



## CULTURAL IDENTITY AND AESTHETICS COMMUNICATION IN THE MUSIC VIDEO OF ENAM'S "AMIN"

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**ABSTRACT:** *This study examines how cultural identity and artistic vision are expressed in the music video or videos for Ghanaian Afro-spiritual musician Enam's 2025 single "Amin." It explores how Enam draws on indigenous Ghanaian spiritual traditions, Ewe choral aesthetics, sacred landscape, body adornment, and ritual performance to create a uniquely African cultural identity within contemporary popular music. It does so by drawing on Stuart Hall's theory of cultural identity, Molefi Asante's Afrocentric paradigm, and the semiotics of visual culture. According to the interpretation, "Amin" reclaims indigenous cosmologies as valid aesthetic and epistemic frameworks while simultaneously serving as a visual ritual, an auditory prayer, and a postcolonial counter-narrative. According to the publication, Enam's work represents an emerging tradition of Afro-spiritual creativity in West African popular music that emphasises African indigenous knowledge as the foundation for artistic production and opposes prevailing global aesthetics.*

**KEYWORDS:** Cultural identity, Music video aesthetics, Postcolonial aesthetics, Ewe tradition.



## INTRODUCTION

It has long been acknowledged that music videos are intricate audio-visual texts that convey identities, cultural meanings, and ideologies (Goodwin, 1992; Railton & Watson, 2011). To challenge decades of Western aesthetic hegemony and reclaim indigenous traditions as primary artistic resources, artists in contemporary African popular music are increasingly using music videos as a platform to negotiate and assert cultural identity (Shipley, 2013). The work of Angela Enam, a genre-defying Ghanaian singer who describes her practice as "Afro-spiritual" and whose 2025 song "Amin" has garnered significant attention for its profound cultural and spiritual engagement, is one of the most striking modern examples of this phenomenon.

"Amin," a word derived from West African spiritual vocabularies meaning "may it be," was released in August 2025, along with two music videos: "Amin: The Blood Moon Rebirth" (September 2025), produced by NF Studios and shot at Ghana's holy waterfalls, and "Liberation Ritual Film" (August 2025) (Ghana News Agency, 2025; YouTube, 2025). Taken as a whole, these audiovisual pieces offer a wealth of material for examining cultural identity and aesthetics in Ghanaian popular music today.

This essay closely examines "Amin" as a musical and visual work. It situates Enam's work within broader academic discussions on postcolonial aesthetics, cultural identity, and the role of indigenous African knowledge systems in modern popular culture. Three main issues serve as the framework for the analysis: (1) How does Enam use visual and aural aesthetics to create and convey Ghanaian cultural identity? (2) How have indigenous spiritual traditions influenced the work's aesthetic language? (3) How does "Amin" contribute to larger discussions concerning creative sovereignty and African cultural representation in the international music industry?

The paper is organised as follows: an analysis of the sonic aesthetics of "Amin" is followed by a review of relevant theoretical and scholarly literature; the visual aesthetics and cultural symbolism of the music films are examined in the next section; issues of identity, spirituality, and postcolonial counter-narrative are then discussed; and the final section presents conclusions and recommendations for further research.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### *Cultural Identity in African Popular Music*

An important starting point for this examination is Stuart Hall's fundamental theory of cultural identity. According to Hall (1990), cultural identity is continually constructed through narrative, representation, and the interplay of history, culture, and power, rather than being fixed or essential. Identity is expressed at the nexus of difference (rupture, displacement, the colonial encounter) and continuity (shared culture, history, and ancestry), especially for diasporic and postcolonial subjects. Scholars who have examined how musicians balance regional customs and international influences have successfully applied Hall's theory to African popular music (Shipley, 2013; Turino, 2000).

