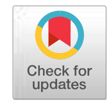
E-Journal of Humanities, Arts and Social Sciences (EHASS)
ISSN – Online 2720-7722 | Print 2821-8949
Volume 5 Issue 15 November Special Issue 2024 pp 81-90
Available online at: https://noyam.org/journals/ehass/
DOI: https://doi.org/10.38159/ehass.20245157

The Good, The Bad and The Legacy of *Kwaito*



Madimabe G. Mapaya[1] & Thulani G. Zulu [1]

[1] University of Venda, South Africa.

ABSTRACT
This article investigates *kwaito* music's role in revitalising South African youth. *Kwaito* is more than a music genre; it is a cultural movement reflecting the experiences, aspirations, and challenges of youth in *ekasi* (South African townships). With the genre's decline in popularity after 30 years of prosperity, it is crucial to explore, analyse, and document its positive and negative histories, particularly its legacy. The enlisted exploratory methodology involved content analysis of scholarly articles, books, and online data, including YouTube interviews and documentaries about *kwaito*. Data collection also included interviews with key South African music industry figures such as former record executives and musicians. While scholars examine *kwaito* from various disciplinary perspectives, key figures in the *kwaito* community feel their contributions are still under-represented. This highlights a gap between academic and journalistic accounts and the personal experiences of those deeply involved in the *kwaito* culture. This article concludes that *kwaito* significantly influences black youth by promoting self-expression, community cohesion, entrepreneurial enterprise, and introducing new role models. It emphasises *kwaito*'s impact on South African culture and music, contributing substantially to the discourse of African musicology.

Keywords: *Kwaito, Kasi, South Africa, Cultural Phenomenon, Methodology, Music Scholarship, Socio-Political Context.*

Correspondence:
Madimabe G. Mapaya
Email:
Geoff.Mapaya@univen.ac.za

Publication History:
Received:
31st July, 2024
Accepted:
5th December, 2024
Published online:
30th December, 2024

INTRODUCTION

Before examining the *kwaito* music genre, it is crucial to recognise that "music" does not fully encompass the performative aspects integral to African music.[1] Descriptions such as Mapaya's 'song-dance performative compound' or Nzewi's 'musical art' are often cumbersome or misaligned with African perspectives.[2] This article defines music as a performative phenomenon that includes dance, costumes, and other expressive elements essential to music-making. Thus, labelling *kwaito* as a music genre incorporates African sensibilities about music.

Kwaito represents the lifestyle and culture of *ekasi*, the affectionate term for black South African townships. According to Satyo, *kwaito* resonates with the *kasi* experience and is vital for understanding the aspirations and challenges of township youth.[3] Engaging with *kwaito* offers insights into the *kasi*

[1] Shingi Mavima, "Signs of the Spirit: Music and the Experience of Meaning in Ndau Ceremonial Life," *Canadian Journal of African Studies / Revue Canadienne Des Études Africaines* 55, no. 2 (May 4, 2021): 439–41, https://doi.org/10.1080/00083968.2021.1917044.
[2] M. G. Mapaya, "Investigating Mmino Wa Setso (Indigenous African Music) as Practiced by Bahananwa in Limpopo Province, South Africa: Towards Ordinary African Musicology" (University of Venda, 2013); M. Nzewi, "A Contemporary Study of Musical Arts Vol. 1," 2007.
[3] Sizwe Satyo, "A Linguistic Study of Kwaito," *The World of Music*, 2008, 91–102.

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culture and its historical context. It highlights the relationship between music, identity, and social structure.

Kwaito fits within the historical continuum of township music. It evolved from township disco while retaining the *is'pantsula* ideology.[4] This transition is acutely reflected in alterations to fashion aesthetics, transitioning from Brandwood and Florsheim shoes to All-Star footwear popularised by the kwaito group Trompies and 1990s pantsula dancers, with Dickies/Converse/bucket hat ensembles becoming emblematic.[5] Recording technology has also advanced from reel-to-reel tape, drum machines like the Roland TR-808 and Linn LM-1, and keyboards such as Juno 50 and Yamaha DX7 sounds to in-the-box music recording.[6] The porting medium shifted from vinyl to CDs. Even though the musicality of *kwaito* musicians has been questionable, it is crucial to note that initially, *kwaito*'s creation involved skilled artists, particularly keyboardists like Mandla 'Spikiri' Mofokeng, Joe Nina, and Eugene Mthethwa.

Notably, research on *kwaito* has mainly been restricted to South Africa and, to some extent, its neighbouring regions, with little attention from international scholars. While South African art journalists have discussed the topic, there is a significant lack of comprehensive studies by musicologists and global academics.[7] Despite its profound cultural and historical importance, *kwaito* remains on the fringes of global music studies. This neglect limits our understanding of African music and marginalises the experiences and contributions of black South African youth during a pivotal period of social change.

