustain their connections. I will work to show how these processes help maintain the *collocational homeliness* underlying the sense of *belonging* developed within and attached to this space.

Earlier, I suggested that those who are constructed as 'indigenous'—and who are inherently implied to have stayed put (Brah, 1996)—in the often-dualistic conceptualisation of diaspora and homeland, are not as immobile as they are taken to be. Across much of the international migration and transnationalism literature, mobility is predominantly discussed,

in relation to the physical movement and settlement of diasporic peoples across borders, with focus on the transnational connections this movement produces and sustains (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). But, as Wendy Willems reminds us, 'bodies do not only move in physical spaces'; they 'also increasingly circulate in digital spaces' (Willems, 2019, p.1199). As I have discussed in Chapter 3, these spaces are often produced within a kind of ecosystem (Bayer, Triệu, & Ellison, 2020) of internet-based technologies (Diminescu, 2008) and social media (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2014), that form a social media ecology (Olesen, 2020). We know that physical spaces and digital spaces are not necessarily distinct; that some of 'the affordances of mobile social media are shaped by the physical, mediated and political contexts in which they are used' (Willems, 2020, p.1677); and that online behaviour is not necessarily divorced from relations and routines of everyday life offline (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2014). What Stacey's choreography might highlight for us is that, as I have already proposed, the ecology can be thought of as, itself, a connective place, that links the *somewhere* of home to *its otherwhere(s)*, as it shapes and is shaped by those collocated contexts.

The digital is not only the site of circulation of Afrobeats cultural codes, it also acts as a nexus for the more immediate, more multi-nodal connection of the various constituencies responsible for is production. These connections are not new, of course. As I have attempted to show in the previous section, through logics of familiarity, connections between the places that constitute home have always existed in the transnational movement of bodies or in the sheer knowledge or imaginations of these movements. Familiarity is constituted more quickly as features of home are shared and versions of it are validated in the liveness of social media interactions. I spoke briefly about 'Come With Me' videos on TikTok and on Instagram that captured curated versions of some everyday experiences constructed as African. An example of such an experience that was popular among content creators was that of the local market. As Adina tells me:

> Adina: It...provides a window into the everyday African life because, now, people can watch...like 'a day in the life' of somebody; people can actually see somebody go into the market, buy stuff, they have that experience...like...you can see a video of someone in a *trotro*[36] and you'd be like 'oh okay, this is how it is'. Things that would have been such a cultural shock to people coming from other places, setting foot in Ghana for the first time,...like...from the airport to wherever your hotel is, you'd have your mind blown a thousand times; but, if you see all that online, you could arrive here and just be navigating...like...you know...you've lived here; and that's...like...you're halfway through having ...like...that shared experience because you've seen it, you've had access to it

[36] Public transport (vans) in Ghana.

Rayla shares Adina's conclusion that these videos create a sense of a shared experience. She shows me three TikTok videos that she believes illustrate this. From the simple search terms "Come With Me market Africa", we find three videos, from different creators in The Gambia, in Uganda, and in Ghana, showing views of Albert Market in Banjul (Figure 11.1), Nakasero Market in Kampala (Figure 11.2), and Makola Market in Accra (Figure 11.3). Rayla points to sections of the videos that she insists are identical; that offer evidence, "*can't you see? We are the same people…we literally live the same lives…*". Playing in the background of all three videos, Afrobeats.

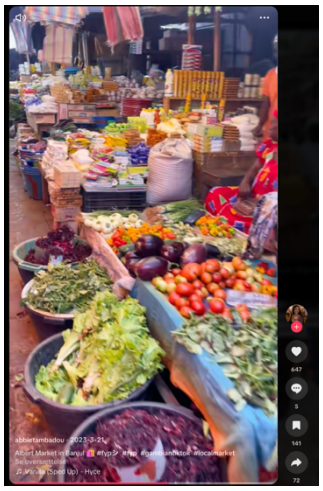

Figure 11. 1

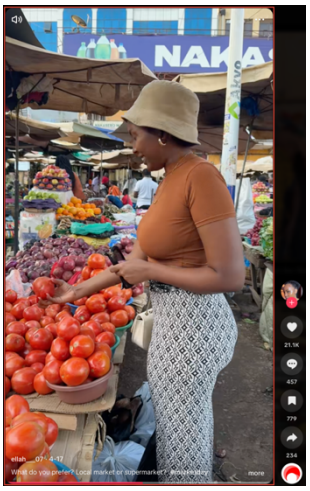

Figure 11. 2

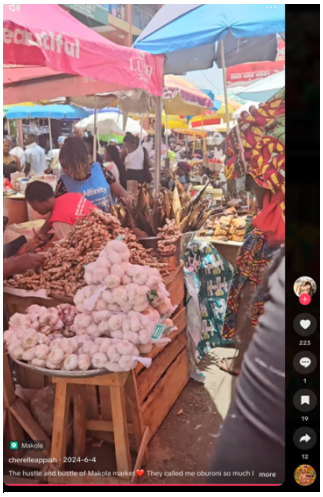

Figure 11. 3

Afrobeats becomes a tool for locating the Africanness of a place; for signposting the geographical and/or cultural context within which the social media content is produced, as African. As Nana Yaw explains, when I ask him if he engages with Afrobeats content on Snapchat, people he follows, who he believes are African, tend to loop portions of Afrobeats songs that may describe an 'African' experience they relate to. A recent trend, for example, where users dubbed in a verse from Afrobeats song, 'Laho', which featured the lyrics "*Minister of Enjoyment. Intercontinental. Monumental. You go live forever*" over videos of themselves partying in various locations illustrates what Nana Yaw meant to describe:

> **Nana Yaw**: Yes, I see a…lot of Afrobeats on Snap…maybe, because, on Snap, it depends on the people you follow. The people I follow are African…so, most likely, you'd see Afrobeats.
>
> **Researcher**: In what ways?
>
> **Nana Yaw**: So, maybe, they are doing something in the background and they just use the

> Afrobeats as background music. So, it's like just the background music. Sometimes, too, they are dancing on it. Sometimes, it's the sound from the African... music that they put inside just to make what they are doing funny...yeah. So, yeah, you see a lot of Afrobeats...on Snapchat. Instagram, not so much.

This use of Afrobeats as a signpost of African place was also observable in 'Come With Me' videos of markets in European cities designated as African. As might be seen from Figure 12.1 (an 'African' market in Hamburg), Figure 12.2 (one in London) and Figure 12.3 (another in Paris), a specific aesthetic is employed in the display of food items that might be intended to simulate some of the look of the local markets seen above; perhaps, in attempt to replicate the feeling of home. Or it potentially reflects how certain features become associated with an 'African' home such that they become the focus of visual content intended to capture the Africanness of a market. In either instance, we might observe how the production of this kind of content across social media might come to inform a *collocational homeliness*. As these videos circulate across the connective place of social media convergences, they transmit images of home that become read as representative features of home that are sufficient to (re)make home; as a grocery store in London might become thought of as African because it has certain food items on sale that are also arranged in a certain specific way.

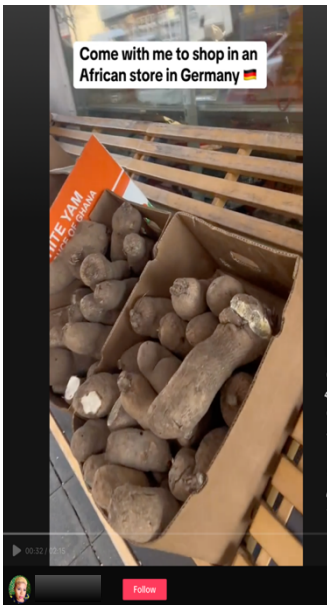

Figure 12. 1

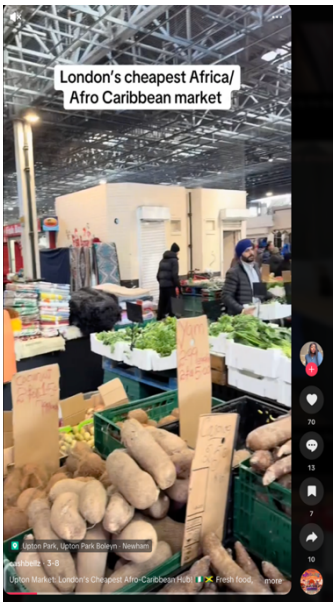

Figure 12. 2

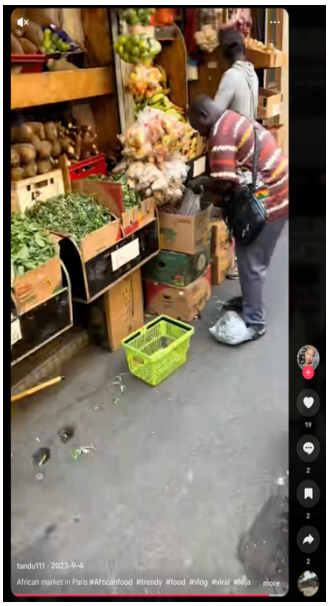
Figure 12. 3

Similarly, as Amanda tells me, 'Come With Me' videos contribute to transmitting the ambience of place; particularly, of those related to Afrobeats such as concerts, house parties, and festivals. When we speak about where she goes to engage with Afrobeats, she lists (among the physical places she frequents) her social media apps, and tells me:

> **Amanda**: ...Snapchat is my favourite [laughs]...because you get to see how people party back home...like...you can literally see how the girlies doll up and everything before they go out and...like…they show you the vibes in the car, the drinks before the concerts...and, then, you see the actual stage and the vibes at the concert or...even the club, yeah?...and it's like you start to see that here as well, you know? Like...when I was in school, we had our own vibes and all; but, now, you feel it...it's a little different. People are...like...more open to vibe together without all that grinding [laughs]...yeah...not that grinding is bad but...yeah...that's how I see it.

The 'vibes' (I discuss this in further detail in the next chapter) that Amanda describes are those that permeate almost all of the Afrobeats concerts, parties, events, hangouts at which I was present. They are the rituals of performance—dance, attitudes, synchronicity–that create a sense of conviviality (I discuss this, too, in the next chapter) that is imagined to be unique to an African collective. As Amanda explains later, although she uses Twitter as well, she prefers Snapchat for the video content that people share of their everyday party routines because it feels more 'live', more convivial. It is a *vibe* that she finds cuts across the parties; one that she assimilates through social media; that she believes is now replicated in the London party scene. Like Amanda, Zero, who also is active in the London party scene, describes this replication as something new, something he believes is more 'African':

> **Zero**: ...so the parties I go to are...like...I would say, yeah?, for me, in my age, my friends are trying to start a thing where we introduce people to a bit more of what it feels like to be African. So... I don't know if you've seen...like...Cultur FM?...you've seen how...like...they have DJs in there and...like...pushing Afrobeats?...like...there's a party that I go to, it's called 'AfroVibes' so, from start to finish, straight Afrobeats...no bashment, no other genres, just straight Afrobeats...So, for me...like...now, we've gone to a shift in culture where...like... Afrobeats is what they save till last because they know that's what's gonna get people going...

Leaning into the early rays of the rising sun, I walk up the street from the Abbey Wood station, grateful to have, now, the relative stability of summer sun; a welcome break from the uncertainty that the spring that had preceded it had brought. I had been invited to a friend's brother-in-law's wedding; and, being one of the groomsmen, my friend had arranged for me to observe the pre-wedding preparations. I arrive earlier than expected at the house the bridal party has rented for the weekend, so I catch the groom's early morning routine. He is up early practicing his dance moves, which he lets me watch. The groomsmen start to wake up and they join us in the large living area on the ground floor of the house.

Naturally, it turns into a roast session, as they make jokes about the crazy hours he has spent practicing, watching videos. They tell me he has become obsessed with mastering the *Tshwala Bam*, a dance routine, that went viral and became eponymous with the song to which, as would come to be the widespread assumption, the dance routine had organically been performed. His obsession is driven, he explains as his friends pile on, by the suggestion on Twitter that similarities between that dance and *Network*, a popular dance move that originated from Ghana years prior, makes it the perfect transition. His bride is a more naturally gifted dancer, and she had already learnt to perform the routine seamlessly. He was having to catch up. He does; and, after the couple performs the routine later at their wedding reception, half the room erupts and joins in, everyone doing the synchronised stiff-shouldered jiggle that, as Angela tells me weeks later, had had "*the entire continent in a chokehold*".

Angela was, of course, referring to the #TshwalaBamChallenge, which, following its virality across African social media circles, became a global cultural event in early March 2024. A viral tweet had shared a TikTok (Figure 13.1) that had dubbed the hit Amapiano song, *'Tshwala Bam'*, over the original sound of a video clip, shared in a different TikTok, that had captured three young men dancing synchronously (and apparently spontaneously) at a house party in South Africa. The men had actually been dancing to a separate Amapiano song, '*Yeyee*', which had been playing in the background at the party at the time of the original recording. The dubbed version had been so in sync with '*Tshwala Bam*' that the dance became known by the title of the song, and, as dancers from across the internet, including American R&B/Pop singer, Kelly Rowland (Figure 13.2), submitted their versions of the dance, the challenge also became eponymous. By the end of that summer, I had encountered versions of the dance at every event, every club night, every house party, every barbeque (example, Figure 13.3).

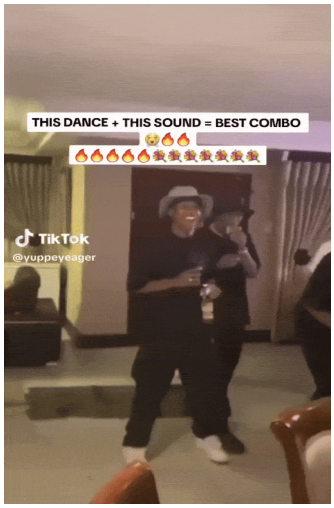

Figure 13. 1

Figure 13. 2

Figure 13. 3

Of the many challenges that emerged across the period of my fieldwork, the #TshwalaBamChallenge was, perhaps, the most illustrative of the connective capability of a social media ecology to transmit the attitudes, practices, *vibes* that become foundational to the sense of togetherness that marks the affective contours of home. Its beginnings can be traced to a house party in South Africa, to a physical location; one of the nodes in the *somewhere* of home. Performed within the festive atmosphere of a party, the dance is recorded and shared—digitalised—via various social media, within the locale from which it originated, and becomes reframed, recast into a related but separate sonic context, as it gains in popularity. In this moment, the dance has not changed in its structural characteristics—the choreography remains the same–but its rhythmic essence has changed, and all of this has occurred within the social media ecology within which it has, so far, been circulated. The dance, in its altered rhythmic state, is then shared on a different social medium, which carries it to other physical locations; other nodes in the *somewhere* of home. As it circulates within these locations, again, via other social media, the dance begins to change in its structural characteristics as dances within those other locations are added and, then, shared. The dance has been (re)named now, and new choreographies, based on its original structure, start to circulate. At this point, both the social media ecology—the connective place—and the other nodes in the *somewhere* of home have had some modificatory effect over the dance. The new choreographies are again circulated via multiple social media and they, too, variously start to gain popularity across the diasporic *otherwhere(s)*. As dancers in the *otherwhere(s)* start to perform their own versions of the dance, a specific choreography begins to emerge as the most frequently performed, and it becomes the focal structure of the dance challenge, until a kind of unified version of the dance (the one global R&B star Kelly Rowland also performs), modified (but still based on the

original), becomes the one that everyone breaks into as soon as the song comes on anywhere across the multiple places of home.

In this attempt at a breakdown, we might see how the convergences of multiple social media connect the physical places of home and foster a space of collective performance that returns to create feelings of togetherness within and across this space. The dance originates within an atmosphere of conviviality; it informs modes of group performance that become guidelines of sorts for replicating it. As these are replicated in various contexts and reshared across the space, they start to form the basis for feelings of *belonging*. As Miranda tells me, when we discuss her participation in multiple dance challenges:

> **Miranda**: ...since we started having the Year of Return and all that, and people started coming in and Ghana started being popular... I like to say I'm Ghanaian...it's like 'oh wow, you are from that place that we come to during December?'...like...it's nice. So, when I do those dances, I feel like...yeah...I'm showing you that I'm African; I'm West African; or I'm Ghanaian or...sometimes, I like to pretend that I'm Nigerian [laughs] 'cause I like the Nigerian culture a lot and their music...yeah...yeah. I've even forgotten the question [laughs].
>
> **Researcher**: [laughs] Yeah... I was basically trying to draw out how your performance of these trends and these challenges makes you feel.
>
> **Miranda**: Yeah. Very good [chuckles] very very good...and also...I don't know...there is something about dance and being African...there is this perception that, if you are African, you know how to dance automatically...or you are good at...you know...swaggy dances...and I've not been a good dancer in the past so learning these challenges makes me feel like I belong more and more...

Miranda's sense of *belonging* is heightened in the performance of the challenges, which, because they are performed predominantly by Africans, reinforce her assumptions of what it means to be African. To be African is to be 'swaggy'; to possess an inherent Afro-cool character that emerges in the way Africans dance. In her engagement with Afrobeats culture, in her participation in internet challenges, Miranda finds an interchangeability in the range of positions she can take within the larger category of African. In the exercise of learning and performing the dances, she not only feels more African, she also *feels a part of* the African collective. Participation in challenges is a gesture towards *belonging*, as I pointed out in Chapter 3. It is a *belonging* that is co-constituted in the convergences of place. As various places across the space that is imagined as home become *collocated*, they produce meanings not just of what it means to be African, but also of how to relate within that collective Africanness. The digital, then, becomes a site of *co-creation*; a meeting point of the ways of engaging with Afrobeats culture that produce a kind of *conviviality* (both of which I will speak about in the next chapter) that is wholly co-constituted within the cultural locales of homeland and diaspora. Processes of

transnationalisation and digitalisation *together*, then, become the crucible that merges their parts into a collective space of African *belonging*.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have discussed themes related to space and of *belonging*, with focus on the co-constitution of space through the interrelations between homeland and diaspora. I have done this by trying to understand constructions of *home* in both the diasporic imagination and in the homeland imagination. I have shown that the feeling of being at home is often *collocational* and home, while situated *somewhere*, can extend to multiple connected *otherwheres*. I have shown how home, as a transnational space of *belonging*, is co-constituted by cultural locales within homeland and diaspora, as well as a convergence of digital and social media that co-produce, circulate, (re)negotiate meanings of what it means to *belong* within an assumed African collective. I have also shown how 'home' becomes imagined as the *root*, as an origin, as a starting point for the circulation of meanings related to a collective African identity; how its multiple places become experienced as continuous in the everyday performances of Afrobeats culture. I have suggested that these meanings are often produced through the mediated practice and replication of certain rituals of engagement, which become core to what is imagined as uniquely African modes of *belonging*. In this sense, the chapter answers the thesis' second research question: *how are young Africans in homeland & diaspora co-constituting/expanding/reclaiming a transnational space of identity through Afrobeats culture and social media*?

The analysis in this chapter might offer a starting point for a better understanding of the relations between homeland and diaspora. As I suggested earlier, with the advance of internet and digital technologies, home worlds and diasporic worlds are becoming more co-constitutive, rendering an understanding of their interrelation on dichotomous terms (see Laguerre, 2009) limited. Accordingly, the concept of *collocational homeliness* is proposed as an analytical tool to explain how a sense of *feeling at home* can draw in, *simultaneously*, homeland and diasporic imaginations. The concept allows for an analysis of their individual specificities, while still making room for their continuities and their inherent interconnections.

Also, we might observe, in the way that home is experienced as *collocational*, some reflections of the trans-spatial, Pan-Africanist conceptualisations of Africanness that I highlighted in Chapter 2. Here, home is situated within the imagined geographical boundaries of Africa, and it is extendable to its diasporas through cultural performance and through logics of commonality, as is often suggested within Pan-Africanist logics. Through modes of transnational cultural performance (as this chapter has revealed), young Africans can also find an interchangeability in the range of subject positions within the African collective. As conjectured in Chapter 2, these positions are structured by an overarching identity (Castells, 2009), which is a collective African identity. This collective Africanness is defined by its distinct *vibe*, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

Chapter 7

'The vibe': particularity and a sociality of Africanness

"We are not a monolith, but we are a community. And the members of a community talk to each other–and talk about each other."

(Gates, 2012, p.xv)

In the softening orange of Accra's temperate-yet-humid dusk, I watch as Stacey and her friends prepare to practise a new routine one of them has choreographed. The music starts to play, and the choreographer shows them the moves. Each one of them is dancing along almost intuitively, adjusting quickly, almost seamlessly, as he transitions through moves. Curious, I ask Stacey after the rehearsal if she had already seen the routine before arriving at the rehearsal. She tells me neither she nor the other dancers had seen it; that this was freshly choreographed; that their bodies just knew how to respond to the music. When I suggest that it might be because they are professional dancers; that the fact that they had practised similar moves in other routines might have been in play, she tells me that she noticed I had been moving to the rhythm too; that my body knew at points to pause and to transition to other dance moves, even though it was my first session with them. She lets out a long belly laugh when I tell her it is because I, too, am a professional dancer.

Stacey's point—that there was simply an inexplicable instinctiveness in the manner in which all of those present at the rehearsal responded to the music—was one that was made in most of my interactions. It is what my participants referred to as 'the vibe'; a kind of visceral response, an inexplicable impulse that ensures anyone connected to the constituencies that produce Afrobeats would 'just get it'; would simply just know how to connect with the music, with its rhythms. It was in the invitations to couple up for bridal train choreographies. It was in the conviviality of the concert arenas, the house parties, the clubs. It was in the way they asserted their sense of *being* and *belonging*.

This is the focus of this chapter. Here, I will clarify, more *directly*, how *being* and *belonging* are articulated together. I do so by attempting to make sense of 'the vibe', which my participants deploy in narratives of *particularity* and to describe a *conviviality* produced within Afrobeats culture that they believe to be unique. 'Vibe' is deployed in two senses by my participants. In the first sense, they talk about 'the vibe' [or 'our vibe'], in reference to the collective cultural ways of engaging and creating that are expressed as if by *intuition*, marking out those who 'just get it' from those who do not.

In the second sense, they speak of 'a vibe' [or 'vibes' or 'to vibe'], which refers to the music's inherent substance, its flows and cadences, its tonicity and lyrical content, that which structures the *affective* responses people have as they engage with it, as well as the ambience it creates within space. But, these are not unconnected meanings—Afrobeats is 'a vibe' (it stimulates inimitable *affective* impulses) because it is inherently suffused with 'the vibe' (distinctive *intuitive* signals) Africans are imagined to possess and exude. Intuition and affect, then, become important to understanding 'vibe'.

Lauren Berlant invites us to think of intuition as a kind of visceral response shaped by 'our sense of *reciprocity* with the world as it appears, our sense of what a person should do and *expect*, our sense of *who we are* as a continuous scene of action' (Berlant, 2011, p.52, emphasis added). In the first section, I draw on this understanding to attempt to explain how 'the vibe' is deployed in narratives of particularity. I first show how this particularity is articulated through certain expectations for self and for the related other to engage with Afrobeats in particular ways, by demonstrating how these expectations produce meanings of uniqueness. I will show, here, that qualities/narratives often theorised as denoting an essence are, in fact, those constructed within these expectations.

In the second section, I think through the deployment of 'the vibe' in descriptions of conviviality. Here, I consider how affects of joy and affinity produce moments of conviviality that (are imagined to) *feel* different in ways that are assumed to be characteristic of a collective Africanness, and I trace how this conviviality becomes core to a sociality of Africanness. I think through how this sociality facilitates the co-creation of elements of (Afrobeats) culture in ways such that they are positioned to bring 'potentially disparate individuals' into relation, making 'their actions…appear to be intersubjective, mutually oriented, co-ordinated, entrained and aligned' (Cook, 1998, p. ix).

'There's no vibe like our vibe': on expectations and the narratives of African particularity

As I have said, I think of intuition as a visceral response shaped by 'our sense of *reciprocity* with the world as it appears, our sense of what a person should do and *expect*, our sense of *who we are*' (Berlant, 2011, p.52, emphasis added). We might understand, then, that our sense of *being* in the world, of making sense of self and of relating to others, and of the *expectations* we have about how the world and others should relate back are conditioned into intuitive processes. In Chapter 5, I discussed how the *everywhereness* of Afrobeats instructs certain logics of normality, of similarity, and of

commonality that come to define a collective African identity; a sense of who my participants believe they are in relation to what an African collective is. I also detailed how these logics underlie notions of what is 'true'/'real', what is *expected*, noting how they work to affirm a collective identity; and, as this collective identity is based on specific traits, also a kind of African particularity.

Particularity may be taken to suggest an ungeneralised or a contained (set of) attribute(s) that may be understood to be *unique* to a single culture, or society (Kottack, 2017). Particularity relates to assumptions of similarity that are validated within notions of difference from other(s); a setting-apart that is formulated on the basis of traits or features assumed to be unique. It brings together notions of who a people collectively are and the demarcation of their group from others. In this sense, we might observe more directly, in narratives of particularity, the ways *being* and *belonging* are articulated together.

These narratives of assumed uniqueness, that become read as a collective African *vibe* are amplified, as I will show, by certain expectations for self and for the related other to articulate their Africanness in specific ways. These expectations manifest in the ways participants speak of the form and content of Afrobeats; its sonic properties and lyrical constitution; the rhythms and the slang/stories/attitudes it is thought to convey across the constituencies in which it is produced and consumed. We might observe *expectations of knowing*, *expectations of showing*, and *expectations of owning*.