Scholars have examined the intricate interplay between highlife customs, choral church music, indigenous oral poetry, and modern international genres such as Afrobeats and hiplife in the



Ghanaian context (Collins, 2005; Shipley, 2013). According to Kwame Nantambu (2006), true African cultural expression, as a decolonial practice, requires the deliberate recovery and re-centring of pre-colonial cultural traditions. The Afrocentric paradigm of Molefi Asante (1998), which holds that African peoples must be at the centre of their own cultural analysis and that African culture must be interpreted through African conceptual frameworks rather than through the lens of Western aesthetics, aligns closely with this viewpoint.

### ***Music Video Aesthetics and Semiotics***

A wealth of academic research analyses music videos as aesthetic and cultural forms. The importance of the star image, the relationship between music and image, and the industry's business logic are among the formal criteria that Goodwin (1992) proposed for the music video genre. Vernallis (2004) expanded on this approach, examining how editing, framing, colour, and movement in music videos produce meaning through what she termed "video aesthetics," a clearly audio-visual method of signifying. In a more recent study, Railton and Watson (2011) examined how music videos use aesthetic techniques to address issues of race, gender, and identity.

The study of cultural symbols in music videos has benefited greatly from semiotic approaches. Building on Roland Barthes' (1977) distinction between denotation and connotation, researchers have examined how ideologically charged layers of cultural meaning are conveyed by visual signs in music videos. This approach has been used to investigate how traditional symbols, settings, and performance techniques function as markers of cultural identity and belonging in African music videos (Ajibade, 2013).

### ***Spirituality, Cosmology, and African Aesthetics***

Many theories have been developed regarding the relationship between spirituality and aesthetics in African cultural production. According to Wole Soyinka (1976), African drama, music, and performance are inextricably linked to spiritual and cosmological frameworks, particularly the interaction among the gods, the living, and the ancestors. In a similar vein, Ben-Amos (1986) contended that African art must be interpreted in relation to its ceremonial role and spiritual potency, rather than through Western criteria of independent aesthetic experience. More recently, researchers such as Kofi Agawu (2003) have examined how rich philosophical and spiritual worldviews are encoded in Ewe musical traditions, particularly the choral aesthetics essential to Enam's practice.

The concept of the "sacred landscape" is particularly relevant to the examination of Enam's "Amin." In many Ghanaian and West African spiritual traditions, certain landscapes, including forests, rivers, and waterfalls, are believed to be inhabited by spiritual energies and to serve as sites of human-divine communication (Opoku, 1978). Therefore, the decision to use Ghana's holy waterfalls as the backdrop for "Amin: The Blood Moon Rebirth" is not only aesthetically pleasing but also an important act of place-making from a religious and cultural perspective.

The spiritual dimensions of Afrobeats and modern African popular music have been the focus of recent research. Shipley (2013) observed that despite Ghanaian popular music's adoption of international commercial styles, spiritual idioms and cosmologies persist. In a similar vein, Olaniyan (2004) examined how Yoruba spiritual traditions influence popular music in Nigeria.



An extreme and self-consciously explicit example of this tendency is "Amin" by Enam, an artist who openly presents herself as a channel for ancestral spiritual powers.

### **Sonic Aesthetics of "Amin"**

#### ***Musical Fusion and Indigenous Elements***

"Amin" by Enam is distinguished by an intricate blend of traditional Ghanaian musical styles and modern sound design. According to Ghana Music (2025), the song blends "traditional Ewe chants with contemporary Afrobeats and soul influences," and its texture quickly demonstrates this fusion. Particularly important is the application of Ewe choral aesthetics. According to Agawu (2003) and Koetting (1970), the Ewe people of Ghana's Volta Region have a rich legacy of choral singing intricately linked to religious and ritual activities. These traditions carry particular implications of spiritual invocation and ancestral connection.

Layered vocal harmonics, ritual percussion rhythms, ambient soundscapes, and atmospheric textures, as described by the Ghana News Agency (2025), combine to create what Murray Schafer (1977) might call a "soundscape" that functions as an aural environment, immersing the listener in a particular cultural and spiritual space. The decision to prioritise the human voice, referred to as "raw vocals" (Ghana News Agency, 2025), over heavily processed instrumentation signals a commitment to sonic authenticity and indigenous aesthetic values. This aligns with Nketia's (1974) observation of a key feature of African music: the human voice as the most revered and expressive instrument.

