Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: Amapiano in Langa township and the World

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Abstract:

An electronic dance music originating from South African townships around 2012, amapiano (literally ‘the pianos’) represents a contemporary musical and cultural form which offers a means of expression for black youth. Currently the most popular music in the country, this thesis examines the form through the lens of kwaito and its literature, a music which emerged in a similar fashion shortly before the first democratic elections in South Africa. My introduction presents the kwaito literature as well as the relevant theories it raises and makes the argument for using these theories to address amapiano as a post-kwaito phenomenon. Chapter One investigates *Kwaito as History*, both as a shared history and a historiography. It analyses the use of a plethora of voices present in contemporary, urban historical accounts and how these can be read. The second chapter outlines the aural aesthetic encompassed by amapiano, arguing for the value of musical analysis in the study of similar forms. The following two chapters examine aesthetics as a broader sensory experience and how this allows for the mitigation and reversal of socio-economic circumstances and the formation of groupings along aesthetic lines (aesthetic formations), respectively. While these chapters focus more on the local function of the music, Chapter Five explores a wider conception, specifically its Afrodiasporic role in challenging the perception of Africa as the past, placing Africans as active agents in the present and future. I do this through an investigation into digital community spaces, Afrodiasporic influences, and various localisations. The final chapter examines amapiano artist Focalistic’s *Ke Star* and the song’s associated media, to demonstrate the role of aesthetics such as amapiano in the township, as well as the township aesthetic in amapiano. My conclusion posits along with many practitioners that “amapiano is the future”, both in the form of aestheticizing a freer future as well as representing the future of research.

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Glossary:

Throughout this thesis I have aimed to utilise the language most often used by amapiano practitioners, even if these contradict standard musicological practice. I discuss my reason for this in the introduction but have chosen to address them at the onset to prevent any ambiguity and misunderstanding.

Artist: An individual with a distinctive identity in the public eye who is involved in the making of amapiano. Most often it refers to vocalists, but can refer to producers and DJs, as many practitioners are involved in more than one of these tasks.

Beat: Used here to refer to the instrumental substrate of an amapiano song, as opposed to the full song including vocals. It is common practice for a producer to compose a beat over which a singer or singers will record vocals.

Chorus: This refers to the high point of the song, which is usually repeated verbatim multiple times throughout the song, much like other forms of popular music. In amapiano it refers to the lyrical peak of the song (which does not always align with the instrumental peak), and often takes the form of a hook, defined below.

DJ: Someone who plays music at an event. Specifically, this is done by playing and mixing recorded songs (their own or someone else's) on DJing equipment.

Hook: A hook usually refers to a short lyrical line or melodic phrase in popular musics, often after which a song is named. These are frequently found in amapiano in the form of a chorus which features only a word or a phrase (for example see the discussion on the hook in *Adiwele* in Chapter Two).

Instruments: This does not refer exclusively to live, acoustic instruments such as a guitar, but includes digital instruments, from performance of MIDI keyboards (keyboards played live but processed digitally by computers) to entirely programmed digital instruments, such as VSTs (Virtual Studio Technology).

Musician: Anyone involved in music making including singers, rappers, producers and DJs.

Peak: Refers to the high point of the instrumentals of a song, usually characterised by most instruments being present and a prominent log drum.

Pluck: a short, synthesised sound characterised by its fast attack and release.

Producer: More often this refers to someone who creates the instrumentals (beat, see above) of a song by programming a DAW (Digital Audio Workspace) and then aids the recording of the vocals over the beat. This involves deciding on instruments and samples, creating parts for each, and arranging them, often exclusively in the digital medium. Amapiano producers usually mix and master their music themselves. However, the term can also refer to a cultural producer, someone who is actively shaping culture. In many ways the amapiano producer does both.

<u>Note on italicising:</u>

As will be demonstrated in the first chapter of this thesis, the names of musical forms such as kwaito, amapiano and gqom are not words in any one language. For this reason, I have chosen not to italicise any of them, as they are English words as much as they are words in any other language. By not othering words by drawing attention to them as belonging to a foreign language, I aim to de-emphasise the hegemony of the English language. I use the same approach for localised forms of speech such as slang, which function in between various languages. Because such mixing is common, I have chosen not to italicise any words that might appear in these languages and thus only italicise words from outside Afrodiasporic languages, of which there are none.