Across all of my interactions, the most immediate illustration of the *expectations of knowing*—the belief that one always already possesses an intimate knowledge of all things related to Afrobeats—was, perhaps, the frequent use of variants of "you know", different from its deployment as a filler phrase. There was always an expectation that I would understand a point that my participants were struggling to make relative to Afrobeats and relating to its engagement, because I, too, was African. They were often rooted in the actual knowledge of the details surrounding Afrobeats culture: the artists, the hits, the concerts, *etc*. As Aku, 34, a freelance communications consultant in Accra, demonstrated when we spoke about what made it easy for her to connect with the other Africans with whom she said she interacted online, it was the up-to-date knowledge of the Afrobeats milieu that often served as icebreaker. She tells me it is almost always taken for granted that she would know. As with many of my participants, this knowing became a key aspect to what grounded her sense of Africanness, because "*at first, I was more about Western pop culture and everything. Like…I would be up-to-date, trying to find…like…what's the latest foreign song and stuff. Right now, I don't really care…but, as for Afrobeats and African music, I am up-to-date…like…I know who is who; which song was released; or who's about to release a project;*

or who is performing where; or who is trending." Dizzie, who was born in London, connects her sense of *being* African to her experience of Afrobeats in Ghana, her sense of *belonging* there, and her current knowledge of the culture:

> Dizzie: I guess it was that trip to Ghana that really sealed the deal for me. Like...yeah...like 'this is me, this is where I belong' Like...there are some R&B and hip-hop artists that, half of them, I don't know, do you know what I mean? Like this guy that died last...was it last year or the year before...I think his name was Pop Smoke?...do you know I didn't know anything about him till he died?. What's the genre called? Is it called...not grime...
>
> Researcher: Drill
>
> Dizzie: Drill! Yeah...I don't...I couldn't tell you right now any drill artist. But if anyone asks me an Afrobeats artist, I can name a list that [directed at researcher] you probably would be like 'I've never heard of this person before' [laughs]. So, you know Oseikrom? [giggles] You see? People would be like 'ah? you, how do you know this guy?' and the songs are really nice!

Dizzie authenticates her sense of Africanness in the knowledge of Afrobeats, and, in that mode of authentication, also attempts to assess mine; to signal that she is possibly more African because she knows an artist that I do not; or to find a meeting point for our mutual Africanness in our knowledge of Afrobeats. We may also observe how the sense of *being* and *belonging* may be articulated together. Her experience of Afrobeats *everywhere* in Ghana, becomes something of a point of affirmation of who she becomes convinced she *is* and with whom she believes she *belongs*. Online, these expectations were observable as well. Tweets highlighting the stigma attached to any manner of lack of knowledge of Afrobeats, for example, were frequent. In one tweet (Figure 14.1), for example, the account holder finds the humour in being almost shunned by a collective for having little knowledge of Afrobeats. Less frequently, there were tweets that also authenticated a sense of Africanness in the knowledge of Afrobeats, in situations where Afrobeats appeared to have attracted some negativity. In one such tweet (Figure 14.2), for example, a user replies to an initial tweet from another account that suggests that they are uninterested in hearing Afrobeats everywhere. Marking this sentiment as inherently non-African, the rebuttal asserts an ownership over Afrobeats that is situated within a collective knowledge of its value. Also, TikTok trends requiring that individuals prove their Africanness by identifying Afrobeats songs with which they were familiar, usually out of a list of old Afrobeats hits (see Figure 14.3), were frequent. In the comments, other accounts suggest other "*songs every African should know*", and these suggestions were predominantly Afrobeats songs.

Figure 14. 1

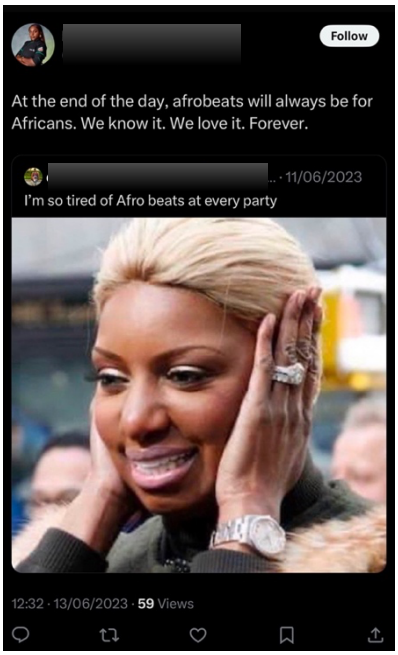

Figure 14. 2

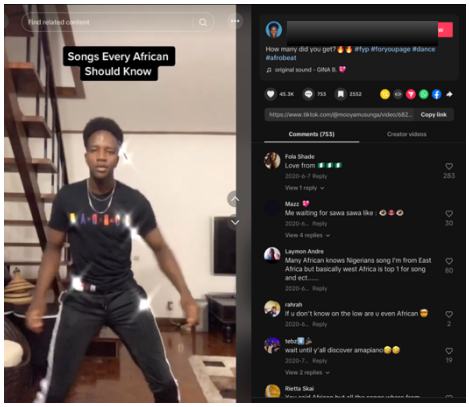

Figure 14. 3

As may be surmised, expectations of knowing often require some manner of demonstration to self and to others. It is a demonstration that marks those who are recognised as a part of a collective from those who are not; one which becomes expected in the meeting of two or more members of that collective. This is a logic that often connects the knowledge of Afrobeats to its showcase; that rationalises the idea that knowing of/about the everyday/normal behaviours/attitudes that are assumed to make an African, would be the natural precedent for the exhibition of these characteristics; that Africans, without the need to be prompted to do so, would already be predisposed to showing these attributes.

It is a logic that comes to structure the *expectations of showing*. As Scrippz, 19, a student at a college in South London, tells me, it is now expected among his peers that one "*rep for where you come from…or it's like a weak ting. Like…you know in school…like culture day and that…you get mad hype for repping Africa and Afrobeats so everyone just does it*". There is, here, an internal motivation to show; to avoid displaying a behaviour that would be classified as undesirable; to impress others and fit in amongst those who represent Africa, through the demonstration of one's knowledge of the cultural elements validated within Afrobeats as African. Again, we might observe the sense of *being* African articulated

with a sense of *belonging* within an African collective. At points, these expectations were articulated in assessments of the showcase of a collective Africanness; in its adjudged adequacy. As Senu and Nana Yaw expect, Afrobeats artists are required to show, in their music and in the music videos, that the music is African:

> Senu: Okay, I think...what I'm trying to say is...even though they are trying to break boundaries and add lot of foreign influence, there should be a connection…where they are coming from, they should look to promote Africa in their music more...so that, when anyone listens to Afrobeats, they know that, yah, this is music coming from Africa but it is also being done for Westerners or foreigners to also enjoy.
>
> Nana Yaw: I want to see some cultural background...like...let's say some nice dressing like African dressing mixed with some urban African dressing like...we don't want *tetete adeɛ* [translated: outdated styles] but...like...some new things in it. Yeah...the dressing...like...people are trying to make it too white nowadays...but, like I said, I like T.J. Omoro...I like the way he still does the Africa setting...sometimes, in a market; sometimes, he does his own settings inside his own country; sometimes, he has his own... studio. And it's all African...like...you can see the 'African' through the clothing, even the girls...you can see the African...the dance...you can see the African

Both men, who live in Accra, describe a uniqueness of some African attribute, which they require the artists to show in order to authenticate both the music and the artists as African. Senu believes the sonic properties of the music can be distinguished—those that are foreign and those that are African. Nana Yaw believes there can be unique African fashion, dance, "settings" (i.e. landscapes). Both men expect this. Online, expectations of showing were less directly articulated. There was often a tacitness in the ways people marked their expectations for themselves and for others to demonstrate their Africanness, typically manifesting in trends such as those that required 'real' Africans to showcase their dance moves or those that asked people to show they were African without saying they were African, for example. In Figure 15.1, for instance, a TikTok user uploads a video as their submission to a trend requiring humorous demonstrations of what people believe to be collectively recognisable markers of Africanness. It is a video of themselves in a familiarly crowded bus, there is Afrobeats playing in the background, and they include a superimposed caption: "someone said tell me you're an African without telling me you're African". They add two emojis of the Sierra Leonian flag, to suggest that this scene, which, in the spirit of the trend, is supposed to look like it could be anywhere across Africa, is actually Sierra Leone. In an Instagram post (Figure 15.2), a user posts a video of a mother oiling up her child's face (to keep it from getting dry or ashy) with the caption: "tell me you have an African mother or grandmother without telling me". Others in the comments suggest that they can relate. In the background, there is Afrobeats.

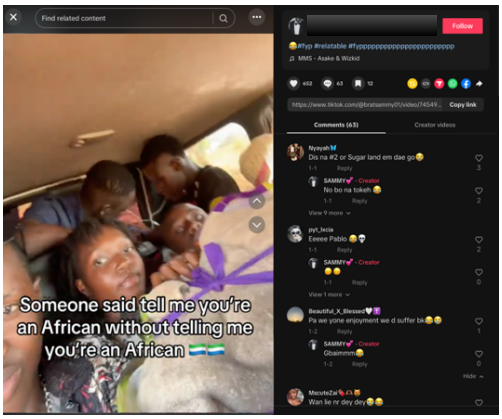

Figure 15. 1

Figure 15. 2

It is a demonstration that marks the self as a member of the constituency that owns Afrobeats; an African collective that experiences a unique everyday, that is proud to show it. Associated to this expectation to demonstrate one's Africanness, is the expectation to feel an attachment to it, to be guarded of it, and, as shown in Figure 14.2, defend it in moments of antipathy. Here, a logic of possession is deployed: if Africans know and show their collective Africanness in and through Afrobeats, then they must own it. As Zero and many of my participants variously point out, it is 'our music'; "*Afrobeats ...is something we, as Africans, we have as our own. It's...what we have to show that 'okay, cool, this is what we can do'*". This logic of possession is the basis for *expectations of owning*; the expected inherent attachment to Afrobeats culture, that underlies sentiments of ownership; a claim validated by a kind of 'for us, by us' reasoning. Because of this sense of ownership, there is, among many of my participants, a desire to mark a sort of symbolic territory around its elements, which, first, validates those who should own it; and, second, marks out those for whom it becomes acceptable to produce its cultural properties, and those for whom it is not.

In the first sense, possession is articulated through a self-participatory, self-orientated logic (example, Figure 16.1) and marked by some of the material properties associated with Afrobeats culture, from those as physically conveyed as the fashions (as I have demonstrated earlier in Chapter 5) to those less so, such as a playlist (example, Figure 16.2). In the second sense, ownership situates the individual within a select collective, marking out those that are allowed to claim the cultural properties assigned within Afrobeats, and those who must not (or must do so within collaboration or with some form of collectively acceptable reason). As Kwabena, 36, with whom I speak in Accra, suggests, there is a kind of disconnection he feels when "*Afrobeats is done by foreigners...like...there's something always missing. They just don't have the swag.*" This swag is something Miranda also identifies as unique for the production of Afrobeats. When I ask

her what else makes Afrobeats African, she tells me *"...the swag? [laughs]...if the person is African or not definitely adds a lot to it...even the person's style---because, when I think of Afrobeats, I also think about the music videos and all that; so, I think it's all part of it."*

Figure 16. 1

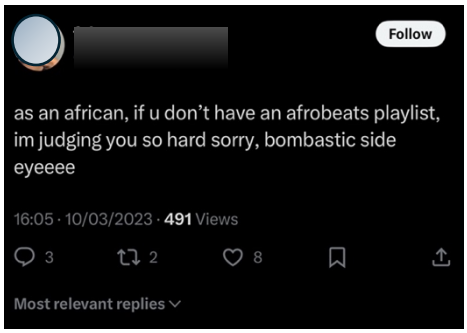

Figure 16. 2

There are, as may be obvious, matters of symbolic boundaries (Lamont et al, 2015) in the narratives of possession I uncover here. I speak about these in more detail in Chapter 8. These narratives, however, articulate certain physical and cultural markers that are assumed to represent a unique African characteristic that Afrobeats is thought to transmit. As Miranda, who lives in Accra, puts it, when I ask what else she thinks makes Afrobeats African:

> **Miranda:** I don't know how to describe it...for a lack of a better word, a 'vibe'...[laughs]. It's a vibe. Because, someone else can create what they can call Afrobeats and it's not Afrobeats because they don't have the vibe. I don't know how to describe it but it's more than just the music, definitely. Yeah. Definitely.

As Miranda suggests, there is a vibe that Afrobeats carries, that it emanates, that makes it unique; and it is a vibe that is not replicable because those that may wish to replicate it do not have *the vibe* that its original creators possess. Kekeli, who is a sophomore in film school in Accra, tells me that this vibe is in the sound—*"the African sound, which has now been modernised, but was always there, you know…like…in the old continental hits that the old people...[laughs] always used to play. 'Premier Gaou'…[laughs] and those Congolese ones."* Amid pauses of laughter at the thought of my being 'very old' because I had offered the titles of the songs she had suggested were evidence of an African vibe preexisting Afrobeats, Kekeli attempts to trace these collective cultural ways of creating and consuming that become the basis for demarcations of those who just get it from those who do not. An anecdote Esi, who lives in Accra, offers illustrates this, when she suggests that there are things about Africans that are common across constituencies:

> **Esi**: Yeah. And even things like rhythm. Like...yes...you can trace...certain things and…like Afro-Latino culture...you can trace them directly to Yoruba culture, Akan culture...but there are also intangible things where you can't really trace the connection, but they just get it. You just hear their music and you get; they hear our music and they get it. I'll give an example: remember when...was it 2017 or 2018?...when 'Mad Over You' came out and everybody was going mad over 'Mad Over You' and I played...it to a group of my friends from Greece, and they just didn't get it. They didn't get what was...they were like "how do you even dance to this?". So, it was like "how do you not get it? How do you not get it?" but my friends---so, at that time I had friends from the UK; Black friends from the UK--and they came and were like "oh this song, we like this song" hearing it for the first time, we were at Chez Clarisse in Osu, and they heard it for the first time and they were like "ooh this song is a vibe". I didn't have to sell it to them. They just got it. And they were Black. So, 'Mad Over You', it's a song by a Nigerian artist. There's no long-winded connection; they just got it. So, I don't know what it is, but we just get each other...and music is one of those things. We just get each other.

For Esi, one group of friends—Greek, white—is not only unable to appreciate the music, it also cannot figure out how to assimilate it, how to dance to it; while another group of friends—Black-British—does so, effortlessly, without having to be sold on it. The second group of friends has the vibe; they just get it, so they are able to identify that the music is a vibe in the way that Esi does. *The vibe* is what distinguishes the second group from the first; non-African from African; those that instinctively knew how to assimilate the music from those who had no clue. The vibe becomes the music's vibe, it reflects it, it becomes it. When I ask Araba, who was born in Ghana but lives in London, why she likes Afrobeats, she tells me it's because:

> **Araba**: I like the vibe...it feels like, when you're listening to Afrobeats...I know Nigerian...some of their slangs don't go well with...like...Ghanaian slangs... but, it feels like it's ours, you know? It feels like you can sometimes relate to what they are saying. We might be different... from different countries but you can relate to some of the things they say and some of the slang they use; the experiences they've had as Africans or, maybe, Ghanaians or Nigerians...yeah. Yeah, basically, it feels like ours but, when you listen to...like...you know...Western music, you know it's nice, it's popping, you can dance to it and everything but just...you can just tell it's not yours...yeah. That's why I like Afrobeats.

It is *the vibe* that creates a basis for an assumption of *particularity*; a distinctiveness bestowed onto an African collective; a distinctiveness that is not only conveyed within and by Afrobeats, but one that also becomes attributed to and/or validated by other assumed collective ways of *being* beyond the cultural boundaries of Afrobeats. They are often very cleanly articulated, the connections my participants make between, through, and among the vibe, the multiple ways of *being* African that are not directly related to Afrobeats, and Afrobeats. As Dusk elaborates:

> Dusk: I think...it would be the people as well...the people...one way or the other, we all relate to certain things...I could cite an example...an example of 'African mums'...every African can relate to certain things that our African mums do. These are certain things that...like...the people from Africa...even if you weren't born here in Africa, and probably they have African parents, they could relate...so, the people have similar experiences and then we share and then we kind of like connect...you understand...and then, once an African puts these things or these feelings together into a musical form, it makes it easier for us to relate, you get it? And, then, we, as Africans, also carry...we have some energy...and then we carry it further into other people's ears and they are like "Chaley, listen to this our song; this is from here" and then people fall in love with our vibe.

The vibe is unique; as Nana Yaw tells me, it is "*the food, the clothes, the way we talk, the music...that's our culture. That's exclusive to us---the way we eat, everything---is exclusive to us*." It is that which reproduces the resemblant everydays that become coded into the *everywhereness*, not only of Afrobeats; but also, because Afrobeats is thought to reflect it, the assumed *everywhereness* of Africanness. It is that which informs the expectations that, in turn, validate its 'truth'. The vibe makes Africans unique in a way that elucidates the inexplicable energy with which they transmit Afrobeats to cultures that are dissimilar; cultures that do not have the unique African vibe. When my participants come into meeting with others, it is on the basis of the vibe—or the expectation of it—that they measure the authenticity of their mutual Africanness; and confirm it in opposition to what they reason as non-African, as foreignness. I suggest, here, that the qualities/narratives often theorised as denoting an essence are, in fact, qualities/narratives constructed within these expectations. While the vibe is assumed to be common, there is almost always an attention to its situatedness. There is, as I will show more systematically in Chapter 8, always also an attention to the limits of this commonality—it is rarely ever assumed to connote any kind of universality, and, although generalising, these narratives are rarely totalising. As Nigerian Afrobeats artist, Adekunle Gold, echoes while speaking about African American participation in Afrobeats' global wave (see Figure 17.1), "*there is no vibe like our vibe*". In an interview on American television network, BET, which caters to a predominantly African American audience, there is a demarcation of the African vibe from others; from even an African-American one. This raises certain questions about notions of race in the construction of Africanness; about the way that Blackness might be constructed in relation to Africanness. I address this in the next chapter.

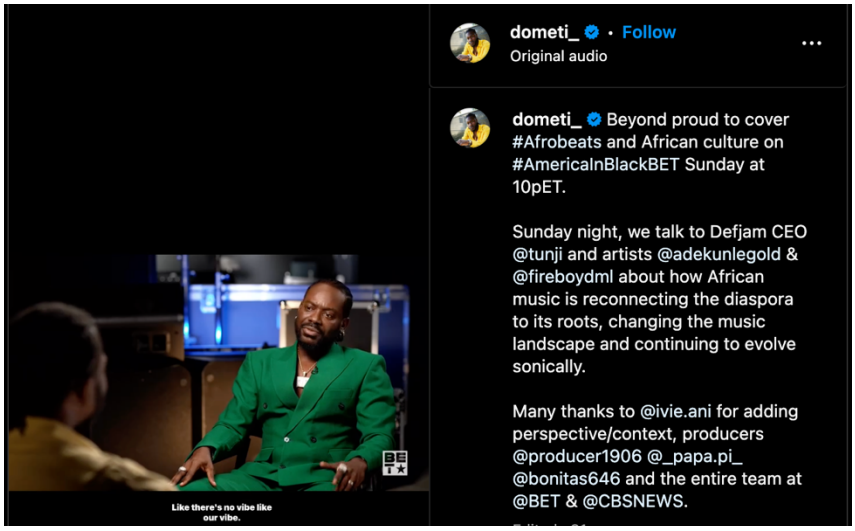

Figure 17. 1

In these narratives about a collective African *vibe*, we might observe notions of particularity; of the articulation of '*who we are*' as an African collective together with clarifications of '*who we are with*'; of *being* and *belonging*. In this section, I have demonstrated how expectations of knowing Afrobeats, of showing it, and of owning it amplify these narratives. I suggest that through continual practice (and enforcement in some cases), these expectations become normalised, as more people exhibit the attributes that are assumed to manifest it; and the more people there are that come into meeting with others that practice these expectations, the more they become imagined as collective and common. Within this normalisation, assumptions of the existence of *the vibe* become settled, and, with them, the beginnings of a commonality on which a *particularity* can be constructed. In the next section, I consider how *the vibe* is validated in this meeting of people; in the affects produced in the encounter of others who affirm the assumptions of the vibe by exhibiting the attributes, characteristics that are imagined to manifest it.

'We are always in sync': affect, conviviality, and a co-constituted sociality

In this section, I think about how '*the vibe*' might produce affects that become read as '*a vibe*'. I have suggested that 'a vibe' refers to music's inherent substance, its flows and cadences, its tonicity and lyrical content, that which structures the *affective* responses people have as they engage with it, as well as the *ambience* it creates within *space*. Affect and space, then become important to understanding how 'a vibe' might come to be generated.

I have suggested, in Chapter 6, that we might understand how homeland and diaspora relate across space by thinking about the *feeling* of being at home. We might consider, then, how space may possess a 'high emotional tone' (Tuan, 1979, p.399), a 'feeling-tone' tied to human mood and experience (Tuan, 1979, 398); tied to *affect*. Affect, as I suggested earlier in this chapter, represents the superordinate condition that encompasses feeling states such as emotion, feeling, mood, sensation, *etc*. It covers the 'impulses, sensations, *expectations*…*encounters*, and habits of relating' and can be experienced in varying ways, 'as a pleasure and a shock, as an empty pause or a dragging undertow, as a sensibility that snaps into place or a profound disorientation' (Stewart, 2007, p.2). As Dusk tells me, when I ask him to describe *the vibe*, "*the vibe cannot be described, honestly. You can't describe the vibe…it's a good feeling, it's a sad feeling, it's a happy feeling…you could be in the vibe and be crying, you could be in the vibe and be happy, you could be in the vibe and be enjoying the music, and then you could be out of the vibe and not be enjoying the music, you understand?*"

Dusk describes a sort of gradient of emotion, of feeling states, of affects that most of my participants also described in attachment to their individual and collective engagement with Afrobeats. In all of my observations, my interactions, my conversations, however, one affect stood out; one that carried through the intuitive group dance moves, through the giggles and laughs across interviews, through the ease of light-hearted banter, through the effortlessness of inter-connection; one that, as I indicated in Chapter 4, turned this project into one of celebration—the affect of overwhelming *joy*. As Hazel, 31, who moved to Ghana permanently when she turned 30, emphasises, "*it's coming back to the sense of ownership. Like…it feels like my music, you know. I can listen to Vivaldi and appreciate it and like it, but it's not the same…not even close. There's a different level of joy that I experience when I listen to Afrobeats…to* ***our*** *music*". Kekeli also tells me that Afrobeats is "*just happy music…everywhere you go; it's just people having mad fun, just vibing…and there is always people dancing together, doing the same moves…like…we are always in sync*." It is a sense of joy that is almost ever-present online also. Visible in nearly every Afrobeats-related trend, in nearly every Afrobeats-related video, in many Afrobeats-related posts, there was the articulation of a joy that the individual and collective engagement with Afrobeats created. Figure 18.1 attempts to capture an expression of this kind of joy among a group of Afro-Brazilians at an Afrobeats event in Sao Paulo; and Figure 18.2, a clip of a recurring Afrobeats event organised by Cultur FM in London, attempts to capture the joy contained in the synchroneity that often characterises group engagements with Afrobeats.

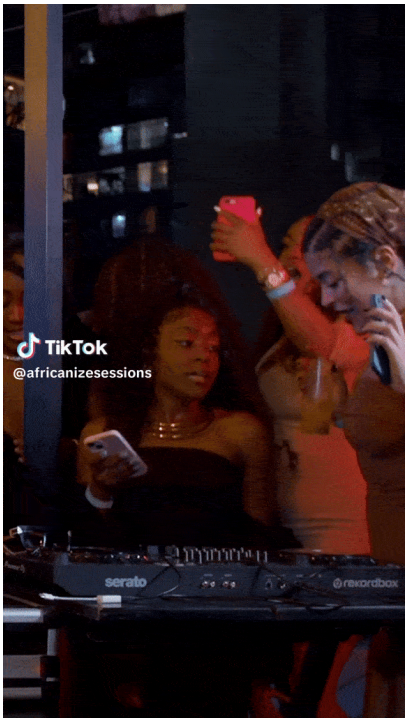

Figure 18. 1

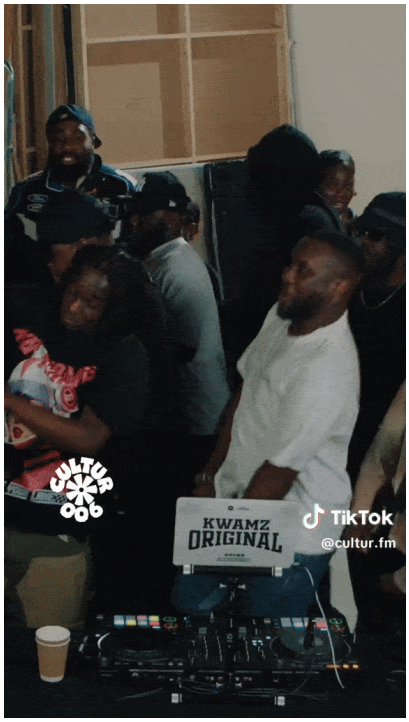

Figure 18. 2

It is a collective joy that often translates into feelings of connection and of togetherness; and, when the expectations of knowing, of showing, and of owning are met within this ambit of connection, it settles into a sense of affirmation. It is a sense of affirmation that both Rayla and Abena tell me they feel. There is a sense that they are *being* African in the correct ways when they see at the parties we go to or when they find replicated in videos online, the vibe they associate with Afrobeats. Abena tells me that it is a feeling of not being out of place, of existing amongst people who connect with the music, the dance, the humour on a comparable wavelength. Whereas, for Rayla, for Kwaku, for Amanda, and for Kwesi, there was always a question of which kind of Blackness was their property, growing up in London at a time when they could not draw on Afrobeats' Afro-cool value, for Abena and for Scrippz, the popularity of Afrobeats had come to offer a reason to not need to question if or where they may fit in. But this sense of affirmation is not only felt within the dispossessive context of diaspora. It is also produced within the homeland context as 'continental Africans' find modes of connection that reify a sense of collective Blackness (see Figure 19.1, which shows a tweet from a South African user, highlighting the sense of joy and the collective Blackness they find during 'Detty December' in Ghana, as they join in the collective engagement with Afrobeats and Amapiano). As Esi explains:

> **Esi**: ...it's one of the things where Africans in the diaspora have found it easy to bond over with continental Africans. We just...it's like an easy [snaps fingers]...we just get each other so it just keeps going farther and farther, and I think the sense of...group vibes is appealing to people

outside the collective and then it's just going global. Like...when I think of Afrobeats, it's not one of those music genres like ballroom dancing, where it's partnered...or tap dancing or one of those solo dancing...Afrobeats, Amapiano it's like group dance. You're dancing with your friend, you are dancing with three or more people. By definition...like...it's inherently a group thing, it's an inherently collective thing. It just makes sense...like...you just see people dancing Afrobeats and it looks like fun. Even if I wasn't Black, it looks like a lot of fun---maybe, I'm biased---but it would look like fun, I would want to be part of it.