#### ***Language, Lyric, and Spiritual Address***

The choice of the title word "Amin" itself has cultural resonance. Although the word has cognates in Hebrew, Arabic ("ameen"), and other world religions, Enam's use of it in the context of Ghanaian woodland god adoration and spiritual bath ceremonies gives it a clearly localised connotation. According to the Ghana News Agency (2025), "Amin" means "may it be" in the song, a performative utterance that is simultaneously a ritual invocation, affirmation, and prayer (Austin, 1962). The song's words, described as expressing "hope, gratitude, and divine guidance" (Ghana Music, 2025), are part of the tradition of what Karin Barber (1991) has referred to as "praise poetry," an African oral literature genre that addresses spiritual forces in a way that is both communal and personal.

The "third space" of cultural hybridity, which Homi Bhabha (1994) describes as a zone of negotiation between tradition and modernity, local and global, where new forms of cultural identity are generated, is reflected in the multilingual aspect of Enam's work, which weaves the native Ewe language with English. Enam's hybridisation, which uses internationally legible sound forms to convey distinctly local cultural content to broader audiences, seems deliberate rather than a break with tradition.



## Visual Aesthetics and Cultural Symbolism

### *Sacred Landscape as Aesthetic Frame*

The two separate music videos that make up "Amin"'s visual component work together to create a cohesive artistic concept. "Amin" The Blood Moon Rebirth" (NF Studios, 2025), the most visually ambitious of the two, is set against "the breathtaking backdrop of Ghana's sacred waterfalls" (YouTube, 2025). This location was chosen for its deep cultural significance. In Ghanaian traditional religion, waterfalls are linked to spiritual power, purification, and water spirits ("mami wata" and related entities) (Opoku, 1978). By filming at this location, the production team places the music video within a distinctively Ghanaian spiritual landscape, generating cultural implications that Ghanaian audiences would recognise immediately.

This symbolic environment is further enhanced by the "blood moon" in the movie's title. In many African cosmological traditions, the blood moon, a total lunar eclipse, is associated with spiritual intensity, metamorphosis, and the blurring of boundaries between the material and spiritual realms. In contrast to Western linear temporality, the African philosophical framework of cyclical time and ongoing regeneration is reflected in the juxtaposition of the blood moon with the notion of "rebirth" (Mbiti, 1969). This important intellectual and artistic decision places the movie in a clearly African cosmic context.

### *The Liberation Ritual Film: Body, Space, and Performance*

A similar visual register appears in the previous "Liberation Ritual Film" (August 2025). The Ghanaian Forest serves as the primary visual setting for this film, which the YouTube metadata describes as a "sacred journey where music, movement, and herbs awaken the forest gods" (YouTube, 2025). As the domain of nature spirits, ancestral energies, and hidden knowledge, the forest is fundamental to Ghanaian and wider West African spiritual cosmologies (Opoku, 1978). Enam presents herself as a spiritual practitioner, griot, priestess, or ritual specialist, performing in the forest rather than as a traditional popular music celebrity, thereby asserting that her performance has efficacy beyond the purely aesthetic.

The movie's description makes a notable reference to herbs. Many Ghanaian traditional healing and spiritual practices centre on the use of medicinal and ritual plants, and the visual narrative's incorporation of herbs links the performance to a particular lineage of embodied, materially grounded spiritual practice. This aligns with the song's purported origins in "spiritual bath rituals" (Ghana News Agency, 2025), which include prayer, water, and herbs for cleansing and rejuvenation.

### *Dress, Adornment, and the Politics of Aesthetics*

Although published sources do not provide a detailed account of Enam's costumes, the artist's overall style, described as evoking the "mystical, ancestral, and intensely personal" (Ghana News Agency, 2025), suggests a purposeful engagement with African clothing and accessories that denote traditional spiritual authority. In the broader context of Afro-spiritual music and performance in West Africa, this often involves the use of cowrie shells, handwoven kente-adjacent textiles, white fabrics (associated with spiritual purity), and other cosmologically significant ornamental traditions (Ross, 1998).