<u>Note on music theory terminology:</u>

I have intentionally avoided the use of music theory jargon opting to use more accessible language instead. In place of chord names like tonic and dominant I refer to chords one and five. In place of beat subdivisions like crotchet and minim I use quarter note and half note.

<u>Note on racial terminology:</u>

The terminology used to refer to race here reflects the common usage of such in South Africa. Black refers to populations descending from indigenous people groups of South

Africa, usually those speaking Bantu languages. Coloured refers to those of mixed descent, with associations to the Khoi and San people groups. White then refers to those descending from European settlers. While the terms give the impression of stability and purity, the reality is anything but.

<u>Note on the use of the word genre:</u>

Given the idea that amapiano and kwaito are more than merely musical genres as discussed in chapter three and four, I have chosen to avoid the word entirely, opting instead for "musical form" most commonly. Genre is often limited to categorising musics based on their aural arrangements. In particular, amapiano artists and fans usually reject the word to describe amapiano, arguing that it is much more than a genre. I use the idea of a musical form instead in order to convey that amapiano refers to more than simply a style of music but instead a way of being (including language, fashion, and lifestyle) which is included in the broader "form". However, the form is still musical in nature as it has a musical style at its centre. In addition, form reflects the notion of aesthetic formation discussed in Chapter Four.

Kwaito as Theory: An Introduction

Amapiano refers to an electronically produced dance music and cultural formation which emerged in South African townships in the early 2010s and has since grown into a national and even international phenomenon. Through the lens of its predecessor kwaito, I examine how amapiano practitioners make use of sensory experience to imagine brighter futures and freedoms for South Africa's black youth living in the townships.

The form combines earlier modes of dissemination resembling those of kwaito, such as sharing music through hard drives, Bluetooth and minibus taxis, with newer digital forms such as WhatsApp groups and notably through streaming services like Spotify and Apple Music, where amapiano continues to grow in popularity (Blake, 2021). Currently considered to be the most popular music in the country in terms of consumption (Seroto, 2020), the music plays a vital role in the identity and daily lives of millions of young people throughout the country and the world.

To my knowledge, no academic literature currently exists on amapiano music. While this presents an exciting new landscape of academic research and discourse, specifically in its immense popularity and contemporary meaning, it also presents a challenge in that there is currently no theoretical basis on which to begin an analysis. This introductory chapter, then, outlines my approach to this issue, specifically how I have used the academic literature focusing on kwaito as a lens through which to begin studying amapiano music, and why such an approach is valid.

Post-Kwaito:

In an earlier work (Eaby-Lomas, 2021), I posited that gqom, a music which emerged in a similar fashion, could be considered to be a "post-kwaito" phenomenon.

> The word 'post' is used here to refer to gqom's emergence after kwaito (specifically after the decline in kwaito's popularity), as well as its existence as both a result of and a response to kwaito. Gqom has in no way replaced kwaito but is instead one of the genres since kwaito's emergence to have been popular amongst South Africa's black youth (Ibid., 102).

An example of this would be the way that gqom began as an intentionally raw and harsh sound, in response to kwaito's clean, commercial nature at the time which did not reflect the experience of the younger generation.

Journalist Marcus Barnes writes of South Africa's black electronic dance scenes,

> There's afrohouse, brimming with emotion and tribal drums; gqom, with its edgy stripped-back rhythms; shangaan, a high speed, whimsical take on indigenous folk; amapiano, a slower paced hybrid of deep house, R&B and the earlier kwaito style; plus ever more splinters and hybrids, all rooted in the country's Black communities (Barnes, 2020).

Each of these emerged after the popularity of kwaito, and each contains elements which can be traced back to kwaito, as well as various external influences which converge into their distinct sounds. In the same list Barnes mentions both gqom and amapiano, as well as amapiano resembling kwaito, further demonstrating the connections between the sounds.

The connection made between kwaito and amapiano is not my own. In our opening conversations about amapiano, founding member and operations manager of Bridges for Music Academy, a music production and DJing school in Langa, Thulani Headman, regularly pointed to the importance of kwaito in the emergence of the newer music form (personal communication 9 September 2021). It is often considered to have its "foundations in kwaito" (Mohlomi, 2021), to be blended with kwaito (Blake, 2021), to have emerged from experimenting with kwaito (Seroto, 2020) with several intertextual references to kwaito (Mohlomi, 2019a; Seroto, 2021). Several producers began their careers in kwaito, such as DJ Maphorisa, while others grew up listening to it.