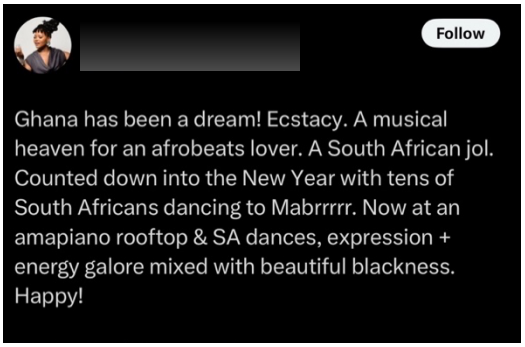

Figure 19. 1

By reflecting on the global appeal of the 'group vibes' and on its attractiveness to the non-Black other, Esi invokes an image of conviviality as it is now largely understood—as the 'joyful aspects of spending time connecting' (Nowicka & Vertovec, 2014, p.349). This thinking, of course, relies on Paul Gilroy's definition of 'a social pattern in which different metropolitan groups dwell in close proximity but where their racial, linguistic and religious particularities do not...add up to discontinuities of experience' (Gilroy, 2006, p. 40). That is, conviviality as multiculture. It is a kind of conviviality that I, too, experienced.

Stepping out from the nippy spring night into a cuddle of wall-mounted electric heaters, one becomes aware of how a place can be warm in more ways than one. I am trudging behind a mixed group of 20-something-year-olds, as we walk down a steep stairwell into the long, neon-lighted lower-ground dance hall of the Simmons Bar in Leicester Square, where the group has decided to 'pre-game' the night. My new friend, a Zimbabwean woman, has invited me to join a club event organised by her Kenyan friend, who has also invited his friends, a Cameroonian man and a German woman. The group also has two Chinese women, who are friends of the Cameroonian man, and a Greek woman, who is my Zimbabwean friend's roommate. Not long after we arrive, the DJ follows his hip-hop set with Afrobeats. The bar erupts as Burna Boy's '*Last Last*' is transitioned in. I am struck by how many white people are singing along word-for-word. As I

lift my head from my phone, a young white woman, who is dancing near our group, meets my eye. She's pointing at me (in attempt, I think, to vibe with me) and is singing intently. I oblige, as we share a brief moment of connection, both beaming as a new song is transitioned in and she jigs off into the crowd.

When our group finally makes its way across the centre of the city to the club in Mayfair, I am immersed in a separate moment of conviviality, as Magic System's 'Premier Gaou' is transitioned in following an R&B set. As the iconic drum entrée of the song thunders across the packed basement, nearly all of the Black people around us meet it with a familiar almost-mania. It is a collective, spontaneous reaction; a kind of knowing, a summoning to find one another, as people, who only minutes ago were strangers, wiggle waists towards one another. It is *something* 'standard emotive language fails to approximate' (Miles, 2022, p.367), a *vibe*; and, sobering up from its breathlessness, I conclude my note in the whispery "*it is absolutely beautiful*". It is a conviviality that feels like home; like that enrapturing *vibe* Miranda describes when she talks about dancing in Accra clubs; a feeling of togetherness that was always palpable in the places that had, in my observations, people who were predominantly Black. Overwhelmingly, this was my experience of the conviviality across sites; a conviviality built on *Black joy*.

'*Black joy*', Sobande & Amponsah (2024) remind us, encapsulates 'forms of joy nurtured and relationally felt by and between Black people' (p.1). There is an interiority to it—it is *felt*, personal, a kind of *being*; but it is also exuded, external, eliciting affects of happiness and of affinity, as it produces a '*being together*, in ways untethered from structurally white imaginaries' (Sobande & Amponsah, 2024, p.17, emphasis added). The *Black joy* that permeates Afrobeats cultural places compels us, therefore, to understand conviviality not only as 'acknowledgement of others' proximate presence' (Georgiou, 2016, p.264), but also as the recognition of *some* similarity; of some manner of alignment, that becomes the basis on which a sense of togetherness is constructed. It is a product of *sociality*—a part of the 'process of relating to others through action' (Sillander, 2021, p.2). In that club in Mayfair, it was co-constituted in the convergences of place, as various ways of *being together* (from across the space within which 'Premier Gaou' produces meanings not just of what it means to be African, but also of how to relate within that collective Africanness) merged.

Long & Moore (2012) suggest that we should think of sociality as the 'dynamic relational matrix within which subjects are constantly interacting in ways that are *co-productive*' (p.4, emphasis added) and through which they 'know the world they live in', finding 'meaning within it', (2012, p.2) as they do so. In Chapter 6, I spoke about how meanings produced in homeland and diaspora come into meeting as young Africans make sense of the world—the space—within which they live. I demonstrated how these meanings are co-produced as they circulate across this space, as various constituencies

interact through processes of transnationalisation and digitalisation. Following Long & Moore's (2012) definition, then, we might think of a sociality of Africanness that is produced through these dynamic interrelations and processes, 'the full variety of instances of human coexistence' (Sillander, 2011, p.2). It is a sociality—a reaching out to others who are imagined to be similar, a 'hanging-together of human lives' through practices (Schatzki, 1996, p.14)—that settles logics of *being* with a sense of *belonging*.

Again, dance was a key element of Afrobeats cultural performance that produced a sociality of Africanness. On a holiday in Morrocco, for instance, Dukes, a first-generation migrant I recruited in London, records and shares a video (Figure 20.1) of a pool boy at the hotel at which he is staying. The other man is dancing to Afrobeats song, 'Unavailable'; another song to have generated an eponymous dance challenge. Before transitioning to the dance routine associated with that challenge, the pool attendant performs various Afrodance moves including the *gwara gwara* (originated from South Africa) and the *shoulders* (originated from Ghana), by which Dukes is audibly excited. In that short, captured moment, the pool boy identifies a mutual Africanness and actively performs what Miranda describes as the "*swaggy dances*", the co-created routines that become a part of a sociality of Africanness, with which Dukes connects.

There are, of course, certain dynamics at play in this interaction that are related to a history of ambivalence in Morrocco, where the question of Africanness is concerned (I discuss this in the next chapter); but, in their mutual identification of and active engagement in dance as a mode of *belonging*, they affirm an African sociality that is co-constituted in the physical and virtual places of the African home (as I discussed in Chapter 6). In a similar way, a manifestation of this kind of sociality is often demonstrated in the dance routines that have become almost expected aspects of the African wedding. In Figure 20.2, for example, a routine performed by a South African couple to Afrobeats song, 'Butta My Bread', that went viral on Twitter, incorporated Afrodance styles from mainly Ghana and Nigeria. The song to which the couple had danced, recorded by Liberian singer, JZyNO, and Ghanaian singer, Lasmid, then, also, found virality, as the dance routine was re-performed and shared on other social media by others in non-wedding contexts. In Figure 20.3, for example, a group performs a different viral wedding routine at their school's Culture Day celebrations. In the comments, others debate the technical accuracy of the dance moves, who did it best and who looks out of place, engaging in communal assessments of an idealised Africanness, and further codifying meanings of membership within the African collective. The symbolic significance of this; of the showcase of Afrobeats culture in demonstration of what the members of the group consider to be their cultural heritage, at a school in a society that previously openly and, at times, violently devalorised its substance, is that where older generations used to pretend to be something else, a new generation is engaged in the active, public negotiation of and connection with what it means to be African.

Figure 20. 1

Figure 20. 2

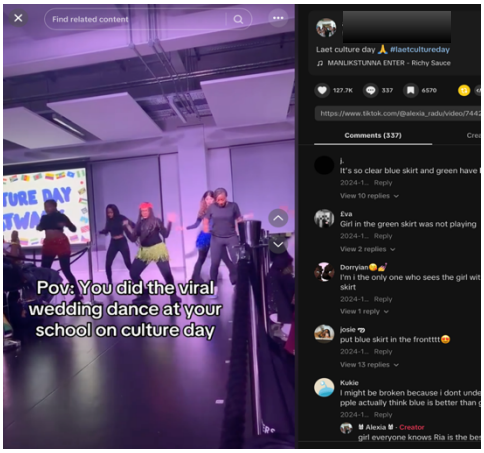

Figure 20. 3

Dance, then, becomes a means through which young Africans connect or relate with other Africans, and the participation in these challenges offers pathways to do so across space. A collective Africanness is often at the centre of the reasoning underlying the co-creation of and participation in these dance challenges, as might be illustrated in Angela's definition of Afrodance, when we speak about her creation of dance videos on TikTok, Instagram, and YouTube:

> **Angela**: ...so, we're actually still trying to establish and understand and have a proper meaning for it, but it is popular dance moves and steps that have been Africanised and also a lot of our traditional steps that have been modernised...yes, I think that's the word. Yeah, so it's a mixture of a lot of things but, at the end of the day, you flow and make it yours and African and represent Africa whilst you're doing it.

For Angela, Afrodance is a fusion of varying traditional dance regimes that, when reimagined through improvisational engagement, becomes a medium for representing a collective Africanness. There is some attention to the co-created character of these dances, which, as I had observed Stacey do frequently, are choreographed by adapting pieces of dance from different cultural milieux, which the dancers dedicate substantial periods of time studying, primarily using digital media. Processes of selection are often founded on the recognition of similarity, as Dusk, who dances in his music videos and in his on-stage performances, also confirms:

> **Dusk**: Yeah...I'm always watching and learning from...all these places. I'm picking up dances from South Africa, I'm picking up dances from the Francophone side...and they have a lot of moves that we also do here, which are very similar, especially the Ga tribe; we have a lot of...you know...similarities when it comes to the moves. So, yes, we do pick up a lot of things...especially from the Francophone people...and they also, in turn, feed off our vibe and...I think that we kind of have the same...you know...because they love to dance, and we love to dance too.

Like Dusk, many others create choreographies based on the confluences they find between different sources of cultural production within the space they imagine as African. However, there is a second, less directly articulated but frequently observed, criterion for determining the 'flow' of these dance moves, which demonstrates how the choreographies that become globally popular are co-created. It is somewhat semiconscious, Stacey admits, but, while making choices on which dances work best in their choreographies, there is some consideration over how these might appeal to dancers in the diasporic *otherwhere(s)*; and, as Angela also suggests, as to how the moves might be modernised to suit dance styles that would be more recognisable for and more appealing to those dancers. The diasporic input is more directly observable, perhaps, as a feature of the modernisation Angela refers to, in the more conscious fashion choices that most

of the dancers make as they turn their choreographies into video content. Angela, for example, seeks to replicate a vibe that she associates with dance cultures, using Western-style urban clothing because, although dance had always been a part of the music culture in Ghana, the specific emergent Afrodance cultural milieu within which she operates had taken most of its foundational form from those in the diasporic *otherwheres*. The fashion style is an aesthetic that tends to mimic African-American or Black-British urban dress styles with outfits such as those Angela sports in her dance studio sessions (example in Figure 21.1) and in her outdoor videos in various locations across Accra (example in Figure 21.2). The aesthetic is also observable across most of the videos Zero posts on his social media, such as when he is in a studio session (example Figure 21.3) and filming in various locations across London (example Figure 21.4). In a few of their videos, however, the dancers tend to choose outfits that combine African-print styles with more Western styles; often in contexts within which an assertion of their Africanness may seem practical or within which that Africanness might appear to be out of its taken-for-granted place. Angela, for example, works to signal her Africanness by wearing an African print top while filming during a short visit in London (Figure 21.5); as does Zero, when he appears on an episode of the BBC show 'Strictly Come Dancing'.

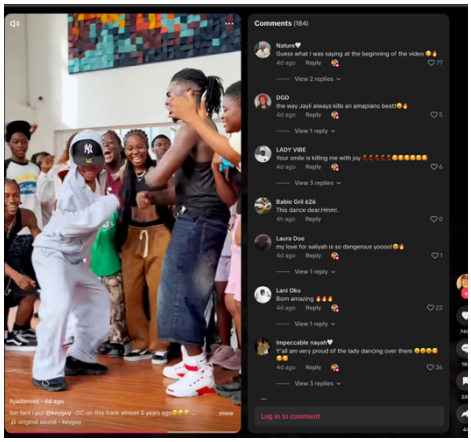

Figure 21. 1

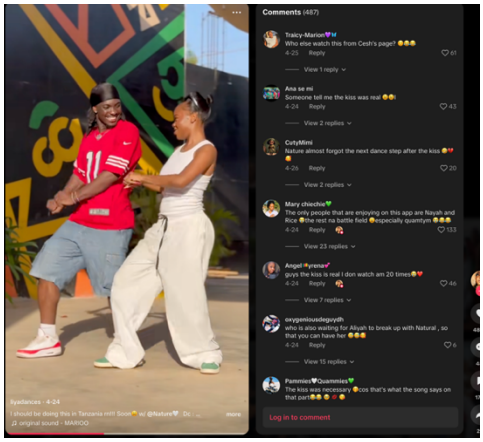

Figure 21. 2

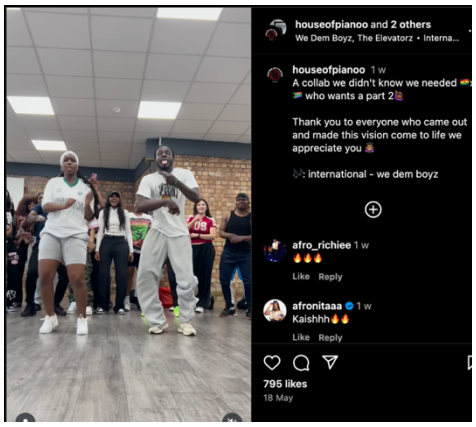

Figure 21. 3

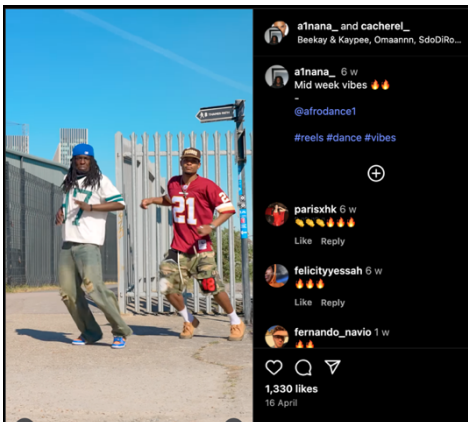

Figure 21. 4

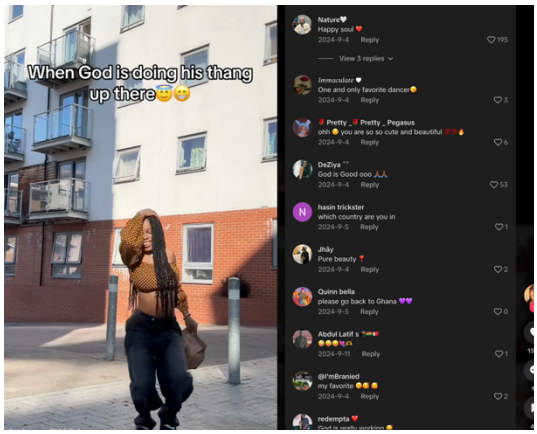

Figure 21. 5

These dynamics are not isolated. There are similarities, here, in the ways that this co-constituted style mirrors global self-fashionings of Blackness that are originated within hip-hop cultural imagery (Perry, 2008) and the related processes of adaptation that extend, co-define the meanings of this global Black style/fashion/dress (Tulloch, 2010). In replicating the aesthetic they associate with diasporic Africanness (which, itself, is heavily situated within hip-hop-inspired global Black self-fashionings), the dancers in the *somewhere* of home include these modes of dress into their imaginings of what it means to be a 'modernised' African; and, as they combine these styles with African print fashions, they redefine what this 'modernised' African can look like for those in the diasporic *otherwhere(s)*. This co-constituted aesthetic tends to be conveyed in comparable modes through many Afrobeats music videos, as the artists aim to represent the various constituencies that consume their music. As Miranda observes:

> **Miranda**: I would say...I don't think the way they dress is typically African. I've seen a few videos where they wear African print and all...like...yeah, I see some people do that. But, for the most

> part, people dress Western; they wear the Western clothes...so, I don't see it. It's the beats and the dancing that I would say is African, and, sometimes, the hair---the Afros and all---but, most of the time, I wouldn't say the clothes are African, no.

As Miranda notes, even in the instances where a demarcation may be made between African fashion styles and those that are read as Western, there is often a way to signal an Africanness through hair styles and/or other accessories such as jewellery. This kind of combination, a product of the processual co-constitution of codes of dress style, was evident in the self-styling choices of revellers across Afrobeats concerts, events, gigs, parties across sites. At a popular artisan pop-up market in Accra (Figure 22.1 and Figure 22.2), for example, combinations of African print and Western-style clothing items were prevalent, almost constituting, across the quarterly reiterations of the market, a kind of normativity. Like with the pop-up goods market, this dynamic was characteristic of other events in Accra that were more likely to attract middle-to-upper class attendees. Events such as the annual 'Detty December' festival, *Afrofuture*, and the location-alternating Afrobeats beach festival, *AfroNation*, in particular, were exemplar environments for this kind of normativity, as Miranda also observes:

> **Miranda**: Some particular events like Afrochella, for example, which is now Afrofuture, I see, at that event, in particular, I see people mixing up the African prints but, for most other events, maybe, one or two people will wear African prints...or...I feel like people still think--maybe, I'm wrong--but people still think it's not cool, unless it's made in a certain way...so, I don't see a lot of people wearing African prints, particularly.

Here, the notion of Afro-cool based on African-print fashion styles becomes a classed one. While class did not emerge strongly as a factor in the construction of African identity, it was observable in small details such as in choice of clothing. As Miranda observes, events such as *Afrofuture*, which had significantly higher ticket prices attracted crowds that were more inclined toward wearing African-print styles. In some ways, this was a reflection of what has been critiqued as cultural commodification and as an Afropolitan exercise in consumerism (Dabiri, 2016). Many of the critiques (as I have discussed in Chapter 3) tend to highlight the appropriation of gentrified versions of these artefacts, as affluent young Africans work to signal their status and mobility and/or demarcate, for Western highbrow validation, a kind of elevated aesthetic different to the dominant global Black urban style. There is some nuance, however, that must be accounted for.

First, even at these events, the Black urban aesthetic was observable. In Figure 22.2, for example, a young man dressed in Black urban style demonstrates Afrodance moves, as a young Asian woman dressed in a combination of Western-style button-down shirt over an African print pair of shorts learns them. The young man's outfit, a sweat-shirt and sweat-

pants over a pair of sneakers, accessorised with a small side-strapped satchel bag (typical of Black London urban fashion culture) was also a common look across the more moderately priced events, such as *Tidal Rave* (Figure 22.3), at which a smaller number of revellers (such as the young woman in frame) self-styled in the mixed African-print/Western-style look. Across events in London, as well, this Black urban style was predominant, often with accessorising (such as earrings, rings, necklaces, head wear, *etc*) that tended to indicate more explicitly certain African affiliations. Second, there were the exceptions in events that were curated specifically for the showcase of the specific African origins of, especially, the UK-based attendees, such as *Ghana Party in the Park* and special Afrobeats brunch parties, where African-print clothing was often more visible. This was also the case for events curated for more working-class audiences such as a King Paluta gig in Hartfield, just outside of North London (Figure 22.4).

The almost inverse manifestation of these class dynamics in London and in Accra draw attention to another dimension beyond the workings of capitalist logics—that of representation and of cultural pride. There are, of course, intercourses here with historically racist apportionments of value to Black presences; however, rather than conformity to these racist standards of sophistication, appropriations of African cultural artefacts, in my encounters, appeared predominantly in assertion of a sense of pride, often in direct dissension to validation from whiteness.

Figure 22. 1

Figure 22. 2

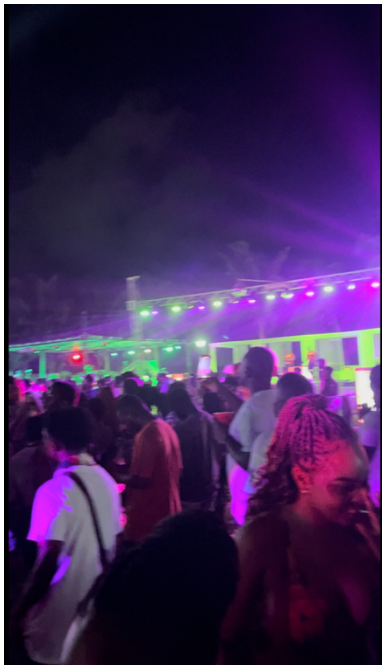

Figure 22. 3

Figure 22. 4

The co-created dress sense expands imaginings of a 'modernised' Africanness, as new combined modes of self-styling are brought into coexistence. Angela, Zero, and Kwaku do not discard their sense of Africanness when wearing oversized jeans and American Football jerseys, even if the assertion of that Africanness is marked more directly on other occasions with African-print outfits. Kekeli marks her Africanness with her Bantu knots while she attends her film school classes in a cropped t-shirt and sweatpants, as does Amanda when she accessorises a knitted sweater and denim skirt with her gold *adinkra* jewellery. This co-creation of dress style informs a kind of rubric for what might be permissible, what one might wear when one engages in Afrobeats cultural activities in order to fit in, to belong. It is, in some ways, a constituent of a larger code of sociality, of being with others, of reaching into an assembly of meanings of what it means to be African. As Miranda, again, observes, when we speak about whether the aesthetic she identifies in the Afrobeats videos are replicated in the real-world Afrobeats places she frequents, the modes of dress are encoded in the overall 'vibe' of Afrobeats, and there is often some active effort towards replicating it:

> **Miranda**: Yes, yes, I see it. I do, actually, especially in December…because that's when they have all these events, where they have all these Afrobeats artists go…and I, myself, try to dress like that; like this particular artist, Arya Starr, she's known for wearing very mini-skirts and things…and I'm like…'yeah, that's it!' [laughs]. Definitely, we are all copying them in some way, because we like Afrobeats and we like the whole Afrobeats vibe…so, yeah.

Also, these co-created modes of self-styling do not only redefine what it might mean to 'dress African', they also bring to attention the relevance of context, as different combinations of fashion style are appropriated within different situations. Stacey ordinarily prefers her African-print tops but, while she films for social media, she works to replicate an aesthetic that, as I have indicated, other content-creator dancers associate with the Afrodance cultural scene. Behind the tripod stand, however, she has her African print bag; and, later, when we attend Afrobeats events, she wears her African-print tops. Yaw's friend, a barber who moonlights as a DJ, that he introduces to me at his son's naming ceremony, wears an African-print shirt to the ceremony, but always appears in hip-hop urban apparel each time we meet at Yaw's favourite street-side pub. This is, perhaps, an exemplar of a blind spot in critiques that are often situated within a hyper-focus on consumerism and elitism in the Afropolitan appropriation of especially African fashion styles. While, in some ways, these fashions are employed in elitist demarcations of status, there are locally produced fabrics and styles that are accessible to those outside of the upper-middle classes; and even those styles that might be thought of as more cost-prohibitive are often reserved for special cultural events such as naming ceremonies and weddings. Put differently, while gentrified versions of African fashion styles may well be, in some cases, deployed as statements of some elite status, these fashion choices are also often based on the separation of what are considered traditional cultural events from Afrobeats cultural events. Where, because of the co-created fashion style, a predominantly Black urban aesthetic might be favoured for the Afrobeats cultural events (as Miranda confesses), a predominantly African-print-heavy aesthetic would be favoured for traditional cultural events.

At the wedding where a hall-wide frenzy follows the bridal choreography of *Tshwala Bam*, I have discarded the ripped semi-baggy jeans and oversized t-shirt, matched with a pair of Nike Jordan 1 sneakers—a dress style that I had adopted to fit in while collecting data in London—and I have returned to my accustomed tailored African print button-down shirt tucked neatly into a pair of single-pleated front trousers, and matched with simple brogued Oxford shoes. I do not look out of place, as many others in the hall are dressed in similar fashion. I do not feel out of place, as many of the weddings I had been a part of in Accra had felt like this. The bridal party (example, Figure 23.2) is outfitted as a bridal party would be in Accra (example, Figure 23.1). It is a *boubou*-based traditional wedding dress style that is different from the *kente*-based styles that had been normative for the customary marriage ceremonies I had witnessed across my childhood and adolescence. It is a style that, as Esi tells me, started to gain popularity as wedding curation pages "*sprung up on Insta and, later, Snap*"; as digitalised versions of African weddings became increasingly content-centred, and even traditional *kente* styles became more aestheticized (example in Figure 23.3). Again, Afrobeats is backgrounded in the couple entry dances and in the video content they share on their social media, which, themselves, become a part of the expectations

of what would constitute an African wedding; of the ways a couple might connect with wedding guests; of the extended sociality associated with the Instagram-able wedding.

Figure 23. 1

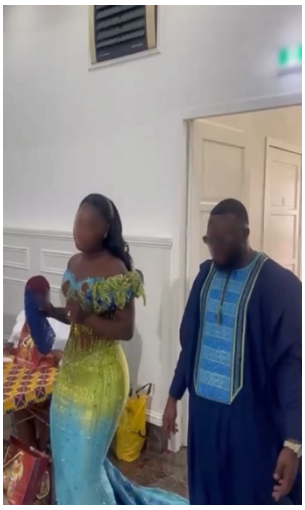

Figure 23. 2

Figure 23. 3

Two considerations are of interest here. First, as images of traditional cultural events circulate across space, they inform certain codes that become a part of a sociality of Africanness. As they become replicated within the *somewhere* of home and throughout its *otherwhere(s)*, confluences engender a collective sense of *being* and *belonging*. In my identification with features of a Ghanaian wedding at a ceremony in London, I come to feel more at home; and, in the reproduction

of their version of those features, the couple, both born in London, feel less removed from it. Second, this sociality of Africanness becomes co-constituted in the digitalised (re)production of home; in the presentation of parts of place as representative of the whole; in the curated cuts and edits of everyday cultural life; and in the co-determined *boundaries* of what is un/cool. It is a sociality that goes to (re)teach how, when, and where to be African.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I have focused on the ways in which conceptions of a unique African *vibe* become core to notions of African particularity. I have revealed how these notions are formed based on certain *expectations* for self and for others to know, to feel, and to display attributes/attitudes related to individual and collective ways of engaging with Afrobeats culture, and how the ability to do so and the continued collective practice of these ways of engaging generate certain affects of affinity, of affirmation, and of *Black joy*. The chapter has revealed how moments of especially Black joy become foundational to a conviviality that is *felt* as unique; how the continuous experience of this conviviality comes to validate assumptions of a unique African *vibe*; and how this reinforces notions of a collective African identity. The chapter reveals how this conviviality becomes the basis of a sociality of Africanness; how digital and social media and Afrobeats culture become key in structuring this sociality; and how certain manifestations of co-creation of elements of Afrobeats culture across social media, homeland and diaspora exemplify this sociality.