This study examines *kwaito's* role in shaping township youth identities in the post-apartheid era and analyses how artists like Arthur Mafokate, Mdu Masilela, Joe Nina, Zola 7, and Mandoza addressed issues such as youth apathy, crime, and cultural expression through their music. The research employs qualitative methods, with data from journal articles, books, interviews, and online platforms. Recently, YouTube has emerged as a crucial data source, documenting performances, artist interviews, and cultural discourse whilst providing additional insights through non-verbal communication, including body language and facial expressions.[8] Interviews with former record executives, radio DJs, and *kwaito* artists illuminated the genre's evolution and significance. Interviews through digital platforms such as WhatsApp and Microsoft Teams were also conducted with key figures in the music industry.[10]

The Good Side of *Kwaito*

Kwaito is a post-apartheid music phenomenon.[8] Despite its challenging socio-political context, it deliberately adopted an apolitical stance, opting to focus on celebrating the optimistic mood of the time, aspirations for economic prosperity, and social renewal.[9] Arthur Mafokate's song *Don't Call Me Kaffir* was perhaps the boldest political feat.[10] Looking back, the song can be regarded as a relic of the township disco era, which typically had spikes in vailed socio-political commentary. The song was a disruptive force to the established societal order, occurring at a time when the populace remained engrossed in post-apartheid optimism. Given the nation's delicate state following recent political transitions, the song was perceived as inflammatory and consequently barred from dissemination via public broadcasting channels. Paradoxically, the song catalysed a musical revolution among the youth. It garnered significant attention from young South African audiences and achieved commercial success, with sales exceeding 150,000

[4] Kgafela Oa Magogodi, "Refiguring the Body: Performance of Identity in *Mapantsula* and *Fools*," *Theatre Research International* 27, no. 3 (October 9, 2002): 243–58, https://doi.org/10.1017/S0307883302000329.
[5] J. Evans, "The Deeper Meaning behind the Dress Codes of Johannesburg's Pantsula Dancers: In the Townships of South Africa's Biggest City, a Thriving Style Subculture Is Changing with the Times," Esquire, 2018, https://www.esquire.com/style/mens-fashion/a22804470/johannesburg-pantsula-dancers-style-fashion-clothing/.
[6] T. Mathe, " The Digital Tool That Ushered in the Bubblegum Music Era," Daily Maverick, 2023, https://www.dailymaverick.co.za/article/2023-03-14-the-digital-tool-that-ushered-in-the-bubblegum-music-era/.
[7] Bongani Madondo, *I'm Not Your Weekend Special: Portraits on the Life+ Style & Politics of Brenda Fassie* (Picador Africa, 2014); Mathe, " The Digital Tool That Ushered in the Bubblegum Music Era"; S. Memela, " Kwaito Artists Missed Opportunity to Help Redefine the Future," *Sowetan Live*, August 16, 2023; Max Mojapelo, *Beyond Memory: Recording the History, Moments and Memories of South African Music* (African Books Collective, 2009).
[8] Gibson Boloka, "Cultural Studies and the Transformation of the Music Industry: Some Reflections on Kwaito," *Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*, 2003, 97–108.
[9] Tuulikki Pietilä, "Play and Irony in the Kwaito Music of Postapartheid South Africa," in *The Routledge Companion to Popular Music and Humor* (New York; London: Routledge, 2019.: Routledge, 2019), 124–31, https://doi.org/10.4324/9781351266642-18.
[10] Gavin Steingo, "South African Music after Apartheid: *Kwaito* , the 'Party Politic,' and the Appropriation of Gold as a Sign of Success," *Popular Music and Society* 28, no. 3 (July 2005): 333–57, https://doi.org/10.1080/03007760500105172.

units.[11] Otherwise, *kwaito* was generally perceived as lacking political orientation. Rather, it was predominantly associated with social gatherings and the ostentatious display of newly acquired financial resources.

Kwaito's apolitical nature was perceived as a rejection of the role played by music in the anti-apartheid struggle. This perception was not well-received by individuals who emphasised the importance of music in promoting the national agenda. For instance, Sandile Memela, in his column piece titled "Kwaito Artists Missed the Opportunity to Redefine the Future", recounts Walter Sisulu's concern regarding the music of the youth that was not intellectually stimulating (Walter Sisulu was an elderly statesman who recruited Nelson Mandela to the African National Congress).[12] According to Memela, Sisulu instructed Peter Mokaba, the then African National Congress Youth League president, to address this musical stance as it did not contribute to the country's political trajectory. Memela cites Oskido as one of the pioneers of *kwaito*, who rejected the notion of adhering to the political agenda. Furthermore, with a prominent group, Boom Shaka, 'sexualising' the national anthem by increasing the song's tempo and performing provocative dance movements to its rhythm, the attitude of *kwaito* was evident. The *kwaito* movement would not engage in political matters.