Thus, in much the same way to gqom, I consider amapiano to be a post-kwaito phenomenon. This has several implications. Firstly, amapiano exists after and in response to kwaito, and other post-kwaito musics which preceded it. Therefore, these share a common history as they form a trajectory of township-originating cultural forms intended for the expression of young, black South Africans. It is worthwhile even here to note, however, that this is not a linear history and involves various new, external influences as well. It is this shared history that makes up the first chapter of this thesis, "Kwaito as History: Complicating Urban Historiographies". Secondly, there is the way that amapiano responds to, accepts, and rejects elements of earlier forms. While not a focus point of the larger work

here, this relationship with other musics will come up throughout. However, most important for this chapter and the entirety of this thesis is that, in my view, amapiano encompasses a cultural formation much like that of kwaito. I would argue that kwaito carved out and shaped the landscape which amapiano now occupies, and thus study of kwaito's formation would prove sufficient as a starting point to study amapiano.

Therefore, I would assert that the existing academic literature on kwaito would prove a vital tool in the study of post-kwaito forms, and in this case, amapiano. The kwaito literature, as I will refer to it from here on, refers to literature intended for and published in academia which focuses on kwaito music and its associated cultural formation. Because of kwaito's much longer history (circa 1990) and immense popularity in the country, many scholars have written about it, across ethnomusicology (see for example Steingo, 2016), African diaspora and queer studies (Livermon, 2020), media studies (Bosch, 2006), cultural studies (Boloka, 2003) and linguistics (Satyo, 2008), amongst others. The kwaito literature also spans a wide time period, beginning in 2000 with the most recent in 2020. The earliest of these can be seen to be the first responses of the academic community, while the middle portion represents the formative theorisations on the musical form. Finally, I consider Gavin Steingo's (2016) and Xavier Livermon's (2020) books to be in a later stage of research as both authors had already participated in the earlier research, responded to that literature, and use the scope provided by a full-length book to develop more in-depth theories.

Research Methodology:

Ethnographic Engagement:

I consider my approach to ethnographic engagement to be a hybrid one. I began my fieldwork by visiting a music production and DJing school in Langa township, Cape Town, called Bridges. Through meeting with Thulani Headman, I was given the opportunity to teach guitar at the academy to meet producers with whom I could work. Through this process I met Eric Sicelo (performing as Eric Lee) and Wanda Mdivasi (Uncle Baguette), and soon after Azile Manxiwa (DJ Blackish) and Yamnkela Kope (Antii). I conducted formal interviews but relied mainly on participant observation in the studio. A common tool in ethnomusicology, participant observation usually involves learning to play the music under the tutelage of an experienced performer and joining an ensemble. Given that amapiano is

produced almost entirely in the digital realm and then performed by DJs, what does participant observation look like in this context?

Reflecting on a similar issue, Catherine Appert in her article *Engendering Musical Ethnography* asks, “But if we return to the idea that music and performance belong at the core of ethnomusicological theory and method, then how would we imagine hip hop participant observation?” (Appert, 2017: 461). Noting the individualism of hip hop performance, she suggests that the ethnographer would best participate by joining the crowd, which forms a vital part of the performance. In contrast, amapiano artists emphasise the importance of collaboration. In fact amapiano artist, Focalistic, argues that this makes amapiano better suited to local values and needs than hip hop (Kumona, 2022). Thus, I approached my fieldwork as a series of collaborations with amapiano producers and artists in Cape Town. First, I began learning amapiano production through listening and emulating, as well as YouTube tutorials, which taught me a great deal about the music and gave me a way into the field by playing my beats to other producers and fans. I then recorded with these musicians several times, sometimes over beats I had produced, producing a beat with them, or recording guitar over beats they had written. Appert’s observation that the audience are participants in performance is true of amapiano, so attending events is a helpful tool (although I was not able to pursue this to its full potential).