This sociality, 'the visible articulation of connections' (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2014, p.192), involves the rules, attitudes, cultural artefacts that become associated with Afrobeats culture and the collective identity it produces, circulates, and maintains. Co-creation is fostered within this sociality, and the gradual (re)negotiation of elements of Afrobeats culture across space informs certain ways of *being together*; ways of *being* African and *belonging* within an African collective, as conjectured in Chapter 2. In this sense, the chapter answers RQ1, and offers further clarification on how the logics of commonality are central to the construction of African identity, which, again, aligns more with Pan-Africanist logics than with Afropolitan assumptions of what it means to be the worldly African.

The chapter contributes to a 'sociology of vibe' (Miles, 2022) in studies of Blackness, adding a perspective of its *feltness* outside of the context of 'Black people's relationship to the criminal legal system' (p.367). It expands the analytical

width of 'vibe' to include the affective 'experiences that standard emotive language fails to approximate' (p.367), which tend to be produced inside moments of Black joy. It extends the meaning of *vibe,* as Black-centred language needed in the broader sociological vocabulary (Miles, 2022), to include the intuitive groove, the impulse, the *embodied rhythm* that many Black people recognise as a part of their commonality but *not* as an 'essence' (Munro, 2010). I have suggested that what is often assumed to be an essence in essentialist analyses of Africanness, can be explained by the expectations that young Africans have for self and for others to know, to show, and to own their Africanness in specific ways. There is typically attention to nuance, as I have suggested, and, while generalising, the narratives of commonality generated in these expectations are rarely totalising. This attention to nuance, as I will show in the next chapter, emerges in certain *boundaries* that young Africans tend to (re)negotiate in clarification of their *being* and *belonging*.

Chapter 8

The situatedness of being, and the shifting boundaries of belonging

"Identities are, thus, points of temporary attachments to the subject positions which discursive practices construct for us"

Stuart Hall (1996, p.6)

I am introduced to Hardy, 25, at the security desk of the East London student housing unit I have newly moved into. He is visiting his friend, Dukes, 27, the Ghanaian security supervisor with whom I have cultivated an acquaintance. It is the first time Hardy and I are meeting, but he greets me with the almost-instinctual dap—the half-handshake-half-embrace that signals our mutual sense of Black masculinity; an extemporary performance intimating a kind of tacit brotherhood, rehearsed since our separate eras of adolescence, nearly a decade, a generation removed from one another. The two are appraising Hardy's new outfit—a blue satin oversized short-sleeved shirt that glistens under the lights of the small lobby, matte black trousers, and a new pair of size 12 buckle loafer shoes he is complaining feels a bit too tight—that he plans to wear on their night out for his birthday on the weekend. It is 'Afrobeats Night' at their favourite club, they tell me, and I have to be there because it is "*full African vibes*". I accept their invitation to join, and digging deeper into my excitement, ask if they would be happy to participate in my study. Dukes reflexively points at Hardy, and when I ask why, Hardy, with an abrupt wave of his hand, responds: "*There's no other music*".

There is an unequivocality with which Hardy annunciates his partialness towards Afrobeats; marks his attachment to its assumed sonic superiority, to its cultural value, and, in the collateral act of dispelling the substance and relevance of all other music traditions, to its distinctiveness—its Africanness. It is this assuredness that is assumed to be instrumental to the stability of identity, if we are to think within frames of Eriksonian (1968) psychosocial theory, as an individual works to reconcile competing roles, values, tastes, and beliefs, gaining certitude in self-knowledge, and settling into both their sense of individuality and their feelings of belonging within a social configuration. Identity, in this perspective, becomes a kind of achievement, a discovery, predicated on the avoidance of role confusion, and on the development of a sense of conviction about who one is and how and with whom they belong. Conviction is also, of course, central to the logics

of a coming-to-know, a discovery of an unchanging identity; logics that are centralised within approaches that designate common characteristics as essences, suggesting that identity is something incontestably fixed, something given.

In a way, my work in the two chapters preceding this one may be taken to demonstrate how, like Hardy, young Africans may articulate their identity positions within tenors of this kind of conviction, and how their assumptions of collective modes of *being* and *belonging,* particularised as African, might come to be solidified within this conviction. That work reveals narratives and attitudes that, as I have suggested in Chapter 7, might be (mis)identified as evidentiary; taken as signifiers of a collective essence, of identity as a product of discovery. They are, nonetheless, not. Assumptions of their *everywhereness*, as I have sought to demonstrate in Chapter 5, do, however, tend to engender some stability in the meanings to which they become attached. Stability, here, does not imply fixedness. It suggests a *holdingness*—that the meanings attached to a certain way of *being* can become reiterative, so that they find some manner of continuity in the specific context(s) within which they are made manifest, within which they are situated; and situatedness, as I have said in Chapter 6, implies mobility; that these meanings, at points, may travel beyond (without being completely removed from) their original context(s). That these meanings may come to maintain some degree of constancy in their situated contexts, however, does not suggest unchangingness; they may take on extended signification as they travel through space; as they are negotiated, contested, consolidated into and within collocated modes of *belonging*.

Thinking this way about identity—about its *holdingness*—allows us, first, to explain its temporality outside of the premise of permanence, without relinquishing the analytical value that considerations of its potential to find some stability in context might present. Second, it also unstiffens the near-maxim of ceaseless fluidity, the 'consensus' of ephemerality, centralised in the 'hegemony of constructivism' (Wimmer, 2013, p.3), without obscuring the perceptibility of regular change in identity formation processes.

This is the focus of the work I do in this chapter. The first layer of the argument I present in the discussion that follows is that, even though we might understand it to be neither fixed nor unchanging, identity can find *some* stability within context; within narratives of commonality that become validated in shared cultural configurations. I demonstrate this by thinking through the frame of Afrobeats culture, within which young Africans situate, with conviction, their sense of *being*; and outside of which this conviction, as I will show, becomes disrupted. As a second layer, I will argue that this disruption manifests in (re)articulations of modes of *belonging*, in the adjustments in meaning that might be made as young Africans contend with congruent and/or competing categories inside of the broader meanings that already *hold*.

The empirical focus here, therefore, works in response to the project's third research question: *what are the boundaries that define the collective African identity young Africans construct through their engagement with Afrobeats culture?*

I begin by demonstrating how the stable meanings of African identity are scaffolded by and within Afrobeats culture, and how they become destabilised without Afrobeats as an anchor, as a frame of reference. Here, I will show how there is a certainty in the articulation of a collective African identity, when my participants think about their Africanness in the context of their engagements with Afrobeats culture. I will, then, show how, outside of this context, they articulate this sense of *being* African with relatively less immediate conviction, and how this produces certain contradictions in their understanding of who *belongs* with them within that African collective.

These contradictions reveal certain boundaries across and within which *belonging* is negotiated. The second section of this chapter focuses on how these boundaries may extend or contract; how they are negotiated, enforced, contested; how they define meanings associated with *belonging*—the logics of inclusion in and the conditions of exclusion from the assumed African collective. Following Michèle Lamont's work, I think of the symbolic boundaries (see Lamont & Molnár, 2002) that are produced and maintained in everyday interaction, and how these are valorised in engagements with Afrobeats culture. I consider how inner boundaries might work in potentially mutually constitutive, interactional processes to produce the *holdingness* that outer boundaries might come to find; how, in other words, inner boundaries might inform/shape/define the contours/margins of these outer boundaries. I identify this process as *boundarying*.

In the second and third sections of the chapter, I will focus on this process of *boundarying*. I demonstrate how, through *boundarying*, young Africans clarify *who they are*, by (re)negotiating meanings, as they determine who *belongs* with them. Specifically, in the second section, I discuss how processes of *boundarying* are revealed in the contradictions that emerge as my participants make these determinations, demonstrating how inner boundaries of geopolitical affiliation and, notably, of race mark out the (assumed) distinctive contours of a collective Africanness. In the third, I focus on how these boundaries are contested; how negotiations of their meanings, through contestations of ownership and of participation, clarify the notions of collective African identity.

"I'm definitely African": on affirmations of *being* and the limits of conviction

This first section focuses on the ways in which meaning is stabilised in the symbolic representations and the materiality of Afrobeats culture—how articulations of *being* African are almost reflexive when located within the frame of Afrobeats, and how they become destabilised without it as an anchor point. It explores the narratives marked by certainty that tend to characterise these articulations; how a sense of conviction about who they are, becomes channelled by and validated in my participants' engagements with Afrobeats culture. The section, then, discusses how this sense of conviction might be destabilised, by revealing contemplations and contradictions in narratives, as participants contend with what their sense of collective Africanness might mean outside of the frame of Afrobeats culture. In so doing, the section reveals the stretches of the meanings underlying my participants' notions of a collective Africanness; and, ultimately, how these might contribute to maintaining the *holdingness* of a collective African identity.

In the outdoor area of the converted warehouse space where an Afro-House event to which I have been invited is not meeting initial expectations, I am found, behind the silvery plumes of kindling marijuana and the residual glares of the dancing strobe lights, by a woman, who tells me later her parents are from Zimbabwe. "*You're African, aren't you?*" she greets me in her dulcet British accent. I smile and nod in confirmation. "*Right, so, you are also outside because they are not playing our music,*" she chuckles. *Our* music. She is not wrong. Like her, the electronic dance music on rotation inside the club does not feel like my property, and the ritual of synchronous fist-stabbing and head-nodding that chords with the rhythms feels alien to me. We are both outside, it would appear, until NiteFreak, the Zimbabwean DJ, who curates a mesmeric blend of Afro-House, Amapiano, Afrobeats, and coupé-décalé, plays his set; plays '*our*' music.

Later, I reflect over how she does not ask if I am Zimbabwean or Black-British, even though either category would have been plausible, given that specific context. She checks that I am 'African'; then, positions herself, in association, within that broad marker—a gesture made based on deduction, based on the conjecture that I would likely share a preference for NiteFreak's mixes. Afrobeats culture becomes the frame within which she situates what she imagines would be 'our' common identity. As I pointed out in Chapter 5, nearly all my participants talk about Afrobeats in this tone—as *ours*, as African. It is unquestioned, it is (imagined to be) given. Adina, who is Ghanaian and lives in Accra, for example, uses this frame—the language of ownership, of commonality—when I ask her how she might describe Afrobeats:

> Adina: Okay, I would say it's...a style of music that's evolved from our traditional and indigenous music. It's... from our culture and everything...the instruments that we tend to use---maybe, the drums... that rhythm, you get it? Yeah, and most of our music---at least, Afrobeats---across several

> African countries have that in common; like…that's the defining thing, I think. And, also, in our music, there's a lot of…like…our terms, you know? Like…anybody can tell just listening to a song…it's just rhythm with our terms, our jargon, our language, and then our…our experiences

In her visualisation of what the music is, Afrobeats immediately conjures an image of a mutual African reality; a property of indigeneity, where certain artefacts and modes of *being* are assumed to be common. Afrobeats becomes a container for the distinctive cultural/social/linguistic elements of this collective African existence. It is a description that Miranda also offers, when I ask her why she believes Afrobeats embodies 'the African vibe'. Like Adina, she extends her lived experience in Ghana to a broader African collective, with Afrobeats as the medium:

> **Miranda**: …I think Afrobeats is the perfect [laughs] avenue to express that Africanness, and that Africanness is so cool that everybody always wants a part of it, and they use Afrobeats to be a part of it, I guess. They use the love of Afrobeats or looking like the people who make Afrobeats or the people they see in the videos, doing the dances and all of that. They participate in it to be a part of Afrobeats because it's…it makes them feel more African. Personally, it does make me feel more African…because, I used to feel like *abrɔfosɛm*[37] when I used to listen to only European music and all of that…and…honestly, since I started listening to Afrobeats and our African sounds, I have felt more African and Ghanaian…

What becomes immediately available in these generalisations is not only the claim of ownership over the music and its extended representations, but also the tone of conviction with which this 'our' is presented. In opposition to a sense of 'whiteness' that she associates with her long-ago consumption of music she categorises as non-African—music she has always disidentified with—Miranda establishes her sense of Africanness. Afrobeats becomes a container for confirming that Africanness, as it does for Hazel, who, having been born in Jamaica, grew up seeking some form of affirmation for a sense of Africanness that had always seemed just out of reach, always only notional. Amongst friends, who expressed their sense of Africanness, like Miranda describes, through their engagement with Afrobeats culture, Hazel found that affirmation:

> **Hazel**: Yeah. First of all, it made me feel more connected to the continent. To me, it seemed like this far away concept, place I had heard about…made it real for me before I got here…and, then secondly, because I loved it immediately because I was enjoying…because I was going out then…I was going to dances and [chuckles] connecting with the people, for sure, I felt like 'I'm definitely African'…there was no doubt about it. Yeah.

[37] *Abrɔfosɛm* might be described as an Akan colloquialism that loosely translates to 'whiteness'; its usage would be most accurately comparable to the notion of 'acting white' (see Fryer, 2006).

A key observation may be made here. The narratives framed within this sense of conviction might present certain suggestions of an essence; derivatives of Pan-Africanist notions of the 'African spirit' (Garvey, 1986) or the 'African soul' (Nkrumah, 1970). Hazel, for example, later tells me this knowledge of self and the related other is something *"...we can see the results of...but we can't see, touch, feel, the essence, you know? It's like God...for example...like...you can see the existence of God in the world, but you can't...can't hold it. It's one of those things."* It is a framing that can be expected, given Hazel's specific endeavours toward an 'imaginative rediscovery' of a distant self before her encounter with the sounds and vibes of Afrobeats. There is a conviviality in the collective performance of the rituals of engagement—of dance, of connection—and, in the midst of that performance, she identifies traits that she resolves should be attributable to an essence. The essentialist framing she adopts 'offer[s] a way of imposing an imaginary coherence on the experience of dispersal and fragmentation' (Hall, 1991, p.224); particularly, when experiences of displacement outside of the African encounter (in USA and Europe) are made more visible as she settles in Ghana. Angela echoes these sentiments, designating her ability to dance as a mark of an assumed broader distinctive African trait; reiterating, with reference to a popularised quote (often attributed to Kwame Nkrumah), that *"it's simple things like that, chaley. Like that thing we say...it's not just that we are born in Africa; Africa was born in us."* Like Hazel, Angela has Black-Caribbean heritage. Born in Birmingham, she does not claim an Africanness by fact of birth; she does so, as she tells me, by virtue of the traits she believes she possesses—traits she also identifies in the people of Ghana, amongst whom she has lived since she was a toddler, and the African dancers with whom she connects across global Afrodance circuits.

I have discussed, in Chapter 5, how these traits become attributed to the collective; and, in Chapter 7, how they inform certain expectations, which come to validate notions of collective African identity; but, as I also indicated, there is often an attention to the limits of this commonality. Even in their generalising descriptions, most of my participants remain aware of deviation, of the possibility for difference. The notion of the African collective is often generalised; however, the attributes and attitudes that are assumed to be characteristic of that collective are rarely reasoned to be absolute or universal. In her description of Afrobeats, for example, Adina offers a list of the traits and artefacts that she imagines are common properties of an African collective, each of which she qualifies with the possessive 'our'. When I ask her to clarify how she understands the word in that context, she explains:

> Adina: [laughs] ...I mean Africa...right? All Africans... So, when I say 'our', I mean anything from Africa. True, there are some people on the fringes who are not really 'our' [laughs]...some people like Egypt...you don't know where they really are and all that but, generally, there are very, very common things like language and...yeah...same food...

Although there is a definiteness about Adina's visualisation of a bounded African collective, there is also an immediate consideration of those "on the *fringes*"; those that might/do not belong. The certainty with which she characterises the collective is destabilised as she reflects over the histories of ambivalence in the politics of association that certain North African countries have maintained with the continent. Within her reflections on what constitutes Afrobeats, there is little doubt—all of these traits and artefacts are 'ours'; they belong to a certain whole. Beyond Afrobeats, however, there is potential for exception—although it still characterises that certain whole, what constitutes 'our' might not be so certain.

It is a kind of paradox that cuts across all of my conversations. While there is almost always clarity on the distinctiveness of an African collective, the certitude with which my participants describe its features is often loosened outside the frame of Afrobeats culture, as they tend to contemplate, not their own membership within this collective or the category itself, but the full extent of its composition. Across my conversations, after I had pointed out the repeated use of the category 'African' in their descriptions of Afrobeats, I watched as my participants grappled with a simple follow-up question: *who is an African*? Their responses[38] generally started with realisations of the disguised difficulty of the question:

> **Miranda**: [laughs] [pauses]...I [pauses]...good question...emm...it's easy for me to say someone from Africa, yes, but, I think someone who can relate to a particular African-ness or African culture...I don't know...like...you have a set of things that belong to one group that you can really identify with, which is an African group. That's what I would say an African is. So, yeah...[laughs]. Emm...
>
> **Dusk**: [pauses] So, who's an African? Emm...I feel like...I think that an African would be somebody that is from Africa, first of all, and...you know...like...has all the qualities of...you know...uhhhh ...like...the unique qualities of somebody who would come from Africa. Yeah, so...[pauses] [*in pidgin English*] Herh, this question hard! E hard, e hard, e hard. This question hard. [pauses]...
>
> **Angela**: Who is an African? [exclaims]. You [chuckles] really want to go inside. Who is an African? [pauses]...
>
> **Nana Yaw**: [pauses] Wow...what a question! "Who do you think is an African"? [pauses] An African..."who do you think is an African?"...[pauses] So...I would describe myself as an African...
>
> **Zero**: [pauses] [chuckles] Are you serious right now? What do you mean who's an African? Emm...who's an African? [pauses] Okay...hmm...that's a hard question...[pauses] An African, to me, it sounds like---it's gonna sound very dumb---but I was gonna say...

[38] I present, here, raw excerpts from interview transcripts to illustrate the processes of contemplation and the comparative struggle to articulate what the category 'African' meant outside of the frame of Afrobeats.

They all, of course, go on to articulate who they think should belong within this bounded category; however, the struggle to arrive at that finished thought revealed the taken-for-grantedness with which they constructed their understanding of the African collective within the frame of Afrobeats culture. This was common across most of my conversations. My participants are African; this is clear to them. The category of 'African' exists, distinct from other categories, and it is not one that needs additional thought. What requires a rethinking is who else belongs within that category; who makes up that collective besides the populations that are generally similar to who my participants think they themselves are. There are often certain exceptions, articulations of which emerge, as I will discuss in further detail in the next section, within the mechanisms of *boundarying* that organise the meanings underlying notions and modes of *belonging*.

"You come from here, but does it come from you?": *boundarying* and the dynamics of contestation

I have, so far, demonstrated how Afrobeats culture becomes a frame within which a collective identity becomes reasoned as self-evident, and how, within that frame, the sense of Africanness is articulated with certain degrees of conviction. I have also shown how this conviction is disrupted when the notions of collective Africanness are reconsidered outside of the frame of Afrobeats, or, more generally, as an abstract category. We know that collective identity is, in part, constituted through processes of differentiation that emerge within a group (Jenkins, 1996; Lamont, 2009). As I have pointed out, the disruptions in conviction often occur as meanings of *belonging* are reordered; in the negotiations of exception; in contemplations over the extents and the dynamics of commonality. I have said that it is often within these processes that the boundaries, within and across which meanings of collective identity come to *hold*, are revealed. In this section, I discuss, in further detail, these processes of *boundarying*, and demonstrate how they may mark out the (assumed) distinctive contours of a collective Africanness.

In thinking through the constituent elements of what they imagined to be an African collective, as they processed its meanings, my participants often settled on their definitions following processes of elimination. While evaluating what precisely would constitute the collective, they also reorganised the requirements for membership within that collective, based predominantly on logics of solidarity, of who claims that collective as their own. Like Adina, who understood the African collective in oppositional terms to those "*on the fringes*", others also made sense of the collective by evoking

vernacular histories of North African politics of association with the continent. This was, for example, articulated in Esi's definition of who an African is:

> Esi: I think it's first defined by their geography. Then, the next thing would be...their kinship with the continent. If you take a group of North Africans...because, it would be naive to say that not all of them... a lot of them do say that...like enough of them have said it that other people can reference it. So, as for the geographical fact, it's objective---you're from an African country. Now, as to whether you feel the kinship with the Africa, where you'd put in the... "I'm not African because I was born in Africa; Africa..."; whether you feel an attachment to the Africanness, that one shows how African you are at heart… do you really feel connected to the continent? That's how I see it; you come from here, but does it come from you?

First, the requirement of relationality that Esi emphasises is highlighted in many of the definitions other participants offer. Zero, for example, believes an African is "*someone that's from Africa, of course, but like...I feel like African means someone that is not...ashamed, yeah?, of where they're from and they push wherever they're from within the boundaries of Africa.*" Here, an understanding of what the collective Africanness means is built within an interactional mechanism, wherein the social boundaries (the institutionalised geopolitical borders) and the symbolic boundaries (of relationality) come to codetermine meaning. The social boundary provides a starting point for containing the extent of membership—that is, people within (or, in other participant definitions, also connected to) the geopolitical landmass of Africa—whereas the symbolic boundaries rearrange the criteria for membership, even for those included by geography. There is an outer symbolic boundary (everyone that unashamedly feels a connection to the continent) that is imbued with relative clarity, where the inner symbolic boundary (North Africans, for example, but only the many who have rejected associations with the continent) might not. The outer boundary is made sense of by reorganising the meanings of who might or might not *belong*.

It is a dynamic that emerges in online discussions as well. The meanings that constitute a collective Africanness are often renegotiated in moments of pushback against dissociative narratives and practices that typically originate from persons, entities, or groups that may be identified as North African. There is a resistance, here, to a history of ambivalence (and, sometimes, of disparagement) in North African relationality with sub-Saharan Africa; and, in that resistance, there is an affirmation of a collective Africanness that reimagines the inclusion of those within the North African region thought to be already actively maintaining a disassociation. In Figure 24.1, for example, a user tweets screenshots of comments posted under selected Afrobeats videos on YouTube to illustrate this ambivalence; a kind of duality, where those labelled as North African are thought to exhibit selectiveness in the moments they choose to assert a collective African identity. In this case, the "*North Africans, remember, they're African*" only in attachment to Afrobeats culture, to its cultural value

(which, in another vein, might validate notions of Afrobeats as a kind of unifier). The tweet is in reaction to a quote from a post-match interview in which football player, Sofiane Boufal, following the Moroccan national team's victory in the 2022 World Cup quarterfinals, dedicates that victory to "*all Arab people*". The backlash, besides being contextualised in the existing histories of North African disengagements from the continent (Mazrui, 1987), was also because Morocco had originally qualified to the World Cup as an African team. This duality is also captured in Figure 24.2. In a tweet, a user, who appears to self-categorise within the North African group, points out the problematic nature of North African engagement with Afrobeats culture while concerns of anti-Black racism persist, criticising the selectiveness of engaging with notions of a collective Africanness only when there is cultural value to be exploited.

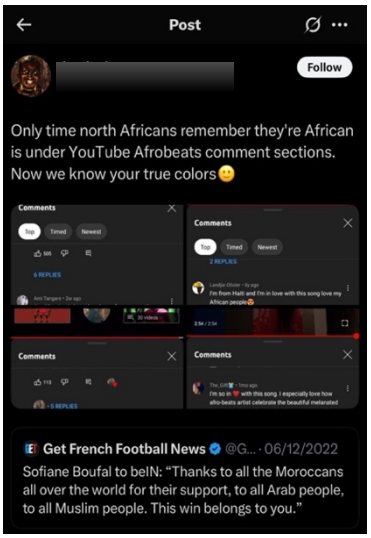

Figure 24. 1

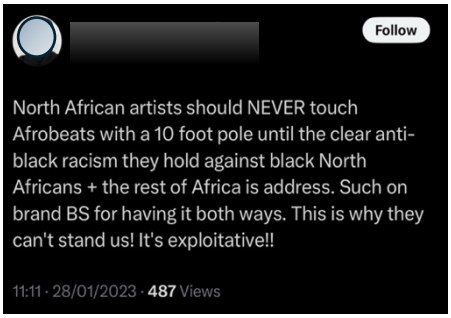

Figure 24. 2

In both tweets, a second inner boundary emerges—the boundary of race. Reactions to Boufal's construction of "*all the Moroccans*" as Arab predominantly sought to mark it as an(other) act of detachment from an African collective. Questions of North African participation in Afrobeats production often evoke discussions around the problematic of anti-Blackness across that region. Perhaps unintendedly, however, these also outline the perceived layers of the racial composition of the African collective. In both cases, there is the latent separation of those constructed as Black and those constructed as Arab; although, in both instances, the notions of a collective Africanness still *hold*. The outer boundary—the one that encapsulates the African collective—is still thought to be constituted by both layers. Although the layer encoded with meanings relating to an Arab racial category is recognised as also belonging elsewhere—a separate collective identity—it is only not 'truly' or sufficiently African under certain conditions. The North African category of identification is not completely removed, but the conditions of its inclusion within the collective become reorganised.