Kwaito and the Independent Label Boom

In South Africa, multinational record companies had an unrestricted influence on determining the musical preferences of South Africans. According to Master Sechele, a former record company executive,[13] had it not been for the endeavours of record label proprietors such as Artie Van Wyk, Phill Hollies, and Mike Fuller, the evolution of African music genres might have been impeded. These executives played a significant role in the pre-1994 South African music industry. Historically, these pioneers were Caucasian, as anticipated in a nation with established historical advantages for whites. However, towards the conclusion of this era, several pioneering African artists from townships started to establish their own record labels. Notable among these were Arthur Mafokate, Mdu Masilela, Oscar Sibonginkosi Mdlongwa, Don Laka, Trompies, and Bruce Sibitlo, who founded labels such as 999 Music, Mdu Music, Wicked Sounds, and Kalawa Jazzmee. This development was instrumental in the early evolution and success of the genre. Only after these independent labels demonstrated, commercial success did international record companies such as Universal Music Group, Sony Music, Electric and Musical Industries (EMI), and Bertelsmann Music Group (BMG) begin to involve themselves in *kwaito* production, recognising its potential.[14]

The creation of independent labels was a significant milestone in the history of *kwaito.* It allowed the genre to thrive and expand at a time when mainstream recognition was limited. The accomplishments of these labels showcased *kwaito's* commercial potential and ability to become a prominent cultural movement. The commercial success attained by the independent *kwaito* labels eventually drew the attention of prominent international record companies such as Sony, EMI, and BMG. These corporations acknowledged the genre's potential and began participating in *kwaito* production, signalling a pivotal moment in the genre's acceptance and global exposure. Finally, *kwaito,* especially its viability prospects, got the respect it deserved.

Kwaito-inspired Clothing

Insofar as fashion is concerned, *kwaito*'s aesthetic sense of clothing is a reinterpretation of *is'pantsula* of the 1980s. *Is'pantsula* is a lifestyle that prides itself on trendy dress codes and cleanliness.[15] Typical *pantsula* attire includes designer items such as Brantwood trousers, shiny Florsheim or Crocket and Jones shoes, neat dashiki shirts, and hats. This kind of attire was emblematic of the gang lifestyle of the time. Over time, the younger generation dropped Florsheim and Crocket and Jones shoes in favour of All-Star speakers and pantsula-style loud shirts, and Brentwood gave way to Dickies trousers, which became

[11] Pietilä, "Play and Irony in the Kwaito Music of Postapartheid South Africa."
[12] Memela, " Kwaito Artists Missed Opportunity to Help Redefine the Future."
[13] Personal Communication, 24 September 2023.
[14] Jacobus Stephanus Gericke, "Kwaito: A Developing Inter-Racial Phenomenon?," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 3, no. 1 (2006): 94–105.
[15] Daniela Goeller, "A Lady Is a Mshoza: Female Agency and Empowerment in South African Pantsula Dance and Culture," in *Fashion, Agency, and Empowerment* (Bloomsbury Publishing Plc, 2019), 111–26, https://doi.org/10.5040/9781350058293.ch-007.

synonymous with the genre.[16] As a statement, the shirt is sometimes tucked on only one side. The *kwaito* group Trompies fashioned a loose-flowing style, with shirts hanging tastefully. More than fashion, this became a declaration of an affinity for *is'kasi* (township lifestyle).

The popularity of *kwaito* and its effectiveness in putting *is'kasi* on the map also inspired fashion. Designers Sechaba Mogale and Wandile Nzimande 1997 founded the "*kwaito* clothing brand" *Loxion Kulca* (township culture).[17] The brand resonated with the broader *kwaito* youth cultural movement. Most importantly, the relative success of *Loxin Kulca* represented a profound mindset shift that inspired other clothing designers and entrepreneurs to establish brands. Theo Baloyi's shoe brand, *Bathu*, and the initiatives of Sibusiso "DJ Sbu" Leope and Siphiwe Likhuleni Shongwe with *MoFaya* energy drink drew from the positive vibes embraced in *kwaito.* This phenomenon is exemplified in the utilisation of the township lingua franca to designate *kasi* products. Further evidence of the connection between kwaito and American hip-hop is evident in the significant influence of American hip-hop fashion labels such as FUBU on *kwaito* style.

Kwaito Artists becoming Realistic Role Models

In a nation with a significant scarcity of role models for black children, *kwaito* artists have emerged as viable exemplars for South African youth who dare to transcend their impoverished circumstances. They demonstrated that success was possible. For example, Zola, who grew up in Soweto and was imprisoned for car theft, became a successful *kwaito* artist who later used his platform to motivate others.[18] From the Getto Ruff studio, Zola grew into this substantial expressive artist who eloquently illuminated *kasi* life challenges. So effective is Zola that Sifiso Siziba, one of the record producers,[19] likened him to the slain American rapper Tupac Shakur. His talent was confirmed when he hosted a philanthropic television show called Zola 7. Even though he had recently fallen into hard times, he still commands respect, and his name is almost synonymous with the good side of *kwaito.*

The impact of *kwaito* stars is inferred by examining the origins and height of their careers. Mandoza, for instance, influenced numerous artists who aspired to succeed in the *kwaito* music industry. He utilised music to advocate for the responsibility of one's condition. The song "*Uzoyithola Kanjani*," meaning "How are we going to get it if you don't get up and go for it?" conveys a motivational message through its rhythmic beats and melodies. This emphasises the necessity of action and perseverance to achieve goals, urging listeners to take proactive steps rather than wait for opportunities. This message is relevant in various contexts, such as personal ambitions, communal efforts, and societal changes, highlighting that valuable outcomes require effort and initiative.[20]