The politics of representation, which Stuart Hall (1996) defined as the use of visual signs to subvert prevailing representational regimes and express alternative cultural norms, is what these aesthetic decisions engage with. Enam makes a statement about what constitutes beauty, authority, and creative value by selecting aesthetic codes derived from indigenous spiritual traditions rather than the globalised visual languages of popular pop music.

### ***Cinematography and Colour***

Professional cinematography is employed in the NF Studios production to enhance the visual language of "Amin: The Blood Moon Rebirth." The waterfalls are described as "breathtaking" (YouTube, 2025), suggesting that the film uses expansive landscape shots to convey the setting's majesty and holiness. According to Vernallis's (2004) tradition of music video analysis, this constitutes "environmental amplification," extending the music's emotional and conceptual meaning into the natural world.

The title "blood moon" also suggests a distinctive colour scheme: the blues and greens of the waterfall environment contrast with the rich reds and ambers of a lunar eclipse. African artistic traditions have theorised that these hue contrasts convey particular spiritual and emotional connotations. In many West African traditions, blue and green are associated with water, healing, and the feminine divine; red is associated with power, transformation, and the spirit realm (Drewal & Mason, 1998). Thus, the film's use of various colour registers would provide a visual argument about the nature of spiritual renewal and transformation.

### **Identity, Spirituality, and Postcolonial Counter-Narrative**

#### ***Enam as Cultural Mediator***

The self-positioning of Enam is essential to the meaning of "Amin." According to the Ghana News Agency (2025), the artist "unquestionably serves as a link between ancient wisdom and new sound." This description reflects the widely held African belief that the artist serves as a cultural mediator between tradition and modernity, the sacred and the secular, and the living and the ancestors. In African performance studies, this figure is well theorised: According to Soyinka (1976), the focal point of African theatrical and musical performance is the Yoruba concept of the "fourth stage," the gap between the realms of the living, the dead, and the gods. In Ghana's spiritual landscape, Enam seems to occupy a similar position.

Notably, Enam's work is described as "more than music; it is an exhortation" (Ghana News Agency, 2025). The term "exhortation" denotes a call to action, awakening, and return, driven by morality and spirituality rather than mere amusement or artistic expression. This places Enam in a long line of African artists who view their work as both political and artistic, spiritual and social (Barber, 1991; Olaniyan, 2004). "May It Be," the song's title, invokes a desired state of being for the community as a whole and serves as a communal prayer.

#### ***Decolonising Aesthetics***

In African popular music, "Amin" is part of a broader trend of artistic decolonisation. According to Ndlovu-Gatsheni (2018), decolonisation requires not only political and economic change but also the decolonisation of knowledge, aesthetics, and ways of being, which he calls "epistemic freedom." Enam's mission might be interpreted as a form of aesthetic and



epistemological freedom: the argument that African indigenous spiritual traditions are not relics of a bygone era but a valid and rich foundation for contemporary artistic creation.

This stance goes against the prevailing logic of the global music industry, which tends to view African music either as a globalised Afrobeats product that conforms to Western commercial formats or as an exotic raw material for Western production. Enam's "Amin" rejects both of these viewpoints: it is too committed to indigenous aesthetic frameworks to be incorporated into popular commercial formats, and it is too spiritually distinctive and culturally rooted to be readily exoticised. This rejection is, in itself, a political and artistic statement.

### ***Belonging, Resilience, and Community***

According to Ghana Music (2025), "Amin" is "an uplifting, soulful release celebrating resilience and divine guidance," a description that highlights the work's therapeutic and communal aspects. The African community art tradition views music as an activity that unites, heals, and strengthens communities rather than as a manifestation of individual brilliance (Blacking, 1973). The song alludes to a spiritual bath ritual, a collective practice of purification and rebirth in which the community's health is seen as inextricably linked to the individual's healing.