Also writing on hip hop, Liz Przybylski notes how working with musicians, producers and media figures who move smoothly and frequently “across physical and virtual spaces” requires an ethnography that can do the same, which she calls hybrid ethnography (Przybylski, 2018: 378). The same is true of amapiano musicians who can collaborate in studio and through digital spaces by sending parts of songs and projects to be worked on or recorded over, and then publish and promote their music through online streaming platforms, social media and face-to-face contacts such as through DJing or copying files onto flash drives. Thus, I complimented by face-to-face ethnography with various forms of digital ethnography, using video calls, posting my music on social media for response, joining social media groups aimed at promoting and sharing the music, recording guitar parts remotely, and interacting with various social media and their comment sections.

In connection with this methodology, I wish to briefly discuss and reflect on my positionality in terms of how I expected it to, and how it actually affected, my fieldwork. Here I am responding to a wider call to sufficiently reflect on how to navigate one's layered identity in the field, recognising that objectivity is unattainable. In her work, *Intersectionalities and Access in Fieldwork in Postcolonial Liberia*, Olajumoke Yacob-Haliso reflects on her multilayered and progressive 'levels of access' in the field, how specific aspects of her identity (for example gender, class, nationality) aided and hindered her fieldwork differently and at different times (Yacob-Haliso, 2019).

Addressing that which was relevant in the field, I am a white, heterosexual, middle-class, South African, male student from the University of Cape Town, studying a South African, (almost exclusively) black music which emerged from the harsh socio-economic conditions of the townships. My first and only fluent language is English, as opposed to my interlocutors who speak isiXhosa as their first language. This is unfortunately common of white South Africans as the predominant second language taught in schools is a standardised (and mostly white) version of Afrikaans. Learning isiXhosa proved difficult, especially considering the time and resources required. While those I met in Langa spoke fluent English, Xhosa is most often spoken between them, and this became the most obvious way that I stood out in the field[1]. I did not grow up in the township, and I had not listened to amapiano prior to my initial investigations before beginning my masters. Nor did I grow up listening to kwaito or other post-kwaito musics. I did, however, manage to alleviate this by having listened to and produced enough of the music that I could easily discuss it. As a white person, I am aware that our presence in the township is usually limited to education and welfare.

The above limitations certainly hindered my access, but each could be mitigated through careful navigation of the other aspects of my identity. For example, because the majority of producers (as opposed to singers) at Bridges are men, my being a man gave me relative ease of access to the studio space[2]. The familiarity of the University of Cape Town helped with access, although this was not uncomplicated as some had associations with the institution,

[1] By this I am not implying that my whiteness went unnoticed, but rather than it is entangled with my inability to speak the language.

[2] That said, it is worthwhile pointing out that I never observed an active exclusion of women in these spaces. I believe the difference is caused mostly by various other structural issues.

which were not always positive. Given that Bridges has several educators and guest educators from middle class areas outside of Langa, my belonging to the middle class was seldom even noticed. In South Africa it is fair to assume that a white person would belong to the middle class, as only 1% of white South Africans are living in poverty, as opposed to 64% of black South Africans. Thus, my middle-classness was probably overlooked due to my whiteness. However, it was often implied that I would pay and would be able to give lifts, despite my not receiving funding to do so, and having quite a tight budget as a full-time student. My age was also a benefit, as I was seldom the oldest person in a room. Given that amapiano can be considered a youth-driven music, this was certainly an advantage.

What, then, of my positionality and my right to access, study, and represent this music? If the music is produced and consumed almost exclusively by black South Africans, what right do I have to benefit from it as an outsider? What value might I be able to add in such a study? Given that this is the first academic work on amapiano, I hope that first I can begin a discourse on the music. Many that I have spoken to were surprised that I was studying this music, responding that they had never thought about the music in this way. I have done my best to listen to interlocutors and represent their words, rather than my own. I hope that many other voices will contribute to this research in the future, in particular women and black South Africans, who will share unique perspectives on the issues addressed here and the many others which still need to be addressed.

The Write Up:

Throughout this thesis I have emphasised the language used by local practitioners to ground the work in localised meaning and to prevent demystification. This can be seen in the names of chapters and titles of sections, including “Amapiano as Lifestyle”, “Amapiano to the World”, “Amapiano is the Future” and “Ase Trap Ke Pina Tsa Ko Kasi”, each of which are common phrases used by fans and artists associated with the musical form. Wherever possible I quote interlocutors, musicians, and listeners. I use popular literature in the form of newspaper articles and interviews and engaged with associated media in the form of music videos and social platforms such as TikTok, WhatsApp and Instagram.