Entrepreneurial musicians such as Oskido, Don Laka, Mdu, and Arthur have established significant musical enterprises. These individuals are credited with discovering and fostering many talented musicians and have exerted a substantial influence on the music industry. Their contributions extend beyond their personal achievements; their legacies encompass inspiring future generations and establishing new standards for success. Their enduring impact reflects their pivotal role in shaping the musical landscape and influencing numerous artists who follow in their footsteps. The transformation of Kabelo Mabalane, renowned for his role as a member of the prominent TKZEE *kwaito* group, from struggling with substance abuse to becoming a significant leader and prominent figure in society is noteworthy. Mabalane's journey exemplifies resilience and transformation. With the support and guidance of Lucas Mahlakgane, who leads the *'World Changers Candidates'*, Mabalane transitioned from a potentially detrimental path to one of remarkable success and influence. His narrative demonstrates a personal triumph over adversity and serves as a compelling example of the potential for change and redemption.

[16] Sharlene Swartz, "Is Kwaito South African Hip-Hop? Why the Answer Matters and Who It Matters To," *The World of Music*, 2008, 15–33.
[17] Steingo, "South African Music after Apartheid: *Kwaito* , the 'Party Politic,' and the Appropriation of Gold as a Sign of Success."
[18] Gericke, "Kwaito: A Developing Inter-Racial Phenomenon?"
[19] Personal Communication, 25 September 2023.
[20] Gericke, "Kwaito: A Developing Inter-Racial Phenomenon?" 99.

Kwaito is often criticised for being materialistic and superficial, but many fans see it as a genuine reflection of township life and a celebration of culture.[21] The journeys of *Kwaito* artists from poverty to success provide a realistic and reliable model for young people in South Africa.

The Bad Side of *Kwaito*

Kwaito is often criticised for its use of offensive language, promotion of criminal behaviour, and glorification of promiscuity. This has resulted in a significant backlash from feminist groups, gender equality advocates, and other social organisations. Blose and Impey argue that *kwaito,* which was initially a platform for women's self-representation in post-apartheid South Africa, has deviated towards the sexual objectification of women, emphasising materialism and sex.[22] Several prominent *Kwaito* artists, including Thebe Mogane, have been accused of perpetuating the use of unsavoury language in reference to women or acts that involve women. Mogane has gained popularity through songs like "Bula Boot" and "Mbobo." Both songs contain euphemistic references to sexual acts, with women being targets of his misogynistic intent. "Bula Boot" can be interpreted as an encouragement for a boy to unzip his trousers, a veiled encouragement to engage in sexual activities with a girl. Similarly, "Mbobo" is a Zulu word for "hole”, which is also a veiled reference to the vagina. Mogane's music, despite its inexplicable success, has adopted this misogyny to an extreme degree; and he was not the only one to exploit sexual innuendos for commercial purposes. A significant number of *kwaito* artists disparagingly refer to women in song lyrics or video presentations.

In 2000, Arthur Mafokate released a highly charged dance song called “*Mnike*”. The word is a veiled encouragement for girls to engage in sexual activity. This is revealed by the phrase ‘*o robala ka madolo’*, which means you are sexually starving. The insinuation is that the only cure for sexual starvation is to submit to sexual advances. Another of his hit songs, “*Sika lekhekhe*”, released in 2005, is also laden with sexual innuendos. *Khekhe* or *kuku* refers to the vagina in the *kasi* slang, and *Sika lekhekhe* means to cut the cake. In its contextual interpretation, boys are encouraged to engage in sexual intercourse with girls. These innuendos are so repugnant that they portray women as objects and recipients of male lust. In an attempt to defend himself, Arthur thinks people are overly conservative, given that social media is now full of girls twerking.[23] This strange defence accuses women of inviting sexual interests simply by dancing.

The persistent portrayal of women as sexual objects suggests that this approach serves as an effective strategy for the commercial success of male artists. Some of the songs that would remain a stain on *kwaito* are *John Vul'igate's "Nasi Stoko",* “*Abuti efa ngan'o*”, and “*Voroso*”. Given the absurdity of these songs, one would expect women to be circumspect when lacing their lyrics with crude sex. Makhadzi, although not a *kwaito* artist, has songs that are notoriously euphemistic about sexual intercourse. Songs such as “*Tshinthsa Magear”* and “*Vharema Mini Wee*!” have sexual connotations.

Conspicuously*, kwaito* is notably sparse in romantic songs. The absence of romance in *kwaito* can be understood against the socio-economic backdrop of *kasi*. In such typical environments, men endure hard labour in factories while women, as domestic workers, care for white families, leaving little energy for family life. Men feel disempowered at work, and women, overwhelmed by their duties, struggle to maintain their romantic relationships. Madoda highlights how socio-economic conditions in townships where *kwaito* originated affect language use and are reflected in artists' behaviours due to stress and environmental factors.[24] *Kwaito*, linked to gangster culture, typically eschews traditional romantic themes in favour of sexual innuendos and foul language to create a sense of self-importance. It is closely associated with the street-savvy, often lawless *tsotsi* culture. In townships like Zola, known for high car theft rates, kwaito has thrived and epitomised street life and gangsterism.[25]