The film's staging further emphasises this social aspect: the woodland and waterfall settings evoke a shared sacred space, the kind of communal ritual site essential to Ghanaian traditional religious practice, rather than individual contemplation. Enam's work invokes this space to call into existence an imagined community (Anderson, 1983), not the abstract nation of mainstream popular music but the particular Ghanaian spiritual community composed of ritual practices, shared cosmological beliefs, and ancestral traditions.

## **DISCUSSION**

According to the research in this paper, "Amin" is a work of significant cultural depth and aesthetic complexity. Sonic, visual, and performance elements are combined in Enam's music video to create a unified artistic vision rooted in Ghanaian spiritual traditions. Beyond a stylistic choice, the use of Ewe choral aesthetics, sacred landscape, ritual performance, and cosmological imagery represents a philosophical and political stance: the belief that African indigenous knowledge systems are sufficient, if not essential, foundations for modern artistic practice.

This viewpoint is particularly relevant in today's Ghanaian cultural context. From the colonial hybridisations of early highlife to the current dominance of Afrobeats and hiplife, Ghana's music industry has long been shaped by intricate compromises between indigenous traditions and international influences (Collins, 2005; Shipley, 2013). Enam's Afro-spiritual practice is a distinctive and perhaps radical contribution in this context, rejecting more commercially oriented modes of cultural negotiation in favour of a thorough immersion in indigenous spiritual aesthetics.

It is informative to compare Enam's practice with that of other African artists working in related artistic domains. The use of indigenous musical traditions and spiritual frameworks as the foundation for modern popular music by artists such as Asa (Nigeria), Thandiswa Mazwai



(South Africa), and Fatoumata Diawara (Mali/France) suggests that Enam's practice is part of a broader continental trend towards what could be termed "spiritual neo-traditionalism" in African popular music—the deliberate retrieval and reactivation of indigenous traditions in response to globalisation.

However, it is crucial to reject any essentialist interpretation of "Amin" as a blatantly "pure" or "authentic" manifestation of Ghanaian cultural identity. Cultural identity is always performative and constructed, a product of particular historical circumstances and power dynamics, as Hall (1990) reminded us. The Afro-spiritual aesthetic of Enam is a modern creation, a fusion of various elements (Ewe heritage, contemporary production, global music-film aesthetics) that did not exist in any pre-colonial period. Its force lies in its ability to adapt ancient spiritual resources to modern circumstances, not in its devotion to any original tradition.

## CONCLUSION

This essay has made the case that Enam's "Amin" is an important and sophisticated addition to the ongoing effort to decolonise African aesthetics. The work conveys a vision of Ghanaian cultural identity rooted in indigenous spiritual traditions through Ewe choral aesthetics, sacred landscapes, ritual performance, and cosmological imagery. It also speaks to modern audiences through globally accessible auditory and visual languages. The finished piece is a potent illustration of what African artists can achieve when they place their own cultural traditions at the centre of their artistic practice. It is simultaneously a prayer, a political statement, an aesthetic manifesto, and a communal ritual.

The importance of interdisciplinary approaches to the study of African popular music has also been emphasised by the analysis. A thorough understanding of the nuanced meanings that "Amin" creates requires engagement with cultural theory (Hall, Bhabha), Afrocentric scholarship (Asante, Agawu), African religious studies (Opoku, Soyinka), and music video studies (Goodwin, Vernallis). The intricacy of the cultural landscape that Enam traverses is reflected in its transdisciplinary richness.

Future studies could examine how "Amin" is received by audiences in Ghana and the diaspora to assess how different cultures interpret and derive meaning from the work's cultural and spiritual themes. Mapping the features of this new aesthetic movement would also benefit from comparison with other Afro-spiritual artists on the continent. Long-term fieldwork with Enam herself would further deepen our understanding of the cultural knowledge systems and creative intentions that guide her work.

In the end, "Amin" ("may it be") serves as a prayer for the future: a future in which African artists are free to fully utilise the richness and depth of their cultural traditions and in which those traditions are acknowledged internationally as the authentic and essential foundations of artistic production that they are.



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