While this helps to ensure that the voices of practitioners are heard and that the research represents the lived experience and expression of such practitioners before academic

theorisations, it also avoids the notions of mystification and delusion that Gavin Steingo warns about (Steingo, 2016: 7–8). Drawing from Jacques Rancière (2004: 49), Steingo aims to avoid any form of illumination, the belief that intellectuals are to enlighten the oppressed and ignorant of hidden truths (Steingo, 2016: 19). Instead, my aim is to simply highlight what practitioners already know to be true. By using phrases commonly spoken in relation to amapiano by its practitioners I hope that the reader will recognise that fans and artists are already keenly aware of these processes.

Structure:

The first chapter then deals with the history of amapiano, beginning with its shared history with kwaito. Titled *Kwaito as History: Complicating Urban Historiographies*, it addresses how such history benefits from a pluralistic approach, rather than trying to construct a linear and complete history, due to the plethora of agents involved and the communal process whereby such forms emerge. I demonstrate how various influences converge in, and continue to contribute toward, amapiano's history. The second chapter *Listen for the Shaker, Wait for the Log Drum: The Sound Characteristics of Amapiano*, describes the distinctive sound of amapiano. I address the various sonic elements and how songs are structured and produced. In addition I argue, especially considering kwaito literature's failure to do so, why sonic analysis would be important to such an ethnomusicological study. More broadly, these two chapters form an introduction to the musical and cultural form.

Chapter three begins a new section comprising chapters dealing with aesthetics, community formations and amapiano in a wider African diaspora. Broadly, these focus on the individual, the group and the global, respectively. The first, *Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: The Aesthetics of Amapiano*, examines an ostensible contradiction between the lived experience of the townships and amapiano's habits of consumption through the notion of "Aestheticizing Freedom". Bhekisizwe Peterson's "redemptive fantasy", Xavier Livermon's "conviviality" and Gavin Steingo's "aesthetics" lay the foundation for the chapter which considers an encounter at a nightclub and an interview. *Constructing Communities: Amapiano as Aesthetic Formation* follows, with a shift in focus from the individual to the group or we-formations. Here I unpack the implications of aesthetics on community formation using Birgit Meyer's notion of "aesthetic formation". I investigate another

popular phrase raised in the previous chapter which asserts that "amapiano is a lifestyle", and how this contributes to group binding (after Meyer), alongside language, dance and fashion. I then zoom out to examine amapiano at a global level in chapter five, *"Amapiano to the World": A movement in Afrodiasporic Space*. Specifically, I engage with several localisations of amapiano throughout the world and various contacts between local amapiano and the world through Livermon's conception of Afrodiasporic space.

"Ase Trap Tse ke Pina Tsa Ko Kasi": The Township as Aesthetic Experience in Focalistic's Ke Star begins the conclusion of the thesis with an analysis of a specific song and music video, focusing on its representation of the authentic township aesthetic, an analysis of key phrases, and how the song has since travelled the world. Finally, the work concludes with a discussion of the phrase "Amapiano is the Future" through the lens of Jacques Attali's music as prophecy. Here I reflect on the project and suggest future research in amapiano.

Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: Amapiano in Langa Township and the World

Several key themes and theories run throughout this thesis, while others make up the foundation of individual chapters. I now wish to briefly outline the theoretical bases for the work in its entirety. To do this I will defend my title "Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: Amapiano in Langa Township and the World".

To begin, "Kwaito's Legacy" refers to the emphasis I have placed on the continuity from kwaito to amapiano and my choice to use kwaito as a theoretical lens through which to study this cultural form. Legacy does not imply that amapiano is simply a new form of kwaito, but instead an entirely new movement which has inherited much from kwaito.

"Aestheticizing Freedom" represents the important role that aesthetics play in the thesis, specifically the potential of sensory experience in imagining and creating freedom. If we take aesthetics to refer to sensory experience more generally, as opposed to Kantian beauty standards, this is the process by which amapiano practitioners imagine and create for themselves a reality apart from their socio-economic conditions and limitations. Thus, rather than viewing amapiano as a form of false consciousness resulting from global capitalist consumerist trends, I read it as a powerful representation of the agency of black

South Africans, especially those living in the township and otherwise severely lacking such agency.