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[21] Pietilä, “Play and Irony in the Kwaito Music of Postapartheid South Africa.”
[22] Maud Blose, “Pornographic Objectification of Women through Kwaito Lyrics,” *Agenda* 26, no. 3 (September 29, 2012): 50–60, https://doi.org/10.1080/10130950.2012.729384; Angela Impey, “Resurrecting the Flesh? Reflections on Women in Kwaito,” *Agenda*, no. 49 (January 1, 2001): 44, https://doi.org/10.2307/4066491.
[23] Ndabeni and Mthembu, *Born to Kwaito: Reflections on the Kwaito Generation*.
[24] Derick Madoda, “Exploring the Correlation between the Natural Surroundings and the Prevalence of Offensive Language in Society: A Case Study on Three (3) Selected Residential Compounds in Lusaka District,” *World Journal of Advanced Research and Reviews* 21, no. 2 (February 28, 2024): 1252–62, https://doi.org/10.30574/wjarr.2024.21.2.0568.
[25] T. Rapule, “The Zola Hall of Fame,” *Mail & Guardian*, 2005.

The 1980s *'pantsula'* lifestyle among black youth, echoing the 1950s gangsterism with inherent violence, has seamlessly become the backdrop for *kwaito.* Tanja Bosch notes the genre's frequent romanticisation of violence, even within the music industry. [26] *Kwaito* artists such as Dr. Mageu use rugged lyrics and vocal styles to depict gender violence, suggesting that *kwaito*'s identity is intertwined with its gangster roots. The genre's foundation for machismo is clear, and moving away from this framework to address societal issues is uncharacteristic. Kabelo Mabalane's song '*Pantsula 4 Life*' illustrates the aggressive, competitive rage typical of *kwaito.* Zola 7's response to a provocation showcases the dangerous *tsotsi* atittude through his language, reinforcing *kwaito*'s celebration of gangsterism. Terms like "*bhade lami*" (sarcastically "my friend") and "*guluva*" (gangster) depict ongoing fights and retribution, presenting violence and toughness as virtues. The song "Mdlwembe", which serves as a soundtrack in Gavin Hood's film "Tsotsi", exemplifies not only the gangster aspect of *kwaito* but also its significance. This further substantiates that the promotion of gangsterism is not merely a thematic element but a fundamental aspect of kwaito's identity and appeal, drawing inspiration from the lived experiences and environments of its artists and audience.

The *kwaito* represents a rupture by removing itself from politics, arguably because South Africa has gained independence; therefore, political engagement is no longer necessary. This has been the general assumption, with many people believing that the African National Congress will take care of all the political aspirations of the people to heart and deal with them, particularly those coming from Black South Africans, who are still at the bottom of the food chain. The laxity of the apartheid rule meant that the *kwaito* could fashion itself solely as a party music genre, where only partying defined the youth. During apartheid, the identity of the enemy was known. In the current political landscape, with the African National Congress in power, identifying an adversary has become ambiguous for a significant portion of the Black population. Lacking political awareness and as evidenced by the predominantly youth-oriented culture, Black South Africa is characterised by a pervasive and continuous state of festivity, hence the preoccupation of *kwaito*.

Political disengagement among the youth in South Africa's black population is a significant concern. Although the 2024 elections witnessed a substantial increase in youth registration, youth voter turnout remains suboptimal. According to the Electoral Commission of South Africa (IEC), approximately 11.7 million individuals, or 42% of the total registered voters, were aged between 18 and 39. This represents a substantial increase compared with previous years, especially since the 2021 Local Government Elections. However, it is noteworthy that youths' engagement in the voter registration process did not translate into a higher voter turnout, with some advocating for an electronic voting system to potentially increase youth participation in the electoral process. Arthur was one of the few *kwaito* artists to sing about politics. His controversial song, *Don't Call Me Kaffir*, was bold. It dared to use the forbidden word *kaffir* by catapulting it to the text of his widely broadcast song. In addition, *kwaito* is seen as chasing after some make-believe or fantasy work depicted by American Hip-hop artists, where naked women provide an impression of glamour and opulence.

The music industry is infamously targeted by drug dealers who exploit both emerging and established artists. This is driven by the constant demand for artists to perform at their best regardless of the situation. Anxiety is a common issue among artists, especially performers, many of whom are introverts deeply engaged with their inner world.[27] The tendency to introspect is apparent in how they approach their work, frequently modifying their techniques to seek new artistic expressions and embracing the uncertainty of unpredictable outcomes.[28] For most artists, especially musicians, presenting a product publicly induces significant performance anxiety. Uncertainty about audience acceptance impacts both performance and aesthetic experience, causing anxiety when artists fear misunderstanding or lack of appreciation. The artist-audience relationship greatly influences artists' emotional and psychological well-

[26] T. E. Bosch, "'Ek Sê, Heita!': Kwaito and the Construction of Community," *Communicatio* 32, no. 1 (January 2006): 88–100, https://doi.org/10.1080/02500160608537964.
[27] Yaqi Huang, "Analysis on Artist Neuropsychology and Art Creation," *Translational Neuroscience* 10, no. 1 (April 23, 2019): 64–69, https://doi.org/10.1515/tnsci-2019-0011.
[28] Takeshi Okada and Sawako Yokochi, "Process Modification and Uncontrollability in an Expert Contemporary Artist's Creative Processes," *The Journal of Creative Behavior*, January 10, 2024, https://doi.org/10.1002/jocb.635.

being, often leading them to seek external support, even when well-prepared.[29] Alcohol and marijuana abuse is common in some kwaito circles, promoting the genre's themes of rebellion and resistance but raising concerns about normalising substance abuse in the music industry. Nedelcut, Leucuta, and Dumitrascu observed that music performance is associated with higher anxiety levels, with music students experiencing more anxiety than professional musicians.[30] The unwritten rule is that one needs some drugs to gather courage and improve stage performance.