Here, we might observe two things. First, the outer boundary of the collective African identity is separated from the one thought to differentiate an Arab collective, but there are overlaps. Either boundary might be crossed; however, as might be seen in the two tweets, inclusion within the African collective for those that might also belong elsewhere becomes contingent on certain conditions of kinship and of relationality, and movement across those outer boundaries is not entirely fluid, as Boufal, who later offered a public apology, might have come to learn. Second, we might make certain inferences concerning the somewhat obscured presence, in these narratives, of those within the dissociative group, who may have a claim toward articulating an attachment to the notion of a collective Africanness. In the second tweet (Figure 24.2), this is intimated in the demarcation of those who might be categorised as Black North Africans and, more subtly, those who address matters of anti-Blackness within the group coded as non-Black. Also, although the screenshots in the first tweet (Figure 24.1) were deployed as part of the process of reorganising the meanings underlying the conditions of inclusion, we might consider the possibility that the users in those comments may merely have been members within the dissociative group, who simply articulated their notions of a collective Africanness within the frame of Afrobeats. The conceivability of the existence of such a subset is often lost in the affects of reciprocal rejection (see Schmitt et al., 2014), as might be illustrated by a separate trending conversation on the subject, following the elimination of the North African teams from the 2024 African Cup of Nations tournament.

The general response to these eliminations was of satisfaction, with most of the reactions including video memes (see Figure 25.1 and Figure 25.2) that were originated within celebratory contexts relating to Afrobeats cultural engagement and its attendant vibes. Here, the memes, which involved depictions of synchronised Black joy, were deployed to mark a racial dynamic, a kind of affirmation of the assumed solidarity among the Black African populations coded as "*original*". These were, of course, in reaction to Boufal's framing months prior. In these acts of reciprocal rejection of "*all the Arab count[r]ies*", persons from those countries who identified with a collective African consciousness were not accounted for. There is typically some resistance, however; albeit somewhat subdued. In reply to the generalisation and in rejection of the differentiation implicit in the first tweet (Figure 25.1), for instance, a user from Morocco affirms their attachment to a collective African identity in an ensuing conversation (Figure 25.3) that attracts others who share this position. In the conversation, although there is an acknowledgement of the dominant dissociative perspective, different sub-layers of that North African layer are revealed, and there is a distancing from the "racists" with whom they "*might share a region but we're not the same*".

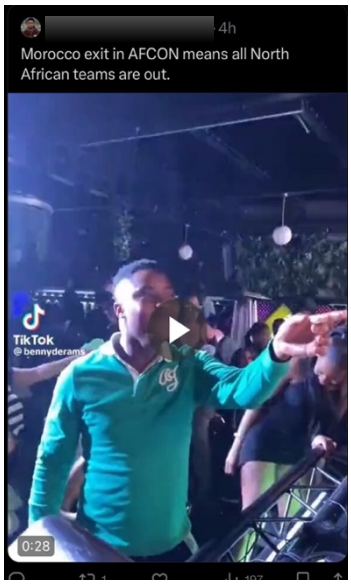

Figure 25. 1

Figure 25. 2

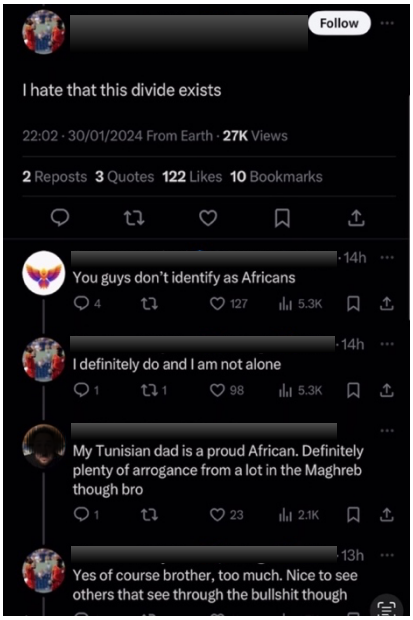

Figure 25. 3a

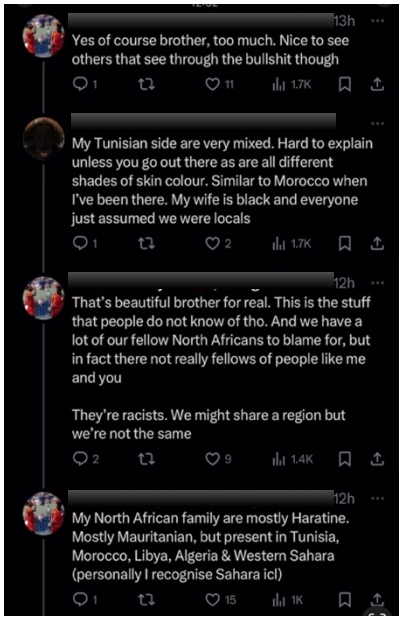

Figure 25. 3b

In their accounts of personal connections and experiences of diversity within their region—that is, mentions of the ethnic diversity of their "*North African family*" or their "*Tunisian side*"—there is also a delineation of various sub-layers within the North African group, which inadvertently reproduces existing racialisations of those populations. However, it offers

additional perspective into the potential separations of African as one identity position and Arab as a separate one. We might see, here, as I suggested in my theoretical discussion in Chapter 3, how a collective African identity might contain different racial and geopolitical modalities. Although it is predominantly constructed as belonging to a separate identity position, the Arab racial category is also included within the conception of an African collective, as would be, for instance, the case for a "*Tunisian dad*" who "*is a proud African*" or for those "*under YouTube Afrobeats comments sections*". Still, even in these cases, the conditions of inclusion are present— there must be some form of relationality and a reciprocal rejection of those who have shown themselves to be "*racists*"; there must be some articulation of a kinship, an affinity towards what becomes inadvertently coded as the default African.

This reveals the complex meanings that underlie the inner boundary of race, which, across my conversations, emerge in direct and indirect ways. First, this constructed default African is Black. Most of my participants articulate this directly; but, while many are categorical that this defaultness also constitutes a totality—that is, that only Black people can be African—there are others who, upon contemplation, offer an expanded racial composition of the African collective, as they construct it. Esi, for example, articulates this when she begins to reflect over the question of who an African might be. She becomes aware of the normativity of Blackness within her conception of Africanness and readjusts her thinking in real time as she reconciles the expanses of the collective Africanness she had been articulating until that point in our conversation. This was also observable, albeit more indirectly, in Senu's response to the same question:

> Esi: I'll admit...when I hear 'African' [snaps fingers] the first thing I think of is Blackness. Then, I stop...then, if let's say I have to really give an answer, then I have to say wait...not all Africans are Black. I have to remember that it's not just people who look like me. We have...like...the most diverse continent. Then, I remember that...yeah...not all Africans look like me, actually. But...when I hear 'African'...I would immediately think of myself. If I saw...a Tunisian person saying [mumbles] I'd say "oh yeah, he's African". It wouldn't immediately occur to me but, once it occurs to me, I would be like "yeah, he *is* African also". They are also Africans...yeah...whether they like it or not. That's the real controversy [laughs].

> Senu: An African is...[pauses] an African is a Black person...born in Africa and...how do I even put it?...yes, an African is a Black person born in Africa...and it's...it's...I think I'll take back my 'Black person'...an African is anyone that's born in Africa or has a relation that is African.

There is an openness, here, in Esi's inclusion of the North African group in her conception of the collective Africanness that might illustrate its *holdingness*. The margins of the collective identity are not adjusted; they still encapsulate all who are connected to the continent, even if certain groups tend to remain dissociative. Although not predominant across

my conversations, there were a few similar positions; a few constructions (of the clearly defined outer boundary) of the collective African identity that removed optionality for racial categories that, as Esi put it, *"...can trace their ancestry several times over to Africa..."*

Ancestry was a key concern within these perspectives; there was often, in variable descriptions, an attention to histories of settlement of other racial groups whose presence was constructed as justifiable; other racial groups, for the most part, except for whites. Again, Esi, who has lived all her life in Accra, articulates this when she explains that "*the people who are here who do not look like us...those of us who are in sub-Saharan Africa and a lot of North Africans can trace their history to the land here...but Dutch people cannot...*" While these perspectives did generally exclude whiteness, there were a few other constructions that were more open to its inclusion. When, for example, I asked Senu why he had altered his initial answer, he said, without the same tone of hesitance, that it was because "*...there are whites as well who can also have relations...so, I won't just single it to Black people*." Even in his open inclusion, the condition of relationality was salient. Among those that included whiteness in their conceptions of Africanness, this condition for inclusion almost always followed. In their reflections over who they might consider to be African, for instance, Dizzie and Araba, who both live in London, did not only require kinship, they also believed some degree of assimilation was necessary:

> Dizzie: [pauses]. Huh? Who's an African? [pauses]...okay, I was gonna say anyone who was born in Africa but no...I think if your heritage is from Africa... if you've lived there, you have connections there, yeah, I think anyone could be African...I don't think it should be based on the skin colour or whether you were born there or not, yeah...why can't someone who celebrates Africa, live their way, they have their kids there, and not call themselves an African? You have to have some sort of affiliation, I think, to say that you're African. I can't have lived all my life here as a white person and say I'm African. However, I could be white, and...I've lived in Ghana, I've experienced Ghana; maybe, I got married to a Ghanaian woman or Ghanaian man; I've had kids who are...mixed; so, yeah, you have to have some sort of affiliation.

> Araba: [pauses] Who is an African? That's a big question. Well...I want to say, if you were born in Africa, you're African but, sometimes, it doesn't work that way. Sometimes... just the fact that you were born from, maybe, Black parents can automatically make you African... you're African by birth...I don't know if I should say someone can become African just because they're...like...of a different race and then they've decided to...you know...learn something about Africa and then follow that culture...I don't know if you can say Africanness is like that but...if you believe the things we believe and do what we do, someone can say you're African, even if you are white... So, I think you can be born as an African, but you can also...adopt the African system as yours.

In these perspectives, there is also a separation of whiteness as a racial layer from whiteness as its own distinct collective. People who might be categorised as racially white, who have settled in Africa, and/or created bonds of kinship within the continent and/or assimilated to the culture (which, again, is made collective here), are separated from those that can/have not. It is a logic of acceptance on condition of assimilation that also emerges, for example, in considerations of Arab or (South) Asian inclusion within the conception of a collective Africanness. In this separation, we might observe the integrations of race and ethnicity (Brubaker, 2009), where those which are constructed as distinct racial categories might also, sometimes, be articulated as ethnic strata. This ethnic perspective, of course, might fit within the conceptual assumptions of what Anthony Appiah calls a 'Pan-Africanism without racism' (1992, p.ix), but it also obscures histories of settler-colonialism, which was the core factor for those among my participants who totalised Blackness as Africanness and categorically excluded whiteness. Race is a fiction, of course; but, as I have highlighted in my theoretical discussion, it has material implications for especially those racialised as Black in an experientially negrophobic world. For most of my participants that self-identify within this category, histories of structural and symbolic anti-Black violences—what Hazel describes as "*the struggle [of] being taken and then fighting to find a place...*"—become permanent barriers to any form of inclusion of whiteness within their notions of Africanness. Miranda, for example, tells me that Blackness is Africanness because anti-Blackness is often at the core of prejudicial framings of and attitudes against Africanness:

> **Miranda**: ...I don't know if I would say a white person is an African even if they grew up here and still had that...you know...feeling and that they followed the trends and the ideologies of a certain African culture...I don't know if I would say they are African; so, maybe, skin colour too has a lot to do with it for me...yeah...skin colour, definitely, and swag... because, I feel like I see some Black people or some Africans and they're a little more white [chuckles] than African...yeah...[laughs].
>
> **Researcher**: So, you believe that Africanness is Blackness?
>
> **Miranda**: Yeah, I do. I really do believe Africanness is Blackness...because, Africanness involves a lot of things, including...the prejudice that we experience, right?... and I feel like, if you are white ... you wouldn't experience exactly what a Black African experience is... it's a little different and I wouldn't say you are African.

Miranda's viewpoint is not an isolated one. Nearly all of my participants, at various points in our conversations, came to contend with these dynamics of racial inequality; and, while some were open to softening the boundaries on white inclusion under the condition of assimilation and kinship, most were impelled further to entrench those boundaries. There are, in these perspectives, undercurrents of Pan-Africanist thinking or what has been identified as the common oppression theory (see Shelby, 2002). While mobilising universalised notions of Black struggle as a basis for validating a collective identity, these perspectives also authenticate what critics might label as homogenised notions of Blackness,

based largely on mythologies and representations of what might be called the Black aesthetic (see Raengo, 2023). Here, Blackness becomes synonymised with Africanness because of universalised sets of attributes and attitudes, especially of Black cool (or Afro-cool as I have discussed in Chapter 3), associated with a global Blackness. This becomes the anchoring point of the second dimension of Miranda's conception of Africanness; one that is repeated across some of my other conversations. Miranda emphasises "*swag*" as an African (and Black) attribute that is inaccessible in and to whiteness, and that encapsulates the various embodied traits that mark the aesthetics of Afro-Atlantic cool (Thompson, 2011). The degree of authenticity of one's Africanness would, within this logic, be assessed based on the traits they exhibit; and the less cool those traits appear, the closer to whiteness they are conjectured to be. Again, we may observe the logics of 'acting white', which, here, is a manifestation of an inversion of 'the "us" and "them" dichotomy' (hooks, 1995, p.68), an oppositional construction of Black aesthetic as cool against the uncool of whiteness, fixing Blackness not just as racial, but also as cultural.

This inversion extends, as well, beyond the vectors of cool. There are also differentiations made in the quotidian, in the modes of everyday living, through narratives informed by what bell hooks calls 'a critical ethnographic gaze' (hooks, 1992, p.339). These narratives are often rooted in a kind of phenomenological analysis of their own knowledges and navigations of worlds that are designed for and with whiteness as norm. My exchange with Angela, whose Caribbean heritage becomes an unintended fulcrum for our conversation, reveals how she constructs her Africanness as Blackness in opposition to what she observes to be everyday whiteness:

> **Angela**: Who is an African? [pauses]. I think all Black people are Africans. Yeah. For sure. Like…one way or…you might be mixed somewhere…but, if you are Black, you're African. That's what I believe…
>
> **Researcher**: Are you African?
>
> **Angela**: I believe I am, yes. I wouldn't even say…I would never go and sit somewhere and say I'm Caribbean…no, I'm African…like…
>
> **Researcher**: Okay, what would you say makes you African?
>
> **Angela**: …My skin colour, my hair, my way of life, my way of thinking, my principles…my [pauses]…my everyday life. Realistically, I don't live like a Caucasian; I don't do the things that Caucasians can do…as simple as just jumping in a swimming pool…I don't do that. If my hair is not done, I'm not doing it [laughs], do you get me? And that…that makes me African [laughs].

Again, the matter of her Africanness is never actually in question. There is a definiteness with which she asserts it, while also contending with the conceivability of her Caribbeanness, which, here, becomes a kind of inner boundary; one which is more easily dissolved into the collective Africanness she constructs. What becomes clearly marked is the outer boundary that disarticulates her from whiteness. It is a boundary she forms, based on 'facts, observations, psychoanalytic readings of the white "Other."' (hooks, 1992, p.338), that also relies on the generalised attributes of an imagined Black collective. While they might extend certain undertones of homogenisation, her generalisations are informed by not only her own lived experience, but also those of the other racialised Black people she comes into relation with. As has been clarified elsewhere (see, for example, Gates, 2012), these generalisations are not without substance. Although not comprising a monolith, Black people '*are* a community'; and its members 'talk to each other and…about each other' (Gates, 2012, p.xv), and often also barter anecdotes about the non-Black encounter. It is this colloquial knowledge that becomes the comparative with which a collective Africanness (read as Blackness) becomes clarified, and against which whiteness becomes reasoned as incompatible. For both Angela and Hazel, who have Caribbean heritage, Blackness (into which they are both positioned to subsume their Caribbeanness) is not just an entry into a collective Africanness, it is the very definition of that collective. The meanings attached to Blackness, therefore, become the basis for solidifying the outer boundary between an African collective and a separate one designated to the category of whiteness; and the more these meanings are (re)produced in their everyday encounters with whiteness, the more likely that that boundary and the meanings that define the collective it encloses might *hold*.

Also, Angela's conception of her Africanness reveals a related dimension to this configuration of *boundarying*, wherein Blackness becomes centralised, and whiteness becomes excluded. It is a dimension that is built on what Fanon (2008, p.91) calls 'a historico-racial schema'; or, as Stuart Hall reads it, an 'alternative corporeal schema' that the Black subject builds from a 'thousand details, anecdotes, and stories' (2024, p.115). Like many others, Angela constructs her sense of Africanness on and within corporeality—on skin and hair, but also on their interactions with and within the world. It is a sort of reverse epidermalization (Fanon, 2008), that revalorises (by repurposing racist framings of) Black corporeality towards self-affirmation, and becomes a frame of meaning for the reconstruction of the perceived and lived differences between Africanness and whiteness. Blackness, then, might be understood as both racial and cultural (Hall, 2024). It often becomes intertwined with Africanness; becomes defined *as* Africanness—exemplified, for example, when Angela tries to explain why she considers whiteness to be dissimilar to Africanness:

> **Angela**: I just feel like to be African is...like...not everyone can be African. It's really...it's truly a blessing...like...we have types of hair. My hair is 4C hair. I have one of the most coarse hair types in the world. A white person...an average white person's hair is...1 or 2A, I think, yeah? Mine is

> 4C. 2A can only be straightened and curled to look like 3C, probably…but 4C can be straightened to look like 1, then curled to look like 2 and 3…but nobody can get to 4 and that is the same way Black people are…like…Black people are 4C hair and nobody can dance like us; nobody can talk like us…

Here, Angela references what is widely identified as the Andre Walker hair typing system (see Moody et al, 2022), which she implicates within a certain racial schema. Attributing certain hair textures as markers of Blackness, and, by extension, Africanness, she replicates broader significations of Black femininity associated with natural hair (Sobande, 2019). This, then, becomes a framing within which meanings attached to other social and cultural attributes that are often assigned to a Black collective can be validated. In this instance, assumptions of the collective natural adroitness at dance (which, as I have delineated in Chapter 5, are rooted in conceptions of the *everywhereness*) become central to a demarcation of Blackness from whiteness. These meanings inform notions of Blackness *as* Africanness; and they come to *hold* because, Angela and others she comes into relation with are able to situate the social and cultural ways in which they exist in the world within what they construct (or observe) to be analogous ways of *belonging* among populations racialised as Black. Often, this is articulated as though embodied, as though it were a different way of *being*, only enunciable through Black corporeality. There is, for example, embodied modes of greeting such as the nod (see Jones, 2017) or even our ritual of brotherhood—the walk-up and the half-lean, mutually recognisable cues heralding the dap, and the transitory interlock and snap of our fingers afterwards—that is almost tagged onto both Hardy's and my skin. It affirms our sense of Black cool, as it becomes *the* way to carry our masculine African selves. And that masculinity itself is another way that Blackness is carried *as* Africanness.

At the celebration following the naming ceremony for his newborn son, Yaw, the taxi driver I follow in Accra, boasts that he has now provided proof of his virility as an African man. I have to catch up, he jokes. He is sure, he conjectures, that I get all the women in London, and insists "*ɛsɛ sɛ wo kyerɛ ɔmo sɛ wo yɛ bibini o; ɛsɛ sɛ wo kyerɛ ɔmo sɛ wo yɛ bɛrema kantinka* [translated: you must show them that you are Black; you must show them that you are a virile man]". There are multiple layers to his masculinity, of course; but, in that context, Yaw constructs his masculinity within the frame of the hyper-eroticised virile Black man. It is one of the most common stereotypes employed in simplistic reductions of African masculinity (see Ammann & Staudacher, 2020); however, while I observe as Yaw grinds[39] with his partner to Sarkodie's

[39] (In the Ghanaian context) A close partner dance that typically involves slow synchronous movements of the pelvic area, and that is marked by sensuality and, usually, intimacy. Often, in parlance, the verb 'grind' is followed by the preposition 'on', which may, at times, suggest this is something one partner does to the other. I use 'with', here, because the instances of grinding I observed were predominantly consensual and reciprocal.

'*Anadwo*'[40], it occurs to me how that trope predominates representations of the African man, even in Afrobeats (Rens, 2021). Here, Blackness does not just become equated to Africanness, there is also a separation of both from whiteness, tying into the racialised conception of the well-endowed Black man that further epidermalises difference (Fanon, 2008). There are, in this framing, replications of certain hetero-patriarchal logics of masculinity, where manliness is measured by or thought to be actualisable through sexual prowess, and women are positioned only as objects to be gratified or overwhelmed. Critiques of such logics are accurate and well-established. The hypersexualised masculinity at the centre of these logics, however, does not always wholly render invisible, African women's agency in their assertions of their heteronormative sexual desire and desirability (Rens, 2021). With care to avoid generalisations and to not make the suggestion that gendered violence is not (re)produced in these places, I want to recognise that, across my observations, the African women within the limited purview of my subjective ethnographic gaze across Afrobeats cultural places, appeared often to 'possess notable authority over their bodies, and…embody…desirability in ways that [might] be read as empowering…' (Rens, 2023, p.532)[41]. Observations of this assertiveness were usually made in contexts of dance and in self-fashioning choices.

At a house party in West Green, the playlist is shuffling old Afrobeats classics. In the middle of the dimly lit living room, Rayla and a group of her friends are dancing in a small huddle, and they start to slow whine[42], when the hook to Major Lazer's '*Particula'* transitions in. "*I like you, girl, in particular; you in particular. I like your waist in particular*" charges the room with an infectious energy. There is a group of three men a few feet away from them. One of the women glides over toward the men and pulls one of them aside and she initiates a grind. The pair dances together for the rest of the night. As the women review their night while waiting for their Uber to arrive, Rayla's friend confesses that she had found the man attractive, and she had grown tired of waiting for him to make a move. It is as though the men of their generation are all afraid to make the first move, Rayla jokes. The women agree. "*I give you green light tire,*"[43] one of them sings, to the group's hilarity.

[40]"*Anadwo*" [translated: 'Night'] is an Afrobeats song (featuring King Promise), which details a consensual love affair, relying on connotations of the virile male sexually overwhelming his partner.

[41] Like Rens (2023), I want to be cautious in my analysis so to avoid the 'tendency towards infantilising (thereby, disempowering) women through simplistic discourses of gender oppressions' (p.532), where their sexual assertiveness and body autonomy may be disregarded or obscured.

[42] A dance move that involves circular movements of the waist, usually in synchronicity with the rhythm of the music. Can be partnered or performed solo.

[43] A lyric in the Afrobeats song, '*Joromi*', by Simi. The pidgin English phrase suggests: 'I have long given you the green light, and I have now exhausted all the ways through which I might communicate it'.

As has been found elsewhere (see Muñoz-Laboy et al., 2007), close partner dance situations were often milieus wherein women challenged hypermasculine privilege and asserted their bodily autonomy (Rens, 2021). It was the norm, across my observations, to find women deploying various strategies of control over mostly heteronormative interactions within the admittedly safeguarded places that my participants elected to go to. Across space, the women I followed tended to show an assertiveness in the visible sensuality they carried on their (e)motive bodies, and often extended this through certain material dress elements that were curated to function as significations of their sexuality. As Miranda tells me of her fashion choices on nights out, the objective is to feel good about one's body and to express one's sensuality in ways that appeal to one's own self. Her miniskirts are never for the benefit of men, she insists; "*African women are naturally sexy, so it wouldn't even matter what we wore, anyway*". Stacey's reasoning is similar. Her crop-tops and her waist beads represent her Africanness, but she also selects them to say something about how she feels about herself. African women wear them, she jokes, because "*the beads show we are hot babes with cutesy waists… we're thicc in the right places, you know? They enhance the curves…and it also helps to make sure our waists stay snatched*[44]".

Both women project the adornments as signifiers of a specific image of African corporeality—that of the slim-thicc Black woman. Lending to the often hypersexualised, but historically and culturally favoured, ideal of African femininity (Bhana & Basi, 2025), the slim-thicc aesthetic is deployed, here, as a collective trait of Black female corporeality and sensuality. That body type, normative (and, at times, even deified) in African cultures prior to the colonial encounter (Razak, 2016), has become revalorised in resistance to colonial and Western racist projects of exoticisation and denigration of the Black female form, across African contexts (Bhana & Basi, 2025) and African diasporic contexts (Hughes, 2020). It, however, also imagines a monolithic Black femininity (Hughes, 2020), which marginalises other femininities and bodies, while also entrenching certain meanings that contribute to the construction of a broader African collective as exclusively Black. In both Stacey's and Miranda's deployments of the aesthetic, there is an indirect articulation of a distinction between the "*naturally sexy*" figure of the Black woman and, collaterally, the 'less-endowed' one of the non-Black woman—which, archetypically, would be the hegemonic image of the thin white woman. Here, an inner boundary emerges; built on the dominant representation of Black femininity across multiple geographies of Blackness (see, for example, Gentles-Peart, 2024; Gordon, 2019). As images of this aesthetic continue to circulate via Afrobeats culture across space, the thicc Black woman also becomes *the* epitomic (re)presentation of the African woman, stabilising meanings that build into constructions of Blackness *as* Africanness. Stacey and Miranda come to recognise, in that dominant representation, their own body type; and, because it is imagined to be *everywhere* the way most (if not all) African women look, it becomes

[44] Here, Stacey references the slim-thicc (or slim-thick) body ideal: a slender waist, wide curvy hips, full thighs, and a rounded derriere.

rationalised as the embodiment of African beauty. The meanings come to *hold*, and an outer boundary of race—and, therefore, a specific framing of a Black African collective femininity—is clarified, valorised, and reinforced.