I originally titled the work “Kwaito’s Legacy of Imagining Freedom”. However, this created a dissonance when I introduced Birgit Meyer’s notion of aesthetic formations in chapter five. In particular, Meyer problematises Benedict Anderson’s Imagined Communities (1991). Meyer puts forward aesthetic formations as an alternative, arguing that the bonding of such communities extend beyond the imagination to include material components and bodily sensations, or they “materialize in the concrete lived environment and [are] felt in the bones” (Meyer, 2009: 5). I then became concerned that “imagining freedom” gave the impression that the alternative realities being created existed only in the imaginations of the individual or the community. I use “aestheticizing freedom” instead because these imaginings usually have concrete environments, material components and bodily sensations.

The subtitle, “Amapiano in Langa township and the World” highlights a second important theme of the chapters that follow. Firstly, there is the local function of amapiano. This includes party spaces, nightlife and their potential for inter-class, race, gender, and background encounters which de-stabilise such boundaries (conviviality), as well as promoting local languages, and aestheticizing freedom. In this is also the role amapiano plays in the township, as a proud assertion of the potential of the township and a tool to control the township’s narrative and representation. At the same time, amapiano plays an important part in the world. With a growing international influence, the township music has taken root in various new locales across a wider Afrodiasporic space. Amapiano and its practitioners move effortlessly across physical and digital spaces to take the local to the global and vice versa. Amapiano asserts its agency on a global stage as a new, active and unashamedly black, township cultural form, demonstrating that Africa is not the past, as it has often been represented, but is instead active in the present to create a better future.

Chapter 1

Kwaito as History: Complicating Urban Historiographies

While it is true that amapiano emerged in a similar fashion to kwaito, with a similar relationship to the township, a similar process of aestheticizing, a similar position in the world and various musical similarities, it also emerged from the tradition of kwaito. This chapter, then, asks how the popular and academic discourses about kwaito's history can be used as a tool for understanding the history of amapiano.

Here I will consider amapiano as a post-kwaito form, thus sharing a longer history with other township popular forms. In this sense, kwaito's history is amapiano's history. However, I will additionally examine the unique issues which emerge in historicising popular musics like kwaito and use these as methodology in my historical study of amapiano. Kwaito, then, is treated as a tool with which to study amapiano's history. And what better form to use as methodology than one that emerged in much the same way as amapiano? The subtitle of the chapter reflects my aim to complicate the various historiographies of these musics by paying careful attention to the plethora of global trajectories which converge in the emergence of these forms. In the process I wish to position amapiano in a tradition of popular township musics while simultaneously insisting on its distinctiveness from earlier styles as a new, independent form which results from newer forms of global contact.

In his 2008 article *Historicizing Kwaito* Gavin Steingo reflected on the lack of a definitive history of kwaito and suggested that this may only happen "when no one is listening to kwaito anymore" (Ibid., 88). He concludes by suggesting that; "Perhaps the truth lies here: fourteen years after the birth of South African 'democracy', we write kwaito's history as its eulogy, kwaito the nostalgic, fictive historical marker of jubilation in a 'rainbow nation' that stubbornly refused to materialize" (Ibid.). If kwaito's history would suggest its death, perhaps his later book *Kwaito's Promise* (Steingo, 2016) is that eulogy.

This raises several questions I hope to address in the chapter. First, is kwaito really dead? To answer this, I will examine amapiano as a post-kwaito phenomenon. I will show how kwaito carved out a space for new forms of expression amongst South African black youth and how

amapiano has taken up those expressions, maintaining the form while simultaneously rejecting that which does not serve the youth in question. Secondly, can a definitive history of kwaito really exist? Perhaps more pointedly, can one write a definitive history of a popular musical form which developed in multiple spaces simultaneously and was produced and consumed at commercial (songs which became popular across and even outside the country) and local (produced and consumed in the same township locale) levels? To respond to this, I will examine kwaito as part of a longer history of South African music popular in township spaces. I will examine the complications of kwaito historicisation and apply historical methodologies used in the kwaito literature to the history of amapiano so far. I will focus on the significant role played by fresh international influence in the trajectory of this history.

Steingo, too, critiques a tendency to view kwaito as the after-party of apartheid (Steingo, 2008a, 77). He instead draws attention to (as many before him have), the longer history of township dance musics (Ibid., 78, 83); highlights the evidence that points to an earlier emergence of kwaito in the 1980s (Ibid., 77); and how linking the end of apartheid and the beginning of kwaito fails to "take into account larger shifts in global political economy, on the one hand, and 'North American global' popular culture, on the other hand" (Ibid.). Here he is referring to the influence of the rise of global capitalism and wider notions of popular culture, that had otherwise been overlooked in the literature. While the structure of this chapter may appear to be implying a linear progression, I have carefully addressed other influences as they come up. However, a comprehensive list of external influences is beyond the scope of this chapter.