Lucas Mahlakgane, chairperson of World Changers Candidates, states that individuals in the music industry are pressured to conform to group norms.[31] Some artists engage in substance abuse primarily due to a desire to assimilate with a social group comprising musicians and significant industry players. This is reflected in the misguided use of new money from successful album releases. Unless a formal arrangement exists to manage an artist, intervening is often difficult, especially where talent and money are concerned. In such circumstances, managing a talented individual can be challenging.[32] The challenge of facilitating an artist's comprehension persists until the individual recognises that all interventions are aimed at safeguarding them from harm, including potential risks associated with substance abuse. However, many individuals do not realise this until it is too late.

As alluded to, the working environment of musicians is also a place where alcohol is readily available, and drug dealers often take advantage of this to push their merchandise.[33] Drug use often starts as an innocent experiment but can become normalised and lead to addiction. Eventually, the artist may be unable to fulfil commitments or perform adequately without drugs. Few artists are educated about the dangers of drug use. Even when their situation worsens into a severe mental health issue, they remain unaware of the consequences. Mahlakgane argues that artists should enlist management services, noting that drug abuse and financial mismanagement are common in South African society, not just among artists.

Kwaito Tributaries

The preceding sections have illustrated the positive and negative aspects of *kwaito.* Forty years later, the debate on whether *kwaito* is dead or has simply metamorphosed into its many versions is still not settled. The latter view holds for several reasons; no music genre has ceased to exist. Because it lives in a person's psyche, music lingers on and sometimes even outlives its generation. According to Siddavatam et al., listeners are drawn to music that evokes strong emotions or memories, creating a deeper connection with music.[34] Second, no new music springs existed. Live performances and festivals frequently popularise music genres by creating memorable and energetic atmospheres that attract fans. It has always existed in response to prevailing conditions such as evolving technology and/or shifts in music trends. Therefore, if current musical styles espouse the same or similar socio-cultural motivations, they are, in essence, extensions of *kwaito.* For as long as Gqom, Hip-hop, Lekompo, or *Amapiano* exist, it can be said that *kwaito* exists, albeit in a different state.

Moving from the premise that these genres are offshoots of *kwaito,* the classification categories that relied mainly on factors other than musicological were encountered. For instance, DJs often use tempo to classify music because it significantly influences a track's rhythm and energy, crucial for seamless transitions and maintaining the desired dance floor ambience. Research shows that tempo plays a role in distinguishing dance music genres, helping to identify different styles and subgenres.[35] For instance, Nduduzo Mathambo, famously known as DJ Complexion, contends that tempo is essential in automatically classifying *kwaito,* with tempo-specific expert classifiers achieving approximately 90%

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[29] Lotte Philipsen, "Who's Afraid of the Audience? Digital and Post-Digital Perspectives on Aesthetics," *A Peer-Reviewed Journal About* 3, no. 1 (June 1, 2014): 120–30, https://doi.org/10.7146/aprja.v3i1.116092; Janette Graetz Simmonds and Jane E. Southcott, "Stage Fright and Joy: Performers in Relation to the Troupe, Audience, and Beyond," *International Journal of Applied Psychoanalytic Studies* 9, no. 4 (December 11, 2012): 318–29, https://doi.org/10.1002/aps.327.

[30] Sebastian Nedelcut, Daniel-Corneliu Leucuta, and Dan Lucian Dumitrascu, "Lifestyle and Psychosocial Factors in Musicians," *Medicine and Pharmacy Reports* 91, no. 3 (July 24, 2018): 312–16, https://doi.org/10.15386/cjmed-959.

[31] Personal Communication, 26 September 2023.

[32] Robert Henley Woody and Robert Henley Woody, "Managing the Great Pretender," *Risks of Harm from Psychopathic Individuals*, 2019, 49–54.

[33] Marissa A. Harrison and Susan M. Hughes, "Sex Drugs and Rock and Roll: Evidence Supporting the Storied Trilogy," *Human Ethology Bulletin* 32, no. 3 (September 30, 2017): 63–84, https://doi.org/10.22330/heb/323/063-084.

[34] Irfan Siddavatam et al., "Multi Genre Music Classification and Conversion System," *Int J Info Eng Electron Bus* 12, no. 1 (2020): 30–36.

[35] Fabien Goiiyon, "Dance Music Classification: A Tempo-Based Approach," 2004.

accuracy.[36] During the process of combining or transitioning between songs in their performances, DJs go by the tempo relationship between the concluding and subsequent songs.