As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, validation for these significations is often situated within Afrobeats culture. Miranda, for example, affirms her dress sense in the fashion styles she observes in Afrobeats videos and in the curated dress style of female Afrobeats stars (such as Ayra Starr). Stacey also identifies the depictions of adornments (such as waist beads) in Afrobeats music videos as representations of a sensuality and desirability she reads as distinctly African. Waist beads, in particular, were frequently at the centre of online discussions that demonstrated the processes of meaning-making through which these boundaries were constructed. In Figure 26.1, for instance, a Ghanaian-American TikTok creator contributes to the recurrent discourse on how waist beads must be worn, which emerges across social media, usually in reaction to representations in Afrobeats videos, in which the beads are often exposed. Using the 'African auntie'[45] trope, she suggests, as do others in the comments, that they should be hidden underneath clothing. Other users offer further validation for generalisations that position waist beads as the property of an African collective. One user, for example, confirms that they are worn among the Kavongo of Namibia, in the way that the creator suggests that they should; and another suggests there are similar significations within Caribbean culture. Certain adornments and artefacts are framed as properties of an African collective, and an outer boundary becomes enforced, when (in Figure 26.2) an Asian woman is considered to have appropriated these artefacts. Here, again, the African collective is indirectly constructed as Black, as the Asian woman is assumed to belong within a separate collective. Further illustrating the contours of this boundary, there seems to be less discomfort around a separate incident, when an African-American woman posted screenshots of a conversation with US basketball star, Zion Williamson, in which he had asked her to wear waist beads for an arranged sexual encounter. In Figure 26.3, a user comments on the controversy, framing waist beads as the property of a collective African culture, and suggesting that Afrobeats was responsible for its popularity among African Americans. Because she is (read as) Black, ownership is extended; and the focus diverts from appropriation (both of which I discuss in the next section), falling rather on the permeation of African culture and on the sexuality waist beads are thought to stimulate.

[45] Caricaturised representations of what (typically) diasporic creators imagine older African women look/behave like, in their enforcements of cultural norms or in the manifestations of their embodied Africanisms.

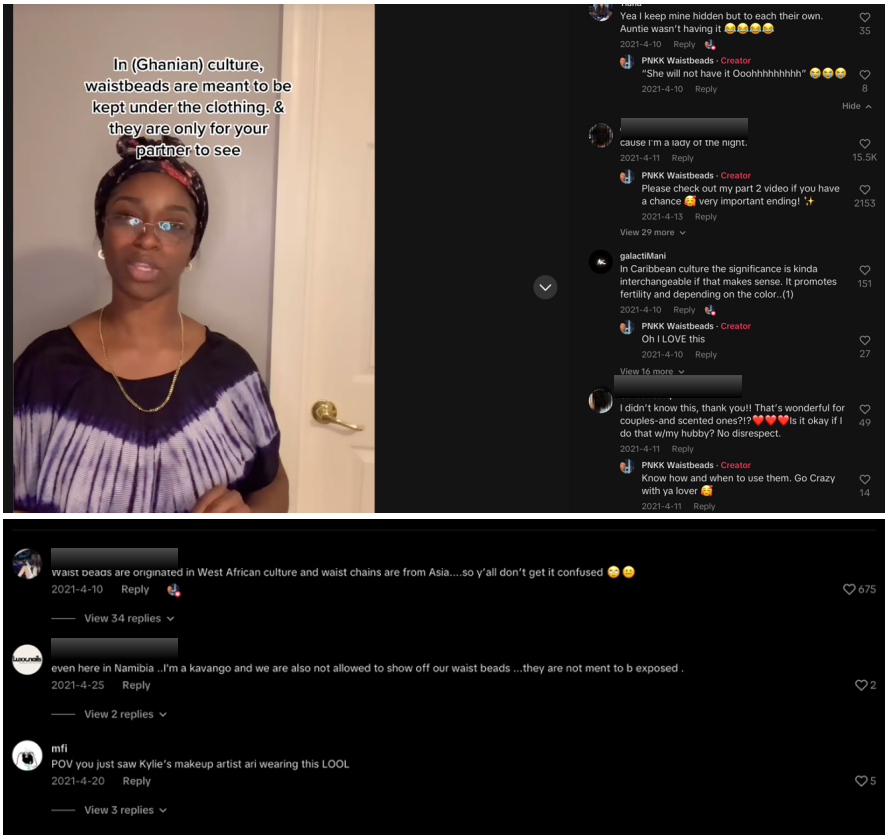

Figure 26. 1

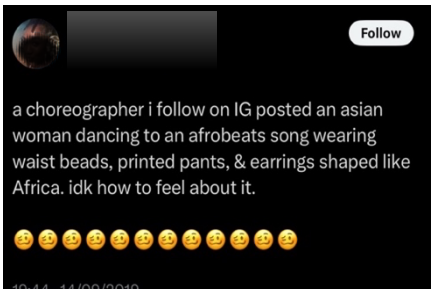

Figure 26. 2

Figure 26. 3

We might see, in these characterisations of a Black femininity and a Black masculinity, how conceptions of race might intersect with those of gender and sexuality (Collins, 2004). Often at the core of these characterisations are assumptions of certain pronouncements in Black corporeality that not only reflect heteronormative constructions of gender, but also could be viewed as reproducing a kind of essentialism. A specific form of physical desirability becomes attributed to all Black women, who all are imagined to possess specific cisgendered features. Their sexuality becomes implicated as 'the

actual spoils of war' in the all-conquering project of sexual virility of all Black men, who also are reduced to their muscles and giant phalli (Collins, 2004, p.151). In the context of their reductionisms, these generalisations are essentialist. In their own cultural contexts, however, they produce meanings that differ from those underlying the racist essentialisms that segregate Blackness from whiteness, based chiefly on constructions of Black corporeality as site for sexual deviance (Collins, 2004). These generalisations are produced within projects of revalorisation, in opposition to racist constructions of Blackness as aesthetically inferior or undesirable; and, as I demonstrated earlier in this section, the boundaries they construct are not always wholly exclusionary. Although constructed largely in dichotomous frames (usually, as Blackness in opposition to whiteness) conceptions of race within constructions of a collective Africanness are contradictory; and, as I will show in the next section, even conceptions of Blackness are not left uncontested.

Ownership, appropriation, cohesion: boundarying and the dynamics of contestation

At various points, I have suggested that, although the collective framing of an African *being* and *belonging* that I attempt to understand in this thesis might be generalist, there is also often an awareness of exception, that becomes central to contestations over the contours of these notions of collectiveness. In this section, I discuss some of these contestations, recognising that, instructive for the processes of *boundarying* that scaffold notions of this collective African identity, is a sense of ownership over Afrobeats culture and the space within which it circulates. Here, I discuss how ownership might inform notions of authenticity, and regulate resistances to acts of appropriation, of dilution, and of commodification. I consider the inner boundaries that emerge as this sense of ownership is contested across space, demonstrating how they shift in context as outer boundaries become entrenched.

Across my observations, the collective framing of the ownership of Afrobeats *was* predominant; however, it was not without internal processes of contestation. These contestations were typically in reaction to what seemed to be perceived as exhibitions of (especially Nigerian) exceptionalism. In Figure 27.1, for example, Nigerian Afrobeats star, Tems, attempts to clear up suggestions made on *The Breakfast Club*, a popular US radio/podcast show, that Afrobeats is South African music. In her attempt at rectification, Tems declares that Afrobeats is Nigerian music. There is backlash, which revigorates perennial debates over the origins of Afrobeats, wherein claims (typically from Nigerians) of Afrobeats' origins in Afrobeat—the highlife/funk/jazz fusion originated by Nigerian icon, Fela Kuti—are disputed (see Figure 27.2,

for an example). The debates are often widespread, and often recur when the origins of different elements of Afrobeats culture are brought into question. Figure 27.3, for example, features contributions to a separate debate that emerged following anxieties over an Apple Music Amapiano playlist that featured Nigerian artist, Davido, as its cover artist, which was viewed by the South African commentators as a move to obscure the South African origins of the music genre. In a separate context, while asserting their own ownership claims over Afrobeats music (Figure 27.2), a Ghanaian user references this view, suggesting that, while they try to appropriate it, Amapiano is not the property of Nigerian artists. A Ghanaian user finds the humour in these acts of appropriation, referencing a debate between Afrobeats artist, Davido, and Amapiano artist, DJ Maphorisa, on claims of Nigerian influence on the global popularity of Amapiano (see Figure 27.4).

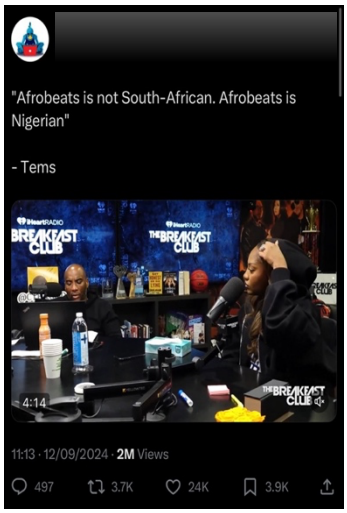

Figure 27. 1

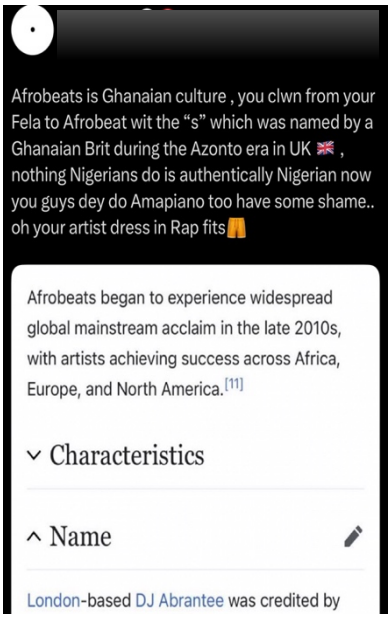

Figure 27. 1

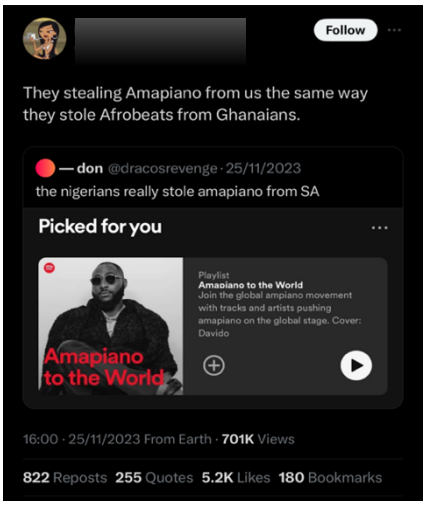

Figure 27. 3

Figure 27. 4

The processes of identification underlying senses of ownership are often expressed in intimate, subjective ways; in ways that often implicate affective and aesthetic dimensions of control (Toynbee et al. 2016). In contestations of ownership claims, we might observe the affective dimensions of control in contentions over origination and in the anxieties around dispossession. In both Figure 27.2 and Figure 27.3, for example, we observe the affective language deployed in placing into question the originality of Nigerian contribution to Afrobeats culture, with claims of theft (in Figure 27.2, "*you guys dey do Amapiano too have some shame*"; and in Figure 27.3, "*stole Afrobeats from the Ghanaians*"), in attempts to assert control over both the narratives of origination of these styles and the ownership of their cultural value. In the suggestion, in both tweets, that Afrobeats is Ghanaian, and that Amapiano is South African, control is wrestled back; and an attempt at reversing the act dispossession is made, as Nigerian contribution is nullified in the counter-narratives. Also, it was not uncommon to find, in these disputations, that the authenticity of the aesthetic elements of Nigerian contribution come under scrutiny. Often, critiques of their 'inauthentic sound' were raised in response to claims of Nigerian origination of Afrobeats music; and, as insinuated in Figure 27.3, even the authenticity of their fashion styles would be questioned.

These internal disputes over ownership mark out certain inner boundaries over who is allowed to produce which aspects of Afrobeats culture, based on its purported origins, leading, for example, to distinction between Ghanaian Afrobeats and Nigerian Afrobeats (see Figure 28.1, where sonic characteristics of a more Fújì-style album are made the basis for this distinction). But these boundaries also often dissolve into firmer outer boundaries, in circumstances that are viewed as antagonistic to the collective (West) African claim to Afrobeats' ownership. In September 2024, for example, Afrobeats music star, Maleek Berry, reinforced the contributions of the African collective, when a BBC radio show host suggested that Afrobeats was solely Nigerian (see Figure 28.2). Again, notions of the authenticity of the Afrobeats sound emerges in discussions of its origination, with notions of authenticity translating as an adherence to the construct of an "*African sound*".

Figure 28. 1

Figure 28. 2

Notions of authenticity were central to the construction of boundaries. Seeking to draw out his understanding of the category 'African', I ask Senu what it means to him. "*African? First word that comes to mind is being authentic. Yeah, 'authenticity'*," he responds. Authenticity is imagined, of course, because it invokes desires 'for the unspoiled, pristine, genuine, untouched and traditional' (Handler 1986, p.2). It is the socially constructed metric for assessing the assumed originality of culture; its idealised unchangingness, which, as I have suggested in my theoretical discussion in Chapter 2, is an essentialist misreading. Inauthenticity, therefore, becomes measured by the assumed proximity to Western sensibilities/tastes/cultures. In this regard, anxieties over loss of authenticity by dilution and commodification become the basis for the boundaries that define appropriation, where those constructed as non-African, who are presumed to be producing elements of the culture, are viewed to be breaching the confines of ownership. As I demonstrated in Chapter 7, Afrobeats cultural locales are predominantly convivial, in that the boundaries over participation in terms of engagement within these locales stay largely loosened. There is less trepidation over non-African involvement in dance trends, for example, because, as Zero suggests, "*...it doesn't bother me because...like...more people get to know about my culture*". There is, of course, a power dynamic that is not taken into account in these assessments, but they become salient when my participants think of non-African participation in terms of production and recognition. "*Where I might see the issue…"* Zero reflects*, "is when it's...like...obviously, cultural appropriation, which might be...like...someone of a different colour, which is not obviously my colour is doing it and everyone's going crazy.*" For most of my participants, this frame is where the outer boundary is set; in the perceived acts of cultural exploitation (Rogers, 2006), where, as

Adina suggests, non-Africans "*try to claim it…like…as theirs. That's wrong…*". In this sense, the outer boundary is predominantly set against non-Black artists, often within considerations of whether or not their appropriation of Afrobeats culture was in partnership with an African artist. As Araba explains, "*I mean...if he features someone, I would be like 'oh, yeah, you're appreciating the genre' but if you pick it up and want to add your flow, it's like you're taking something that's mine...*"

A similar line of reasoning underlies objections to the adoption of Afrobeats cultural styles into K-pop, which were often considered unacceptable for their mimicry of African accents and attempts at using pidgin English terms that are used frequently in Afrobeats songs. In Figure 29.1, for example, a Twitter user expresses their frustration at this trend, marking out the perceived distance between what they construct as Africanness and what they perceive Koreanness to be. It is a racial boundary, as I have discussed earlier, that emerges in the prosecution of ownership claims, and that is replicated in other articulations of resistance against instances of appropriation such as in Figure 29.2, where a clear expectation is articulated concerning what the racial representation in Afrobeats music videos must be. Again, these articulations are contextualised within notions of authenticity and in the logics of ownership, which validate feelings of entitlement toward gatekeeping and assigning access selectively. In Figure 29.3, for example, a user raises concerns about access to an Afrobeats-dedicated event on Cultur FM in the United Kingdom, where a white DJ receives pockets of acclaim for an innovative mix of popular Afrobeats songs. While the people at the event appear to appreciate the mix, much of the online commentary suggested widespread discomfort with the DJ's presence. In Figure 29.4, for instance, this disquiet is expressed more directly, when a different user suggests the presence of a white DJ would render any Afrobeats event inauthentic.

Figure 29. 1

Figure 29. 2

Figure 29. 3

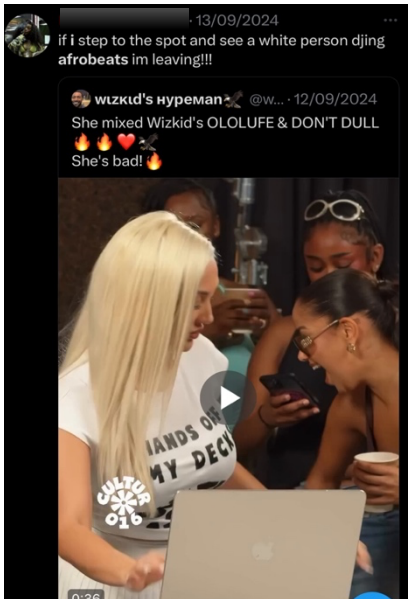

Figure 29. 4

We might observe in these contestations, contradictions around racial inclusion (that I discussed earlier in this chapter) within the collective Africanness that is constituted in the processes and rituals of engagement with Afrobeats culture. Paradoxically, constitutions of convivial places of engagement also produce anxieties around participation, where non-Blackness is, under certain conditions, included and, under others, excluded. This demonstrates, to some degree, what Wole Soyinka's work contends with as the simultaneity of essentialism and non-essentialism in conceptions of collective Africanness (Wright, 2015). Here, however, there is a stronger framing of authentic Africanness as Black, with direct and subtle prescriptions of Blackness as the requirement for any claim of ownership of Afrobeats, and for any acceptable participation in its production.

In my earlier discussion of the contradictions in conceptions of race, I arrived at a demonstration of the mechanisms of *boundarying* that aided constructions of a collective Blackness as Africanness. I showed how my participants imagined themselves as Black and how that Blackness was constituted within a frame of global Blackness, whose construction is at once racial and cultural. My participants are aware of their Blackness; it is the vector of Afro-cool that they claim an ownership of, that they must gatekeep. It is one that is constructed in opposition to whiteness, but one that also holds meanings outside of it; meanings that are contextual, meanings that are contested.

In Araba's elaboration of the conditions under which appropriations of Afrobeats culture might be considered acts of cultural appreciation, she offers R&B star, Chris Brown, as an exemplifier, in juxtaposition with pop artist, Justin Bieber. When I ask her if she is happier with Brown's performance of Afrobeats than she is with Bieber's because Brown is Black, she tells me:

> **Araba**: He's not Black like that [laughs]...but [pauses] I don't know...I would prefer him doing the features. Yeah... honestly, I think people would be pulled towards, you know, how he's smooth, he knows how to dance...but, then again, I don't know how [pauses]...I don't know how I would feel....I would probably like the song and everything but, when it comes to him copying, I don't know how I would feel about that...I would probably not like the whole idea, but the song might be great but...he should just stick to what he's doing...yeah.

Araba's almost reflexive response, first, casts uncertainty over the degree of Brown's Blackness, which becomes the frame within which the appropriateness of his production of Afrobeats culture is assessed. Because she cannot quite place his (non-)Blackness, there are concessions made over the limits to his participation. Here, Brown's near-Blackness allows him to cross the outer boundary; endows him with the partial ability to produce some authentic elements of Afrobeats culture (such as dance); but he is not quite Black enough to possess the requisite Africanness to produce the authentic African vibe. In his own US context, however, Brown is racialised as Black; his Blackness would likely never be in question.

These contradictory modes of constructing Blackness demonstrate its shifting meanings. The shifts become core to the sense-making processes that define inner boundaries. My participants are aware of these shifts; of the contexts within which these contestations emerge. However, this does not destabilise their collective sense of Blackness as Africanness, nor does it dissolve notions of a global Blackness. As Dusk tells me, "*Black Americans? Yes! Even though they don't want to...most of them don't want to identify as Africans, they are*". Many of them continue to construct a collective Blackness based on observations of what they consider to be similarities across various geographies of Blackness. Abena, who finds there are similarities in the ways that she and her Black Caribbean friends in London are raised, for example, includes African Americans in her concept of Africanness "*because, they can relate to the things that we...that everybody relates to and, you can see it online, you know? On Insta, Shade Room, yeah?, they would post something and everybody comes to comment and people would be like 'did we all have the same childhood?' or something...[chuckles]*"

The kinds of online observations Abena references here become important for affirming notions of a collective Blackness because they present anecdotal evidence for assumptions of cultural similarity. Countering narratives of difference, the

perspectives that are presented in these observations often emphasise themes of unity. For example, when anxieties about the growing popularity of Afrobeats in the US started to grow, narratives attempting to downplay its vast appeal became prevalent. These anxieties appeared mainly to be around the replacement of hip-hop culture, as might be observed, for instance, in Figure 30.1. In response to this tone of commentary, several African American users move to discredit the claims that Afrobeats does not resonate within African American circles. Also, videos and commentary demonstrating how Afrobeats complements hip-hop were not uncommon. In Figure 30.2, for example, a video showing rapper, Gunna, performing a song that was produced in Afrobeats style goes viral, with most of the commentary showing contentment over the notion that there seemed to be a melding of cultures. It is this notion of a melding of cultures that validates the assumptions of a collective vibe, as might be observed in Figure 30.3, where a suggestion is made that culture wars are only observable online because Afrobeats creates milieus for conviviality.

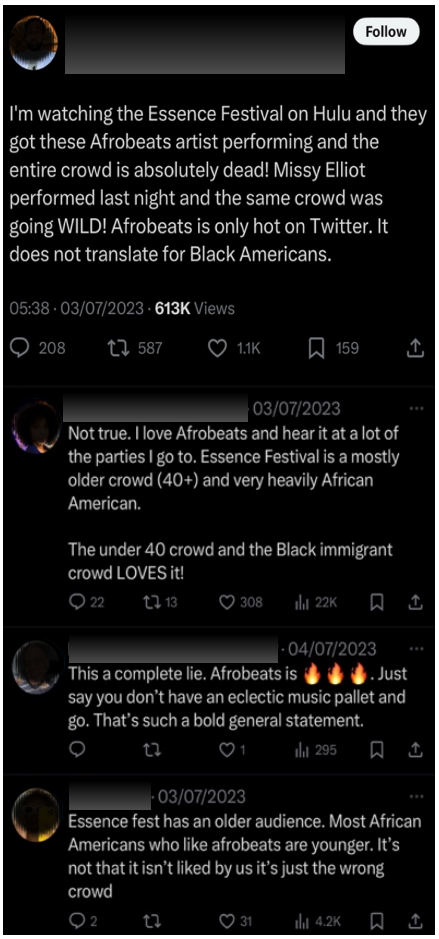

Figure 32. 1

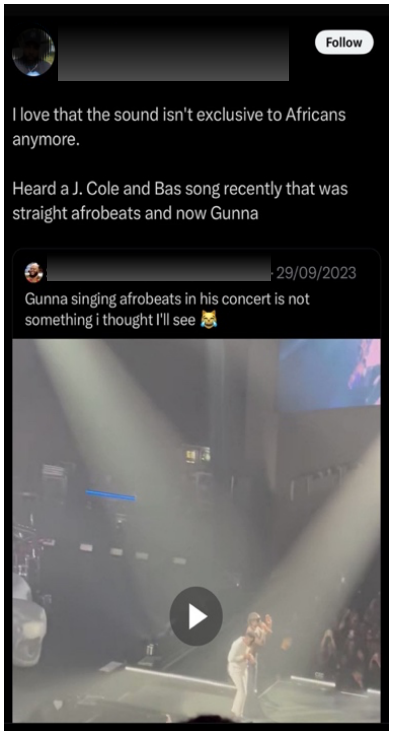

Figure 32. 2

Figure 32. 3

In contestation, certain inner boundaries emerge; and, as those boundaries themselves become contested, the outer boundaries that enclose an African collective become clarified. In the resolutions of these processes of contestation, the multiple ways of being Black come to be viewed as congruent. Assumptions of a collective vibe become reinforced, as difference is negotiated in the contestations and their counter-contestations. Repeated across space, these processes of contestation and counter-contestation provide a kind of evidentiary basis for meanings of a collective Blackness to be read as those of a collective Africanness; and as they persist, the notion of a collective African identity comes to *hold*.

Conclusion

This chapter presents an analysis of the extents to which notions of collective African identity are reinforced; how, in essence, they come to *hold*. The chapter begins with a discussion of how the stable meanings of African identity are scaffolded by and within Afrobeats culture, and how they become destabilised without Afrobeats as a frame of reference. It discusses certain contradictions in articulations of the meanings that are mobilised toward definitions of Africanness, showing how those contradictions reveal certain boundaries across and within which *belonging* is negotiated. From there, the chapter focuses on how these boundaries may extend or contract; how they are negotiated, enforced, and contested. These are symbolic boundaries, as the chapter demonstrates, that are produced and maintained in everyday interaction, and are valorised in engagements with Afrobeats culture. The chapter revealed how we might distinguish

between inner boundaries and outer boundaries, demonstrating how inner boundaries work in mutually constitutive, interactional mechanisms to produce the *holdingness* that outer boundaries come to find.

The chapter focused more on how these symbolic boundaries might be produced outside of deliberative machinations of institutional/elite power. It emphasised the habitual and/or unconscious routines of the everyday and the practices, across space, that emerge from modes of cultural co-creation and the materialisations of sensibilities emanating from rituals of group cohesion. While the aim was to reveal how boundaries emerge outside of certain strategic mechanisms of domination (highlighted in some approaches; for example, Wimmer, 2013), it was not a suggestion that they never reflect or impose forms of power. The suggestion was that, boundaries can also emerge—in processes of negotiation of cultural meaning or the settlement of ambiguities in competing categories, for instance—without having to be actively, strategically 'made' or 'drawn' within projects of dominance. Consequently, I proposed a concept of *boundarying*; first, to offer a kind of encapsulating analytic for this broader mechanism within which symbolic boundaries develop—both as undeliberate and as strategic; and, second, to elucidate *how*, as outer boundaries generally manage to *hold*, inner boundaries might be expanded, moved, contracted or entrenched. *Boundarying*, therefore, attempted to capture the mechanisms through which outer boundaries of *being* are made sense of, as inner boundaries of *belonging* are (re)negotiated, such that the meanings associated with collective identity come to *hold*.

The chapter also shows how varying nodes of identification (racial, geopolitical, national, *etc*) come to be encapsulated under the broader African identity, and how it is distinguished from other broad collective identities. In this sense, the chapter clarifies how these nodes of identification exist within a kind of spectrum, contiguous and overlapping, as they are (re)negotiated to clarify what it means to be African. Together with the three preceding empirical chapters, this offers a potential understanding of identity as a tangible condition, constructed individually *and* collectively, that might come to *hold* within communally defined structures of power and of meaning-making and that can crystallise/congeal out of multiple nodes of identification. In the next chapter, I discuss more specifically how the findings across these chapters clarify the core conceptual arguments I have made. I emphasise how these findings provide answers to the research questions and how those answers may contribute to our thinking around the thesis' three broad concerns: identity, music culture, and space; and I discuss how the interventions I propose to theory might be useful for scholarship.