Historically, music journalists have used pigeonholing to align their preferences with their work. This is why specific journalists specialise in certain genres of music. They categorise music based on attributes, expert knowledge, and evolving taxonomies influenced by new music trends and technologies.[37] In the process of reviewing new music, music journalists may assign new labels to genres, either approvingly or disapprovingly. An illustrative example is the introduction of the term "bubblegum music" in the South African music lexicon. Zaid Khumalo coined the term 'bubblegum music' for township disco, expressing dissatisfaction that hits in this genre were often ephemeral and lacked substantive lyrical content.[38]

Record companies, from artists to repertoires (A&R) departments, operate on genre-based frameworks. Different genres necessitate various resources, including personnel, recording studio types, marketing strategies, and distribution channels through which the final product must navigate to impact the market. Record companies utilise genre classification for marketing strategies and recommendation systems to organise music. This process involves analysing trends, artist styles, and target demographics. Genre classification facilitates the provision of accurate song recommendations, potentially based on frequency structure rather than subjective labels.[39] Thus, record companies are motivated by production and marketing to categorise music.

In addition to genre coining, artist branding occurs as a result of their success within a market-defined genre. For instance, Joe Nina would justifiably claim he is the ‘Pioneer of *Kwaito’*. Mdu Masilela would emerge as the ‘Godfather of *Kwaito’*, and Arthur Mafokate as the ‘King of *Kwaito’*. These titles are tacitly contested, safe to say they have propelled the genre to the heights it once enjoyed. *Kwaito* is currently categorised into two distinct forms: traditional *kwaito* (Old School) and contemporary *kwaito* (New School, a.k.a *Kwaito* 2.0). Old School pertains to township *kwaito*, which originated in the late 1980s.

Old-School followed the bubblegum music era. The general musical feature was a steady metronomic four-in-four beats per measure. The high-hat (HHT) follows either of the following two patterns: the standard *kwaito* pattern or the constant off-beat. Characteristically, the drum pattern, the comparatively prominent melodic basslines and fluid strings or synthesised pads from keyboard instruments define *kwaito*. In *kwaito*, the bassline is king. The musical ensemble known as Brother of Peace significantly emphasised the role of bass in their compositions by incorporating Jimmy Mngwandi, a jazz/fusion bassist, into their productions. The vocal elements are characterised by their simplicity, frequently employing a call-response structure with lead chants reminiscent of nursery rhymes or rudimentary singing. The backing vocals lack harmonisation or distinct parts, featuring occasional unison passages.

New-School is an offshoot that has migrated to the suburbs of South African cities while maintaining the umbilical cord from the township experience. This is possible because artists in this category were born in the townships. Still, following the new political dispensation, they moved with their families into previously white-only suburbs. Thus, they transferred from township to suburban schools, commonly known as Model C schools in South Africa. Musicologically, these artists have begun to listen to pop and rock music in their new environments. Influences, such as orchestral sheets of sound, themes, or hits, are then fused with a straight *kwaito* drum beat with the role of the bass, although still subservient to orchestral sound. Lyrical delivery became more deliberate and advanced. Typical examples are TKZEE’s music, where they even sampled the final countdown by the group Europe, Zola 7’s Mdlwembe

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[36] Personal Discussion, 16 July 2024.

[37] Hassan Ezzaidi, Mohammed Bahoura, and Jean Rouat, “Taxonomy of Musical Genres,” in *2009 Fifth International Conference on Signal Image Technology and Internet Based Systems* (IEEE, 2009), 228–31, https://doi.org/10.1109/SITIS.2009.45; Alla G Korobova, “Genre as a Classification Category in the History of Musical Science,” *Vestnik Moskovskoy Konservatorii* 14, no. 3 (2023): 408–19.

[38] Memela, “ Kwaito Artists Missed Opportunity to Help Redefine the Future.”

[39] B. Jaishankar et al., “Music Genre Classification Using African Buffalo Optimization,” *Computer Systems Science and Engineering* 44, no. 2 (2023): 1823–36, https://doi.org/10.32604/csse.2023.022938; Korobova, “Genre as a Classification Category in the History of Musical Science”; Sunil Kumar Prabhakar and Seong-Whan Lee, “Holistic Approaches to Music Genre Classification Using Efficient Transfer and Deep Learning Techniques,” *Expert Systems with Applications* 211 (January 2023): 118636, https://doi.org/10.1016/j.eswa.2022.118636.

and all of Mandoza's Gabby Leroux's production hits, Nkhalakatha and Godoba. The last *kwaito* brigade to straddle *kwaito* and Hip-hop are Pitch Black Afro and Briggz from DJ Cleo's stable.

At the height of *kwaito* and house music, an underground hip-hop movement emerged, initially spearheaded by a collective known as Skwatta Kamp. As the culture oscillated between township and Model C school influences, hip-hop gained significant prominence in the South African music landscape. While Skwatta Kamp maintained a comprehensive orchestral sound, Mafikeng-originated artists, led by Jabulani Tsambo, known as Hip-hop Pantsula (HHP), developed a distinct rap style in the Setswana language. Stoane of Bongo Maffin pioneered rapping in Setswana, which evolved into a defining characteristic of *motswako* hip-hop. Today, *motswako* is a South African hip-hop genre that exemplifies the confluence of American hip-hop and *kwaito*. In this genre, suburban influences and *is'pantsula* are noticeable. This blending of hip-hop with local cultures is also seen in hip-hop performed in isiZulu and other South African languages. Throughout these developments, *kwaito* culture, particularly *kasi* swag, showed resilience and remained integral to the emergence of New School Kwaito subgenres.

New School, now devoid of the pantsula dance element, retains only gestures and swag reminiscent of the Old School *kwaito*. Another noticeable distinction is that old school was tarven based wheas New School had become club culture.

However, South African youth still wanted to continue celebrating their newfound freedom. Thus, a club-based offshoot of *kwaito* called Gqom emerged from Durban. With a tinge of *kasi* vibe still in place, this genre assumed the status of club music. At parties primarily in suburban areas, and unlike at a music concert where musicians are the centre of attraction, the focus is now on the intra-audience experience. The captivated audiences now fashion their dances. In this situation, DJs become *defacto* 'priests' who cast spells on the audience. In Gqom, the role of a bass line pales into insignificance. In its place is a droning sound that mesmerises the audience's psyche. The kick drum was no longer regular, as it was in two iterations of *kwaito.* Significant groups/artists include DJ Lag, often referred to as the "King of Gqom," Rude Boyz, Distruction Boyz, Babes Wodumo, Known as the "Queen of Gqom," and Griffit Vigo. Sho Majozi is also one artist in the genre, although she is not from Durban.

Amapiano is another perplexing genre. In terms of degrees, this genre is furthest from the *kwaito.* The bass and kick drum are typically locked together. Like Gqom, *Amapiano* has a constantly stabbing synth sound that drives music and is hypnotic and trance-inducing. The log drum is a fundamental aspect of *Amapiano* music. Although it is based on a genuine instrument, in the context of *Amapiano*, the log drum produces a blended sound akin to that of a kick drum, 808, synth bass, and log drum percussion. The log drum establishes bass lines and drives the songs forward. In *Amapiano*, rapping continues from Hip-hop; as in Hip-hop, it is often delivered in the vernacular. Despite this, *Amapiano* is a genre that transcends the South African border to become internationally recognised dance music. From the choreographed *pantsula* dance of *kwaito,* the lazy swaying swag of Hip-Hip and the unmediated individualistic rave or party dancing, there is a return to the highly choreographed and sex dance style that has been added as a challenge to youth digital platforms such as ticktock, Instagram, and Facebook.

Music, as mentioned above, has some connection with *kwaito. Lekompo*, a genre introduced by King Modana and Makhadzi, cannot be linked to *kwaito* in any way. Similarly, Afro-pop, although occurring in the later part of the *kwaito* era, as in the music of groups and musicians such as Mafikizolo Malika and Lira and Zonke, has more connection with the bubblegum era. Instead, it was a response to the exponential growth of gospel music in South Africa. The two, gospel and Afro-pop, maintained organic music-making practices wherein 'real' talented musicians played actual musical instruments to record and present their offerings.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, *kwaito* music has significantly shaped the cultural and social landscape for young Black South Africans, symbolising their aspirations for economic empowerment and social change post-apartheid. This study underscores the importance of recognising *kwaito's* influence on black youth, fostering self-expression, community connections, and an entrepreneurial spirit among musicians. Future research is recommended to further explore *kwaito*'s impact on the music industry and its role in promoting financial independence and creating new role models for young people. Additionally, there is a need to document and celebrate the achievements of *kwaito's* pioneers, acknowledging their contribution to music,

culture, and society. This will honour the genre's past and inspire future generations to continue innovating and expanding cultural boundaries. Investigating the evolving nature of *kwaito* and its continued relevance in addressing systemic inequalities can offer valuable insights into the dynamics of cultural expression and political significance in post-apartheid South Africa.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT
We express our gratitude for the intellectual contribution of this chapter. Specifically, we would like to thank Lucas Mahlakgane, Sifiso Siziba, and Nduduzo Mathambo as well as the editors of this volume.

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ABOUT AUTHORS

Professor Madimabe Geoff Mapaya is an African musicologist at the University of Venda, South Africa. His research focuses on African musical traditions, with a particular emphasis on Southern African oral traditions. His work aims to preserve, promote, and critically examine the intersections of music, culture, and identity within Indigenous Knowledge Systems. A prolific scholar and advocate for decolonised education, Professor Mapaya has published extensively in peer-reviewed journals and book chapters. He straddles academy and performance community work to enhance understanding of Africa's diverse sonic heritage.

Dr. Thulani Zulu, a music educator at the University of Venda, teaches music theory and history. As the Music Section Coordinator, he promotes the performing arts through community engagement. Dr. Zulu is dedicated to preserving and advancing African musical heritage, combining academic excellence with cultural advocacy. His work connects university scholarship with local communities thereby fostering appreciation for the performing arts and empowering emerging talents. Dr. Zulu champions music's transformative societal power as an academic and leader.