Chapter 9

'It's *Afro*-beats; it's African music': a conclusion

"…we already have a set of answers: it is a collective identity that intersects with many other collective identities"

Michelle Wright (2015, p.3)

'It's *Afro*-beats; it's African music' seems a fitting quote with which to begin the task of condensing the knowledge we might draw from what has been an *experience of people*—of hearing their stories, sharing in their *vibes*, learning their very sense of self. It is a quote I shared in Chapter 5 from my conversation with Dizzie, who, having felt disconnected from her heritage growing up in 1990's London, found in Afrobeats culture, a medium through which she could *be* African. Her argument is clear: Afrobeats represents Africanness, and, even from its name, it should be inferable; should not have to be in question.

I have presented, throughout the empirical discussion, various articulations of this reasoning, the core of which aligns with the foundational premise of this project: *young Africans are constructing an African identity in new individual and collective ways through and because of their engagement with Afrobeats culture*. To inspect the cogency of this premise, I focused on two broad constituencies—homeland and diaspora—which I identified, first, for their roles in the co-creation of Afrobeats culture; and, second, for their centrality in conceptualisations of African identity (Bosch Santana, 2016). By focusing on *both* constituencies, I worked to address insufficiencies in the existing approaches to understanding African identity that, as critics have identified, tend to neglect homeland perspectives (Koser, 2003; Zeleza, 2010) or neglect experiences of diasporas not directly formed as a result of the historical moment of the Middle Passage (Wright, 2004; Chacko, 2018). In effect, I was broadly seeking to understand how Africans in homeland contexts and those in diaspora are co-constituting, across transnational space, a collective African identity through their engagements with Afrobeats culture. This meant that this project was always concerned with matters of identity, of music culture, and of space.

In this final chapter, I attempt to summarise the arguments I have made across the thesis around these three concepts, whose interrelation I have examined. I discuss how those arguments align with key findings from the empirical enquiry,

which revealed that identity is constructed in both individual and collective terms, and that in certain contexts, it can find certain degrees of stability. To structure this discussion, I reflect on how the empirical findings might answer the project's research questions, and how these answers might add to our existing knowledge on identity, music culture, and space. This is not to suggest that the three are neatly separable. There are, of course, overlaps; and, although I organise the discussion based on the three broad concerns, I attempt to draw out these overlaps as they emerge from the empirical data and within my elaboration of their key implications.

It is not an easy task to fit, into a thesis, observations from months of the *experience of people* and the space that they make their own. It is harder still to do so while attempting to record the dynamic processes involved in their construction of a collective identity through a music culture they are continuously (re)creating. It is a task that requires decisions over what portions of their stories are most closely representative of that experience, of that space, and of those processes. This means that there are also decisions made on what not to include, and directions that might have been taken that did not emerge in those stories. I discuss some of these, as I offer some suggestions for future research. Also, as these decisions are always subjective, regardless of the systematic processes involved in making them, there are invariably certain limitations to account for. I think through some of these limitations towards the end of the chapter.

Identity: key findings and contributions

As I have suggested, identity is about *being* and *belonging*. I have proposed that we understand *being* in a synthetic sense, relying on an understanding of Stuart Hall's (1994) 'being' and 'becoming', as a present, continuing state; taking 'who we are' at any present time to be a product of who we have always been ('the past') and who we are becoming ('the future') (Hall, 1994, p.225). Based on this understanding, and operating on the premise that identity is also about situating one's self within a collective (Castells, 2009), I suggested also that we think of *belonging* as a process of identification with others, externalised; an alignment predicated on points of commonality; a positioning within group-defined meanings, within narratives of particularity; a clustering of multiple resemblant states of *being*. Extending this thinking to African identity, specifically, I proposed an encompassing sense of *being* African and *belonging* within a collectively constructed Africanness that frames other nodes of identification within a kind of spectrum, and that is given stability through structures of power and of meaning-making. This understanding, then, became foundational to the

key arguments I presented across the thesis, arriving at certain conclusions that might offer an alternative perspective to the prevailing modes of thinking, speaking, knowing about identity.

To begin with, different from what might persist in what has been referred to as a constructivist 'hegemony' (Wimmer, 2013, p.2), the direction of enquiry, here, maintained an openness to narratives of commonality that tend to be central to the more 'essentialist' conceptualisations of identity. It, however, still maintained a view of the individuality often highlighted in constructivist approaches, where identity tends to be conceptualised as a matter of selfhood (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000). In this regard, I argued that identity is constructed *both* on the individual level and collectively, both a matter of selfhood and of commonality. It was this premise that formed the core of the first research question, which sought to know *how engagement with elements of Afrobeats culture might translate to the construction of individual/ collective African identity*.

My findings support this premise. I demonstrated not only that identity is constructed both individually and collectively, but also that, for young Africans, definitions of selfhood are often constituted *within* and intertwined with notions of the collective. That is, who they imagine themselves to be is made sense of by imagining the attributes of those with whom they believe they belong. As representations of these attributes are circulated through elements of Afrobeats culture, they validate assumptions of normality; notions that the attributes (and the social meanings that they come to define) are the norm across multiple geographies of Africanness. In Chapter 5, I discussed how this normality comes to construct a collective 'reality'; how that reality creates the imaginary of a real/true African self; and how that imaginary concretises assumptions of a collective *true* African culture. I discussed how this becomes foundational for logics of interrelatedness and the rationalities of a collective bond. More specifically, the findings showed that, as elements of Afrobeats culture were more present (I discuss this in further detail in the next section) within the everyday routines of young Africans, they created expectations of how an African everyday life *should* be; and this included the expected 'true' African proclivity toward loving Afrobeats, knowing how to dance to Afrobeats, and/or having a fashion sense similar to what was represented as 'cool' within Afrobeats culture.

Also, although the understanding of identity I relied on in this thesis foregrounded the commonality that approaches considered to be essentialist tend to centralise, I was sceptical that this commonality suggested any kind of an 'essence'. The direction of enquiry, therefore, moved away from considerations of a fixedness, a coming-to-know, a discovery of an inherent 'one true self' (Hall, 1994, p.223). Nonetheless, it maintained an understanding that, while never permanent, never fixed, identity 'may harden, congeal, and [crystalise]' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p.1) temporarily (Weedon, 2004),

and within specific social/cultural contexts, 'framed' by certain 'axes or vectors' (Hall, 1994, p.226), certain structures or sources of meaning. 'Frame' suggests extent; indicates there are certain boundaries that would outline the stretches of this temporary coalescence. I sought, therefore, to investigate *what boundaries might have defined the collective African identity which young Africans construct through their engagement with Afrobeats culture*.

Again, the empirical analysis supported the premise. I was able to show that, while there was a fluidity and multiplicity in the ways *belonging* was negotiated, often, the contours of *being* remained largely stable. In other words, as people make sense of who belongs with them (and who does not), their sense of who they are becomes more defined. Stability, here, did not imply fixedness, as I proposed in Chapter 2 and demonstrated in Chapter 8; it implied a *holdingness*. The analysis showed that this *holdingness* was clarified by a process of *boundarying*, wherein the layers of varying nodes of identification (which I touched on in Chapter 2) are (re)negotiated, as an encompassing identity configuration is imbued with specific codes of meaning. As these codes of meaning are repeated across space and time, they coalesce and find some degree of constancy. It is in this constancy that identity comes to *hold*. As I discussed in Chapter 2, the varying nodes of identification exist within a spectrum and their layers are congruous, and, in their points of meeting and overlap, they may be thought of as marking certain boundaries.

These boundaries are symbolic (Lamont *et al*, 2015), as I have argued, and distinctions between inner boundaries and outer boundaries can be made. As I explained in Chapter 2, I understand inner boundaries (*i.e.* those that might mark 'West African' from 'East African', for example) as those that might differentiate nodes of identification, but would likely still be categorizable within a singular collective frame; and outer boundaries (*i.e.* those that might mark 'African' from 'European', for example) as those that are deployed to enclose; to separate one collective frame from others that, also collective, are imagined/constructed/marked as distinctively dissimilar. The empirical material revealed *boundarying* to capture the mechanisms through which outer boundaries of *being* are outlined/made sense of, as inner boundaries of *belonging* are (re)negotiated, extended, expanded, multiplied, and meanings associated with collective identity come to *hold*. Racial and geopolitical inner boundaries were discussed in Chapter 8, as those were the most predominantly produced, (re)negotiated, and contested in the clarification of the outer boundary of Africanness.

There are a few *connected* conceptual interventions we might consider here. First, there is a proposal, in offering up the notion of *holdingness*, to think of identity as neither permanently fixed nor perpetually in flux, neither immutable nor vacillatory. As I explained in Chapter 2, there is often a certain degree of stability in identity that we might consider, as we tend to do, for example, in medical contexts, when we mark a patient's condition as stable; as neither particularly

improving nor deteriorating, neither volatile nor unfluctuating, neither labile nor fixed. Within that perspective, we understand the patient's condition to merely (for a time) *hold*. Thinking about identity in an analogous manner—with a consideration of its *holdingness*—allows us, to mark its impermanence without making implicit (or, sometimes, explicit) suggestions of a sort of evanescence (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000) in its manifestation.

As such, we might identify, in what the concept of *holdingness* proposes, a kind of middle ground; an alternative way through which we might understand identity that is not 'limited to the polarities of binary opposition', and is positioned to 'challenge the rigidity of dualisms' (Woodward, 1997, p.7), offering a balance between constructivist and essentialist claims over identity. As has been noted elsewhere (Block, 2022; Brubaker & Cooper, 2000; Wimmer, 2013), there is a fixation, in the current constructivist consensus in identity research, on banishing 'essentialism'. This preoccupation has generally been channelled into an insistence that identities are multiple, fragmented, and fluid, which, while valuable, tends to obscure the 'singularity that is often striven for' in practice (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p.1), especially within contexts where 'social reality is marked by sharp boundaries and high degrees of social closure' (Wimmer, 2013, p.3). What a view of its *holdingness* offers to us is the analytical purchase to understand identity as the encompassment of multiple subject positions (Kramsch, 2009) that *can be* fluid but also can find certain degrees of stability *within context*, as 'a primary identity' that is 'self-sustaining across time and space' frames those other subject positions (Castells, 2009, p.7). I demonstrate this in Chapter 8, revealing how a collective African identity is constructed as primary, encompassing other racial, ethnic, and regional categories, that can be fluid and contested but still produce meanings associated with that collective Africanness. This is what that work might offer: a sort of extended analytical frame for what we might need 'identity' to explain.

Second, the concept of *boundarying* offers further analytical breadth for examining the extents of the fluidity commonly centralised in constructivist conceptualisations of identity. As I demonstrated in Chapter 8, the process of *boundarying* involves the everyday negotiations of *belonging* that clarify boundaries, not necessarily towards projects of dominance, but, often, I think, as part of the quotidian processes of meaning-making. As such, *boundarying* attempts to capture the more practical (re)constitutions of symbolic boundaries rather than the more structural processes of actively deliberately drawing them (Lamont *et al*, 2015) or making them (Wimmer, 2013). In Chapter 2, I conceptualised identity, following Manuel Castells (2009), as the encompassment of multiple nodes of identification that are contiguous and, at times, overlapping. In Chapter 8, I demonstrated that the process of *boundarying* underlies the fluidity among these nodes, whose boundaries may be crossed through certain negotiations of meaning. I argued that this fluidity exists, to a higher degree, within inner boundaries, as young Africans negotiate the meanings they associate with other groups of Africans

they believe they belong with, rather than in the outer boundaries that usually represent who they imagine themselves to be. This becomes useful for an analysis of the, at once, delimited fluidity and contextual stability of identity—that is, in essence, its *holdingness*. Because the process of *boundarying* clarifies outer boundaries (that define 'who we are'), as inner boundaries (that arrange 'who we are with') are negotiated, we might find, at its core, an exemplification of some African philosophical considerations of personhood. I highlighted a few in Chapter 2, such as the Nguni maxim '*umuntu ngumuntu ngabantu*' [I am because we are] (Venter, 2004) or, as now increasingly deployed across the literature on humanism, *Ubuntu*. We might think, perhaps, of the value of a decolonial intervention, given what we might draw from traditions of African thought, in our often-dichotomous thinking around identity.

Third, and also aligning with the ethos of Ubuntu, working within an understanding of identity as *both* individually *and* collectively constructed allows for a loosening of the hyper-focus on individuality that the dominant views on identity tend to espouse (Block, 2022). At the same time, it brings into view, more actively, the importance of individual initiative, which tends to be obscured by the focus on inherence and 'essence' within essentialist conceptualisations. Again, the notion that the individual is constituted within and by a situatedness within the collective—'*I am because we are*'; *being* because of *belonging*—offers an expanded explicative power to our existing frames for understanding identity.

Together, these conceptual interventions offer a way of thinking about identity that has some usefulness within our contemporary moment, wherein projects of exclusion, of racism, and of ethnonationalism are appropriating essentialist discourse, particularly in antagonism toward constructivist ideas. Analytically, they provide a frame with which to explain this turn towards the 'terrible singularity' (Brubaker & Cooper, 2000, p.1) of fascism, of white supremacism, and of the misappropriative weaponisation of strategic essentialisms in service of biological determinist politics of exclusion. In many ways, much of this so-called radicality is directed toward a reversal of constructivist language around gender, race, multiculturalism; and the opposition, I reason, is rooted in misgiving over whether that language truly reflects the lived 'reality' of a social world that is structured by difference. As the logical opposite to constructivist ideas about fluidity and multiplicity, essentialist ideas become reasoned as the more representative of that 'real' social world, and its language of inherence, of 'nature' becomes entrenched in defiance of notions of a 'constructed' social world, however accurate. Identity is how people metabolise the social world; disaggregate it—with all of its complexities, its vastness, its heft—into smaller digestible units. We *construct* it, marking its boundaries based on the specificities of the social contexts or the historical moments within which we exist, with the arbitrary conventions of culture as its scaffold, as we variably impose meaning on (lived/imagined) *manifestations* of similarity and of difference. The language we use in describing identity is important. If we can offer a language that more closely explains the way people perceive identity in practice,

perhaps, we might be able to weaken the pull of the notions of 'realness' that become associated with projects of 'hard' essentialism. Perhaps, the conceptual interventions this thesis offers could provide something of a basis for generating such a language.

Failing that, the interventions offer empirically derived clarifications over the more contextual conceptualisation of African identity. As conjectured, they provide a basis for understanding African identity as the encompassing sense of *being* African and *belonging* within some collectively constructed Africanness that frames multiple other nodes of identification within a kind of spectrum, and that is given stability through structures of power and of meaning-making.

Music culture: key findings and contributions

I suggested in Chapter 2 that we might think of Afrobeats as an example of a structure of meaning-making. As the titular quote of this current chapter might demonstrate, it was logical to attempt to understand the construction of an African identity through Afrobeats because of the discernible ways the music has acquired a kind of representativeness for a generalised Africanness. Thinking of it, in a more extended way, as music culture, was expedient for gaining deeper insight into the associations made between that which was imagined to be 'African culture' and the artefacts produced in and/or related to the music. Accordingly, I suggested that we think of Afrobeats culture as a sort of amalgam of a variety of African musics, plus their rituals of engagement—that is, the styles of dance and of fashion, the symbology, the colloquialisms, the gesticulations, the *joy*—which is co-created, circulated, and sustained across transnational space. The premise was that, because it was engaged with, reconfigured, and transmitted mainly through social media, Afrobeats would sustain a circulation of cultural codes from homeland through multiple diasporas, within a transcultural space where a collective African identity is constantly being (re)constituted.

My thinking, here, was not much of a departure from that of Paul Gilroy (1993), as he elucidated an analytical model for the examination of the cultural flows and continuities across what he understood to be the representation of a Black cultural world formed through the histories associated with the Middle Passage. These flows, he argued, were traceable through the routes of the Black music cultures produced out of those histories, and, in 'weighing the similarities and differences between Black cultures' (Gilroy, 2009, p.430) the contours of a 'compound diaspora' could be mapped (p.

451). As I pointed out in Chapter 3, however, much of the work across the African diaspora studies literature, including Gilroy's work, has focused predominantly on diasporic music cultures, neglecting continental African cultural forms and experiences (Koser, 2003; Zeleza, 2010). As the product of collective homeland and diasporic African creativity, and with its amplified status within Black popular culture, Afrobeats music presented an opportunity to explore African/Black identity beyond the limits of diasporic experiences. It provided a particularly advantageous lens because, as I reasoned in Chapter 3, it sustains a circulation of culture from homeland through multiple diasporas, within a transcultural space where a collective African identity is continuously being (re)constituted. To explore this premise empirically, I had to examine how young Africans were engaging with Afrobeats culture across this space, and explore how these modes of engagement would (re)produce meanings of identity that would be universalised; assumed to be those that defined an African collective and the individuals that constituted it. My task, therefore, was to explore how *young Africans across homeland & diasporic space engage with elements of Afrobeats culture*.

The empirical analysis revealed that, across that space, modes of engagement converged because they became aligned with the routines of everyday life. I demonstrated that young Africans tend to construct a 'reality' based on this everyday engagement with the music; with Afrodance styles that are improvised in engagement with the music and sometimes choreographed to suit its sonic arrangements and its lyrical content; and certain styles of fashion popularised within Afrobeats cultural circles. Because they engage with these elements of the music culture across their everyday routines—in their homes, on the drive to school, from the streetside shops, at work, in the traffic jams, in bars and clubs, at church, in the hush of dawn—Afrobeats is assumed to be part of the normal, the expected, the 'reality' of African life *everywhere*. In Chapter 5, I discussed this *everywhereness*, which I relied on as an analytical category to explain how the elements of Afrobeats culture become a part of the everyday routines, and how they become valued. The logic was that, because Afrobeats was everywhere, it made sense to encounter it, to connect with it, to be partial to it, and to feel an attachment to its cultural value. As I proposed, e*verywhereness* might be thought of as presence—as the state of being, or appearing to be, in all (or most) places; and, also, as the imprint, the impact, the inheritances that are inherent in a thing that makes it (re)claimable for its value relative to its expanse/compass/stature.

The latter sense is, as the empirical material showed, another way that young Africans engage with Afrobeats. Because it is reasoned to possess high cultural value, it becomes an important aspect of what is built as an African sociality, and, therefore, it becomes, for example, a 'natural' reflex to play the music at a naming ceremony, or launch into an Afrodance routine at a barbecue, or wear the stylised African-print dress to a semi-formal work mixer. As I explained in Chapter 3, cultural value refers to collectively validated, intersubjectively warranted assignments of meaning to a cultural artefact,

designating to it a worth not measurable in monetary or economic terms (Kaszynska, 2024). High collective assessments of its worth underlie young Africans' sense of ownership of elements of the culture, and becomes the basis for marking the thresholds for participation and appropriation by those they categorise as non-African. In this way, certain rules of engagement are also negotiated, leading to expectations such as, for example, having a bridal Afrodance choreography or curating one's own Afrobeats playlist as a matter of norm rather than of choice.

Also, in both senses, the *everywhereness* explained how everyday routines, everyday scenes from diverse geographies and variegated populations of Africanness become singularised in notions of similitude. Because Afrobeats is thought to be normal and valued everywhere across those geographies and among those populations, it becomes common sense that it represents the 'reality' of those places and peoples. In other words, the imagery and the lyrical content of Afrobeats culture are assumed to transmit what everyday life looks/feels like across the various parts of the transnational space within which the culture is produced and circulated. The imagery and lyrical content transmit portions of the everyday routines that are lived in the places within which they are produced, and, because these vignettes of everyday life are lived in similar ways in another place, assumptions of '*how things are everywhere*' across the geographies of Africanness become validated and entrenched. In this way, Afrobeats does not only become a part of everyday life; it also carries the 'reality' of that everyday life everywhere that is imagined to be African. It, then, becomes a frame within which a 'real' Africanness becomes unquestioned; invokes a sense of conviction that, since their own everyday routines resemble those of other Africans everywhere, an individual can believe they are 'truly' African. There are, therefore, articulations of stronger attachments to or deeper consciousness of their sense of Africanness because their everyday individual engagements with Afrobeats are validated in and by encounters with others they consider to be African, who engage with the culture everywhere in similar ways.

Conceptually, *everywhereness* is of value for two reasons. First, it allows for an analysis of how music cultures encompass diverse cultural forms across multiple geographies, offering, perhaps, additional insight into the logics that sustain their flows. We know that, through music culture, the many cultural specificities of the multiple geographies of diaspora are brought into relation (Gilroy, 1993), as are those of the multiple geographies of homeland (Zeleza, 2010). What the concept of *everywhereness* offers is a way of understanding how these are further brought into relation. In other words, it offers a means to explain how music culture might transport the social and cultural ordering of everyday life (DeNora, 2000) such that a 'truly compound diaspora' (Gilroy, 2009, p.451) might, potentially, be brought into relation with a similarly compound homeland. Second, it also helps to explain how assumptions of commonality persist beyond the histories that connect these geographies. We might, for example, be able to explain how assumptions of commonality

are extended to Black geographies that were not produced within the histories of the Middle Passage. Although 'a significant event', as Michelle Wright (2004, p.3) illustrates, the Middle Passage is not the history that produced the diasporic identity of the Afro-German, which makes a framework that relies on that history inadequate to explain the construction of this diasporic identity. While these histories may differ, the geographies they produce are still brought into relation through the cultural meanings music cultures convey and through certain contemporary continuities that may exist outside of those histories. As I demonstrated in Chapter 5, the *everywhereness* might help to explain this relation.

The work this thesis does on Afrobeats culture, therefore, contributes to the larger body of African (diaspora) studies literature focused on the mobilisation of Black music cultures towards the circulation of Black identities. It offers an expansion in scope within this body of work, where focus has mainly been on diasporic identities or, to a lesser extent, on siloed national/regional identities (Zeleza, 2008). As a co-constituted music culture sustained by the creative inputs and engagements of both homeland and diasporic groups, Afrobeats provided an empirical basis for scrutinising the circulation of African identity more universally, taking both homeland and diasporic experiences into perspective.

Space: key findings and contributions

The benefit of an investigation of the construction of a collective identity through the flows of music culture is that it works to reveal contours of the space within which both are constituted and circulated. As I have been explaining, Black music cultures are often the product of transnational processes of co-creation; the creative cultural amalgam of multiple Black geographies and their interrelations. I suggested, in Chapter 3, that these interrelations are facilitated through processes of transnationalisation and of digitalisation, through which music culture transcends boundaries, collapses them; extends space for the integration of, as I have just discussed, a compound diaspora and a similarly compound homeland. It became as important, therefore, to understand the space itself as it was to understand the music culture.

I suggested that transnationalisation involves the cultural processes that transcend geopolitical boundaries, resulting from the dispersal of people and the flows of their ideas, practices, and artifacts across multiple geographies, beyond borders of nation states, often to extents that make them difficult to associate to a single place of origin (Welz, 2009).

The space that Afrobeats was conjectured to have been co-produced out of was, therefore, conceived as transnational, encompassing the physical places of homeland and of diaspora. Also, I suggested that processes of digitalisation—the 'way many domains of social life are restructured around digital communication and media infrastructures' (Brennen & Kreiss, 2016, p.1)—made the transnational flows that led to the creation of Afrobeats culture more immediate. Therefore, I conceptualised the transnational space as comprising the physical locales of homeland and diaspora, as well as the constituent platforms of a social media ecology, that fosters the co-creation, circulation, and sustenance of Afrobeats culture. Therefore, I suggested that we think of space, broadly, as an assembly of places and practices 'into meaningful relations and formations'; an embodiment of social meanings 'that are always plural' (Georgiou, 2010, p.22). These social meanings, I argued, are contested, (re)negotiated, brought into relation, as a collective identity is constructed and asserted.

As I have pointed out, one of the premises of this thesis was that, young Africans across homeland and diaspora were co-constituting a collective identity through their engagement with Afrobeats culture and through their use of social media. As such, I looked to learn how *young Africans across homeland & diaspora were creating/expanding/reclaiming a transnational space of identity through Afrobeats culture and social media*.

The empirical analysis revealed that they do this by extending home; or, more specifically, notions of home, notions of what its most representative features are, of what it looks and feels like. Again, this was imagined through engagement with Afrobeats culture and the sense of belonging that collective engagement with the culture creates. In Chapter 6, I focused on the interrelations between homeland and diaspora. I worked to reveal the various ways in which 'home' is constructed as situated space (often imagined within the geographic landmass of Africa), that becomes extendable through everyday rituals of cultural performance, of collective connection, and/or, symbolically, through the reclamation of dispossessed place.

Home, then, offered a productive conceptual foundation for making sense of space—the agglutination of homeland and diasporic places; plus, its situatedness—the associated mobilities (of people and their cultures) and simultaneities (of the 'hereness' and 'thereness' of place)—between 'origin' and diaspora. As I suggested in Chapter 6, what we know of home is that it involves modes of settlement that are associated with, if not based on, senses of *belonging*—of 'feeling at home' (Brah, 1996, p.190)—and feelings of 'significant identification outside of the area of settlement' (Blunt & Bonnerjee, 2019, p.267). Broadly, these feelings are those that are often tied to a place one might stake claim to as one's own (Brah, 1996). This understanding of home, of what is usually presented as a dichotomy between homeland

and diaspora, is usually developed from diasporic perspectives. The work I did in this thesis revealed more about how home is produced in the imagination of those in the homeland as well. In other words, the work demonstrated that home is collocated. I, therefore, proposed the concept of *collocational homeliness* as an analytic tool, which I showed was useful for thinking about homeland and diaspora outside of the dichotomy within which they are usually viewed (Laguerre, 2009). The concept allows for an analysis of their individual characteristics while still making room for their continuities and their inherent interconnections. If home is always in view for diaspora (Brah, 1996), then home cannot be a distant *elsewhere*, removed, waiting to be returned to; and, in the connectedness of the modern world, return does not necessarily need to be a physical sojourn.

This is where a kind of ecosystem (Bayer, Triệu, & Ellison, 2020) of internet-based technologies (Diminescu, 2008) and social media (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2014), that constitute a social media ecology (Olesen, 2020) was revealed to be of particular importance. It was revealed to facilitate the sense of collocational homeliness. I suggested that we understand 'collocation', in its primary sense—as the coupling, the going-togetherness of things. As I have attempted to point out, we consider homeland to be an inherent part of diaspora; we understand the two to go together, to be collocated. There is, therefore, an interdependence in the construction of a sense of homeliness in diasporic and homeland imaginations: what home means in either is often in relation to or in contention with the other. Then, I drew on the notion of collocation in computing, wherein a single space is provided, allowing multiple actors to locate their own network, server, and/or storage equipment (or pool these together) within a collective infrastructural set-up, where mutual needs for resource management and maintenance are provided for (for a more comprehensive explanation, see Equinix, 2025). Based on this, I suggested that we conceptualise a sense of homeliness that is co-constituted, as distinctive diasporic and homeland modes of knowing/making home (or those that are shared) come to shape and/or be shaped by a single space of *belonging*. This space, the empirical findings revealed, is where cultural codes are re-produced, circulated, tapped into, or brought into relation. leading to the construction of notions of *being* and of *belonging* that come to be articulated as a unique African *vibe*.

Here, the empirical findings revealed that online modes of collective engagement with Afrobeats culture such as trends, fights, and, especially, challenges reflect and transmit offline attitudes, practices, *ways of being together* that become foundational to notions or experiences of a special kind of conviviality. This conviviality, produced in and by moments of Black joy (see Sobande & Amponsah, 2024), was foundational to a sociality that, as I showed in Chapter 7, facilitates the co-creation of elements of (Afrobeats) culture in ways such that they are positioned to bring 'potentially disparate individuals' into relation, making 'their actions…appear…intersubjective, mutually oriented, co-ordinated, entrained

and aligned' (Cook, 1998, p. ix). I showed that dance routines and challenges were particularly important ways through which young Africans maintained a sociality.

These dance routines and challenges are, of course, driven by an Afrodance creator economy (see Royston, 2024); dance content creators whose combinative use of digital and social media not only propels the circulation and monetisation of their videos (see Rieder et al., 2023), but also facilitates the popularisation of the music. In many ways, this reflects the double-bind of efforts to attain visibility and of the vulnerability that it creates for Black creators in digital spaces, as 'social media encourage practices oriented towards self-promotion and personal branding that…extend commerce into ever more intimate domains of life' (Sobande, Hesmondhalgh & Saha, 2023, p.1451). This might be especially true for Black women creators whose participation in trends and challenges becomes hyper-visible, particularly with the higher possibility for amplification across a social media ecology, creating even more threat for their lives to be spectacularised (Sobande, 2021).

Somewhat paradoxically, however, participation in challenges is a gesture towards belonging; one of the ways young Africans 'engage in forms of community-building and solidarity-making' (Sobande *et al*, 2023, p.1448). It is an act of sociality, a stage in the 'process of relating to others through action' (Sillander, 2021, p.2). Largely, as I demonstrated in Chapter 7, the social media ecology helps to facilitate this; becomes a meeting point of the separate unique practices of conviviality in diasporic and homeland places; and the crucible that merges their parts into a wholly co-constituted sense of home. This sociality, 'the visible articulation of connections' (Quinn & Papacharissi, 2014, p.192), involves the rules, the attitudes, the cultural artefacts that become associated with this space of belonging and the collective identity it produces, circulates, and maintains. As these rules, attitudes, and artefacts are continually circulated, (re)negotiated, validated across space, they inform ways of making home between *collocated* homeland and diaspora.

Home elucidates essential characteristics of the relations between the 'hereness' and 'thereness' of homeland and of diaspora. It brings into view the dynamics of human living: the geographies of clustering, the conditions of (im)mobility, the architectures of interrelation. Thinking through home, we are able to outline the interrelations between place and identity, both of which are core to questions about human life and (dis)connection within an increasingly globalised world (Blunt & Varley, 2004). The literature on homeland and diaspora tends to consider these concerns in one of two ways. One strand of this area of enquiry tends to understand home as a 'fixed, bounded, discrete place', centralising concerns with the specificalities of place-attachments that are thought to be grounded in the material characteristics that make a location feel like no other (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011, p.518). Another strand tends to favour a view of home

that emphasises its 'threshold-crossing capacity…to extend and connect people and places across time and space' (p.518), with a focus on its more symbolic characteristics (Blunt & Varley, 2004; Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). We understand that both the material and the symbolic are foundational to constructions of notions of home (Brah, 1996); and recent attention has been directed at understanding those constructions as simultaneously material and symbolic. This thesis' simultaneous view of homeland and diaspora invariably positions it within this emerging scholarship. Proposing the concept of *collocational homeliness*, I worked, therefore, to contribute a kind of multinodal perspective, by tracing, at points, how the material might come to define notions of home; how these notions might take on certain symbolic attributes, and how the material merges with and into the symbolic. In this view, home (imagined within the geographic location of Africa), as I have demonstrated in Chapter 6, is *somewhere*, that possesses a 'threshold-crossing capacity…to extend and connect people and places across time and space' (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011p.518) in the shape of a modestly furnished restaurant in the diaspora, for example, whose ambience reproduces the typicality of those at home.

Also, the concept of *collocational homeliness* allows, perhaps, for an expanded understanding of mobility in the context of homeland and diaspora. As I indicated in Chapter 6, those who are often constructed as 'indigenous'—and who are inherently implied to have stayed put (Brah, 1996)—in the often-dualistic conceptualisation of diaspora and homeland, are not as immobile as they are often assumed to be. Across much of the international migration and transnationalism literature, mobility is predominantly discussed in relation to the physical movement and later settlement of diasporic peoples across borders, with focus on the transnational connections this movement produces and sustains (Ralph & Staeheli, 2011). But, as I have tried to show, 'bodies do not only move in physical spaces'; they 'also increasingly circulate in digital spaces' (Willems, 2019, p.1199), as the literature on digital diasporas has revealed (Saha, 2021). Those bodies in homeland can also move and can experience home outside of the fixed bounded locale, in their recognition of some its features, as it is reproduced in diaspora, and as they contest or validate those features as (in)authentic.

More practically, in the current climate of anti-migrant hostility and of violent pronouncements for those constructed as non-native to return home, *collocational homeliness* becomes more valuable, perhaps, for explaining migrant strategies towards creating a sense of belonging in places that constantly signal to them that they are unwanted; that they cannot remake home; that they must only live home in whichever faraway place home may be. If making home in a small piece of the diasporic elsewhere becomes amplified as some radical attempt at *terraforming*, then, perhaps, living home from a distance might be a practical strategy toward avoiding harm from flag-wielding mobs with racist-xenophobic intent to *reform* their land in their own parochial image.

Recommendations for future research

As I admitted at the beginning of this chapter, this final thesis was the product of certain decisions, which, while systematic and justifiable, left certain empirical and analytical paths underexplored. First, I made the core of these decisions at a time when research on Afrobeats was still only just emerging, which meant that the enquiry needed to begin at its potential for understanding the circulation of meanings of identity across the continent and its diasporas. Second, the direction of fieldwork—driven by *the experience of people*—that provided the bulk of the material for this thesis led to a critical analysis of the way in which people engage with Afrobeats culture and how it relates to the construction of identity. Although more critical work on the logics of power in and around Afrobeats and social media would be vital to our knowledge, my experience of the world of Afrobeats, within the parameters of this empirical enquiry, was so overwhelmingly joyous that a narrative that did not represent the conviviality, the enjoyment, the *vibes* generated across this world, felt like a kind of betrayal. Moreover, as Karin Barber (2018) observes, popular culture in Africa embodies the 'ordinariness of everyday life…and people's resilience in solving everyday problems' (p.1), as they thrive within and in spite of the constraints of power. The *vibes*, themselves, are a kind of resistance, and, as this kind of documentation, too, is indispensable for our knowledge of the social world, I want to present it as a starting point for further critical work we might do in Afrobeats research.

Such a body of work is already beginning to emerge with what Ayobade (2024) calls Afrobeats' lower frequencies. Much of that work focuses on concerns around commodification and the marketability of Africa. I have touched briefly on a few of these issues in this thesis, but further work would be useful to reveal the extents of capitalist logics at the centre of the global popularity of Afrobeats culture; how they unfold within the continent; the roles of the musicians and the extents of the exploitation of their creative labours; and the reflections of class dynamics in the commodification of the 'Detty December' festivals.

Also, further research could focus more on the politics of difference within the African continent, with Afrobeats as a lens through which broader discourses of race and of citizenship are reproduced and contested. Further focus, for example, on North African engagement with Afrobeats, in particular, might reveal layers to the sub-Saharan-North Africa divide that go beyond the more obvious concerns around anti-Blackness. As my very elementary analysis here may suggest, there are complex identities that are not always accounted for, and these become of more interest as new trends such as #wearenotArabs (see, for example, @justamermaid, 2025) emerge across social media, wherein users assert the more subsumed identities of the region. Their distancing from a hegemonic Arab identity in favour of highlighting the more

obscured identities (such as Amazigh or Berber) *as* African could be of interest, particularly in the context of the racial inner boundaries I highlight in Chapter 8. Also, there are certain dynamics of xenophobic hostility that play out in the distinction of Nigerian Afrobeats from South African Amapiano that would benefit from further empirical work. This has potential to offer insight into the specific antagonisms, as Ayobade (2024) notes, that might be rooted in social contexts outside of the two nation-states' emerging Afrobeats cultural hegemony.

On the limitations of experiencing of people

Any *experience of people* is inherently subjective. It is framed by the ephemerality of mood, the burdens of travel, the vacillations of weather, and, among many of life's other inconsistencies, even the intoxicating currents of good music. In the ebbs and flows, a specific view, a particular motif is constructed about that experience, no matter how *outside* the observer might be. I have discussed the specifics of the research process in Chapter 4, and I have stated my involvement as a participant observer and as a knowledge-producing participant. Because of this, there are certain limitations that I must own.

First, the enquiry was limited to a specific group of young Africans and was, therefore, dependent on the specifics of the contexts within which they engaged with and spoke about Afrobeats. The findings are, therefore, limited to these groups of mostly Ghanaian participants' subjective experiences. Although I make claims about the construction of a collective African identity, I do not suggest these claims to be generalisable. As with identity itself, as I have been arguing, these discussions of collective identity are contingent and contextual. They are contingent, as are outcomes of most qualitative research (Brennen, 2012), on the researcher's expertise and knowledge. As much as I worked to build a rich knowledge base—especially, to cover as vastly as possible the wider geographies of Africanness—this knowledge is limited. It fails to account for knowledge produced outside of the anglophone academy and for knowledge in the libraries across those geographies of Africanness that are not digitised; nor those that are not accessible from Western library accounts.

Also, the study takes a heavily human-centric approach to its scrutiny of the social-mediated processes underlying the construction of identity through Afrobeats culture. While this might be unpopular in a field that is increasingly platform-centric, I want to own my choice to focus more on the human uses of the platforms rather than on their affordances or

on the algorithmic processes that structure those affordances. I do not suggest that these are unimportant. An analysis of the logics of extraction and exploitation that structure them is vital, especially for a population that has historically been victim of the violence that these logics have produced. While I touch on a few of these in brief notes, I do not make any sustained analysis of their potential effects because, as I have pointed out, there were limits to how much of their stories I could present in my discussion in this thesis. I made the choice, therefore, to highlight the ordinariness of everyday life; the humanness of interconnection; and the joys of having a skewer of barbecue pork with a hilarious taxi driver and his barber-cum-DJ best friend, as Mr. Drew's remix of '*Case*' cuts across the neighbourhood, the first hues of dusk in the horizon, and not one complaint of noise.

This project began with ideas about identity; with observations on the changing modes of identification among young Africans as they engaged with Afrobeats culture; with a conjecture that, because of this engagement with Afrobeats culture, young Africans were more actively and openly articulating an attachment to their African identity and to a sense of belonging within an African collective. These ideas, much like the young Africans they were about, connected with new ideas about space; about the ways home can be carried inside a person (Anzaldúa, 1987), and extend beyond a single distant place. They found resonance with ideas about affect and intuition, revealing the depths and expanses of Black joy; and they returned to African philosophical traditions where they settled with older ideas about how a person is made within the deep human bonds of the collective. What those ideas now reveal to us is how, for young Africans, being 'African' means affinity, it means connectedness; to the continent and its extended geographies. They are Africans *in* the world, not Africans *of* the world, and, as they clarify this by asserting their position in a world that seeks to relegate their presence to insignificance, they find a space for being African that is open, shifting, contested; but, also, markedly African; markedly *theirs*.

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Appendices

Summary Participant Profiles

Focal Participants

Field Site	Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Class[46]		Heritage
				Class Background	Class Position	
Homeland (Accra)	Yaw	39	Male	Working class	Working class	Ghanaian
	Stacey	23	Female	Upper-Middle class	Upper-Middle class	Ghanaian
	Dusk	27	Male	Working class	Upper-Middle class	Ghanaian
Diaspora (London)	Rayla	26	Female	Working class (2nd gen)	Middle class	Ghanaian
	Abena	22	Female	Working class (2nd gen)	Lower-Middle class	Ghanaian
	Dukes	27	Male	Working class (1st gen)	Lower-middle class	Ghanaian

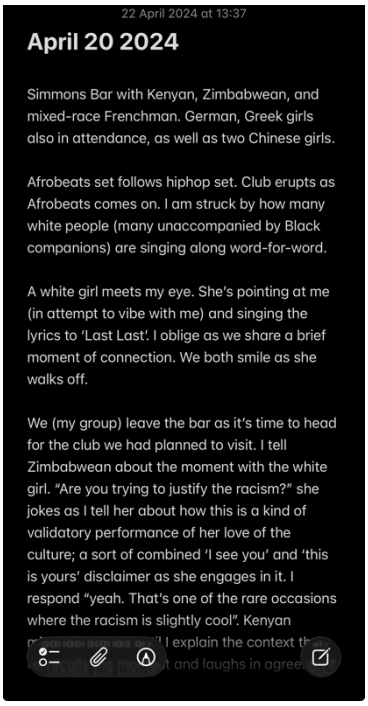
Interview Respondents

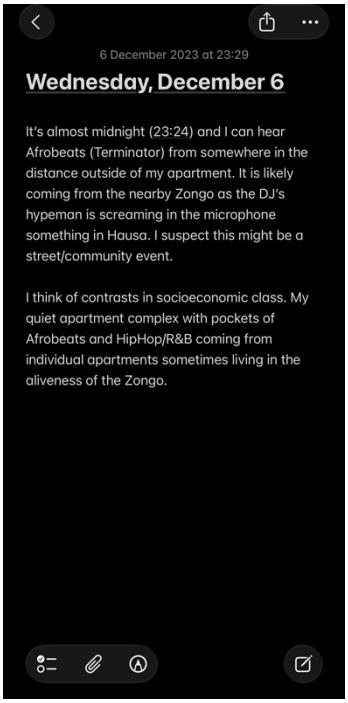
Pseudonym	Age	Gender	Field site	Generation	Heritage
Adina	25	Female	Accra		Ghanaian
Aku	34	Female	Accra		Ghanaian
Esi	35	Female	Accra		Ghanaian
Hazel	31	Female	Accra		Jamaican
Kekeli	20	Female	Accra		Ghanaian
Kwabena	36	Male	Accra		Ghanaian
Kwame	29	Male	Accra		Ghanaian
Miranda	25	Female	Accra		Ghanaian
Nana Yaw	19	Male	Accra		Ghanaian
Sarge	32	Male	Accra		Ghanaian-American
Senu	33	Male	Accra		Ghanaian
Serwaa	22	Female	Accra		Ghanaian
Amanda	26	Female	London	2nd gen	Ghanaian
Angela	21	Female	London	*3rd gen	British-Caribbean
Araba	25	Female	London	1st gen	Ghanaian
Ayi	24	Male	London	1st gen	Ghanaian-British

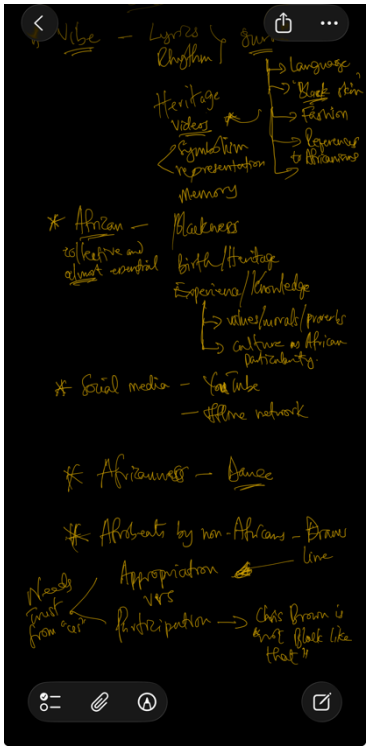
[46] Class descriptions are based on subjective assessments of participants current class positions and assessments of class backgrounds based on anecdotes participants shared about their backgrounds. These are intended only to offer a picture of the depth of their lived experiences, and current class positions alone do not tell this story.

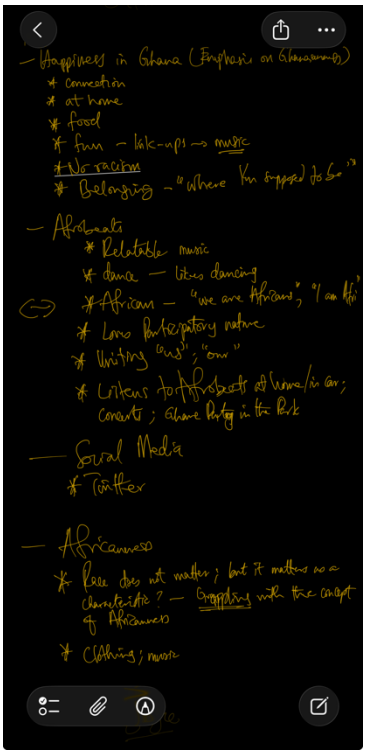
Bigz	27	Male	London	2nd gen	Ghanaian-Nigerian
Dizzie	33	Female	London	2nd gen	Ghanaian
Ella	18	Female	London	3rd gen	Ghanaian-Barbadian
Kwaku	27	Male	London	2nd gen	Ghanaian
Kwesi	25	Male	London	2nd gen	Ghanaian
Scrippz	19	Male	London	2nd gen	Ghanaian-British
Shirley	26	Female	London	2nd gen	Ghanaian-Jamaican
Zero	28	Male	London	*2nd gen	Ghanaian

Selected Screenshots of Fieldnotes









Interview Guide

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Topic prompts [*Potential questions if clarity needed*]

1. Afrobeats Culture
    a. Can you tell me about Afrobeats? What does Afrobeats mean to you?
    b. Do you enjoy it? When you say you enjoy it, what do you mean? What about it do you (not) enjoy?
    c. Can you tell me about how you came to enjoy the thing(s) you enjoy about it? Did/does someone recommend it/them?
    d. The thing(s) you enjoy about it, where/what places would you go to enjoy it/them? How often?
    e. Do you do it/go alone or with others? Do you enjoy it more alone or with others? Why do you say so?
    f. Do you keep up with the latest trends on the thing(s) you enjoy about it? How so?
    g. Who is/are your favourite performer(s)? How do you connect with them?
2. Identity
    a. Can you tell me about yourself? How would you describe yourself in three words?
    b. If someone (you're becoming friends with) asked you where you come from, what would you tell them?
    c. What does being [*insert self-defined identity marker*] mean to you?
    d. What thing(s) would you say make you describe yourself in this way?
    e. Are there people in your life that would also describe themselves in a similar way?
    f. What does it mean to you to (not) have people in your life that describe themselves in similar ways?
    g. How would (you say) you connect with others that describe themselves in similar ways?
3. Afrobeats Culture & Identity
    a. What does Afrobeats mean for being [*insert self-defined identity marker*]?
    b. What do you think of Afrobeats in relation to the way you describe yourself?
    c. Have you encountered others who would think of Afrobeats in this way?
    d. What do you think of the attention Afrobeats is getting on the global stage?
    e. Does it matter if non-[*insert self-defined identity marker*] perform (thing you like about) Afrobeats?
4. Social Context
    For homeland
    a. What does it mean for you to be [*insert self-defined identity marker*] in Africa/the world?
    b. How does Afrobeats make you think of this?
    For diaspora
    c. What does it mean for you to be [*insert self-defined identity marker*] in the UK/the world?
    d. How does Afrobeats make you think of this?

1. Questions drawn from online ethnography
    a. Do you know about [insert challenge/trending topic/hashtag]? What do you think of it?
    b. What other challenges/trending topics/hashtags have you engaged with? Tell me about them.
    c. Who would you usually find participating in these challenges/trending topics/hashtags? Which platform(s) do you usually find them on?
    d. Do you talk about these with anyone? Where would (you say) you (would) have these kinds of conversations? How?

Codebook

Code Frame

Identity						
Identity Only			**Identity+Space**		**Identity+Music Culture**	
	Individual	Collective	Origin?	Habitude?	Characteristics	Generalisation
Code	"I am African" "my way of" "personally"	"we are Africans" "our way of" "us" "Africans" "all of us" "it's an African thing" "everywhere in Africa" "our hair" "real Africans" "all Black people"	"Our roots" "home" "where we're from" "where we belong"	"African life" "our normal" "in Africa" "African setting" "Normal African village"	"our vibe" "we dance" "swag" "skin colour" "our music" "our spice" "sauce" "rhythm"	"African music" "African dance" "African fashion" "African culture" "our language" "our terms"
Definition	References to self; selfhood; singularity; notions of who a person is.outside of the collective	References to the collective; a focus on group dynamics	Articulations of place as collective; place where all Africans connect;	Articulations of place as always familiar; always similar across wide African geography	Articulations of traits or attitudes or ideas that are attached to African collective	Statements that deploy broad descriptors;
Use	When references are predominantly related to identity; with mentions of specific nations, ethnic groups but linked to identity etc.; do not use if articulations of mixed identity (mark these under mixed identity, if any)		When references are related mainly to identity plus place; if overlaps with all three, use two most strongly present		When references are related mainly to identity plus music culture	
Themes	Being; African nationalism?; Race		Home/Root; Everywhere; Normality; Belonging; interconnectedness; Familiarity		Particularity; Ownership; Vibe; Co-creation; Afro-cool; Contestation	

Music Culture							
Music Culture Only				**Music Culture+Space**		**Music Culture+Identity**	
	Music	Dance	Fashion	Habitude?	Magnitude	Origin?	Affect
Code	"Afrobeats" "Afro-pop" "Amapiano" "Afropiano" "Afro-dancehall" "Naija beats" "hiplife" "Francophone music" "azonto"	"Afrobeats dance" "Afrodance" "leg work" "Tswala Bam" "azonto" "shaku shaku" "Network"	"African print in videos" "urban style" "kente" "jewellery" "Woodin" "adinkra" "mixed styles" "kaba" "cowry" "beads"	"Afrobeats everywhere" "every day" "part of us" "normal everywhere now" "playlist" "TV" "dance challenges"	"Afrobeats+Grammys" "Afrobeats at carnival" "dance in streets" "NFL ad" "football matches" "performance" "O2 sold out" "Maddison Square Garden" "everywhere"	"African Music" "Ghanaian sound" "Nigerian music" "South African music" "African print" "African dance"	"Makes us happy as Africans" "Proud to be African" "Gives African vibes" "Feel more African" "Brings Africans together" "

Definition	References to music genres	References to dance styles	References to fashion items or styles	Accounts of normal or usual encounter with elements of Afrobeats culture or everyday engagement	Emphases on the importance of Afrobeats in specific place; on depth of meaning of the presence of Afrobeats in unexpected or unprecedented place	Attachments of national or regional or specific cultural config. as the source of Afrobeats	Articulations of emotions or feelings related to how Afrobeats makes specific groups or individual feel
Use	When references are predominantly related to music culture; with mentions of specific genres, musicians, styles, etc.			When references are related mainly to music culture plus place		When references are related mainly to music culture plus identity; with mentions of togetherness and synchronicity in engagement of esp. dance, etc	
Themes	Culture; Enjoyment			Everywhere; Normality?;	Pride; Everywhere (visibility)	Ownership; Boundaries	Enjoyment; Conviviality; Ownership; Vibe
Space							
Space Only				**Space+Music Culture**		**Space+Identity**	
Code	Homeland	Diaspora	Connective	Expectations?	Habitude?	Reclamation	Divisions?
	"Back home" "Accra" "Africa" "Ghana" "Naija" "SA" "Here" "Francophone" "East Africa" "West Africa" "Motherland"	"Diaspora" "UK" "Jamaica" "US" "London" "The West" "There" "Abroad" "Caribbean" "Dubai" "This place" "Europe"	"Socials" "Insta" "Snap" "Internet" "TikTok" "YouTube" "Connect us" "Online" "Twitter"	"No Afrobeats?" "Barber YouTube playlist" "Salon music" "African restaurant" "Wedding jams"	"Neighbourhood jams" "Even in church" "On radio" "Hang outs" "Clubs" "Everywhere you go" "Playlist on the tube" "commute" "shops" "at work" "in car"	"Full of Africans" "Ghanaians showed out" "Africa to the world" "Take over party scene" "Put Africa on map" "in Central London"	"North Africans vs SSA" "Nigeria vs SA" "Ghana vs Nigeria" "US gatekeepers of Blackness" "Diaspora wars"
Definition	References in Posts/Qts/Obsv related to physical locations in/around Africa	References in Posts/Qts/Obsv related to physical locations outside Africa	References in Posts/Qts/Obsv related to virtual locations	Articulations of what is expected in certain places; disappointment about place	Suggestions that elements of are Afrobeats expected or normal; places where they're taken for granted or are expected	Articulations of pride that Afrobeats is in place where typically might be unexpected	Fights/debates about place where elements of Afrobeats originated; which places are African?; origin of Blackness
Use	When references are predominantly related to place; with mentions of infrastructure or environment or social relations within place; generalisations of place or extension of one place as representation of wider geography			When references are related mainly to place plus elements of Afrobeats culture; with mentions of music/dance, etc in attachment to place		When references are related mainly to place plus identity; with mentions of nationality or social background in relation to geographical area or specific place/event location, etc	
Themes	Home; Togetherness; Everywhere			Everywhere (+visibility); Normality?;		Togetherness; Ownership (Group)	Boundaries; Ownership (Contested)
						Everywhere (pride?);	