I begin with a discussion of amapiano as a post-kwaito phenomenon, followed by this longer history, tracing important moments of the historical trajectory through mbaqanga, bubblegum and then kwaito. Finally, I will address amapiano's own history and how it reflects kwaito as history and kwaito as a viable method of studying history.

Amapiano as post-kwaito:

I have argued elsewhere that gqom, another electronic dance form which emerged from (and mostly for) South African township spaces, can be seen as a post-kwaito phenomenon (Eaby-Lomas, 2021). Here, post-kwaito refers to "gqom's emergence after kwaito

(specifically after the decline in kwaito's popularity), as well as its existence as both a result of and a response to kwaito" (Ibid., 102). I argued in *Historicizing Gqom as a Post-Kwaito Phenomenon* that kwaito carved out a space for black youth in South Africa to express themselves on their own terms and perform their own narratives. Gqom occupied this space, while simultaneously setting itself apart from the earlier form.

Here I will argue that amapiano similarly functions as a post-kwaito form. I will trace the characteristics of kwaito which manifest in amapiano. Some can be traced back as far as pre-colonial music in Southern Africa, while others emerged at various later stages. It is important to note that while amapiano is a recent manifestation of kwaito's form, it is new, fresh and responds to kwaito. It emerges at a unique moment in South African history, with new international influences. Like gqom, which emerged at a time when kwaito's effectiveness for youth expression had declined, amapiano responds to new needs of black South African youth. Interestingly, there are many ways in which amapiano responds to the rise and decline of gqom, thus being simultaneously post-kwaito and post-gqom. This is possibly the reason for amapiano's slower tempo and smoother sounds and is well-exemplified in notions of "gqom is dead, all hail to amapiano" (Pitori-Mgosi, 2021). However, I emphasise the role of kwaito in amapiano's history because of the significant moment that kwaito has come to represent.

Mbaqanga:

If amapiano is indeed a post-kwaito music, representing another youthful manifestation of a form with a longer history, how far can one go back? Where and when does this form begin? Amapiano is new, in as far as it needs to be new to fully capture the voice of a South African black youth still not entirely free. It is simultaneously a rupture and a continuity. To examine this, I turn to kwaito's longer history. This section briefly introduces mbaqanga and bubblegum and then traces several important characteristics of kwaito and post-kwaito forms to these musical forms (and earlier).

Gibson Boloka traces the roots of bubblegum and kwaito to the 1970s mbaqanga or "jive" music of the Johannesburg townships, which is in turn rooted in marabi dance music[3]

[3] Marabi refers to a township style which combined American jazz influences and local rhythms. It developed in the late 1920s.

(Boloka, 2003). Much like marabi dance before it, mbaqanga was primarily performed in shebeens, originally illegal drinking houses which opened in response to the Liquor Act of 1927 which prohibited 'Africans' and Indians from serving liquor and entering licensed premises. Thus, these forms functioned primarily as entertainment (Ibid., 98). Mbaqanga additionally performed other functions such as education, cultural expression, and identity construction through its lyrical content (Ibid., 99). Boloka mentions the important public role and expansion of the shebeens, "ethnically" separated radio, the popularity of radio, the migrant labour system and a local and international common culture of the apartheid struggle as factors which contributed to the success of mbaqanga (Ibid.). This is significant in that it marks a shift from the "ethnically"-divided music sanctioned by the apartheid government (usually monolingual and "tribal") toward more general black popular music forms, a shift which would be solidified in bubblegum.

Bubblegum:

Viljoen sees no contradiction when she writes

> As part of the continuing globalization of the South African music industry and the world-wide emergence of disco and house styles, mbaqanga gave birth to a local appropriation of Euro-American bubblegum in the 1980s (Viljoen, 2008: 57).

This quote wonderfully captures the undecidable nature of South African bubblegum's emergence. A South African form, with a South African history gives birth to an appropriation of Euro-American music. After Steingo criticised Coplan for ignoring the cultural production of international bubblegum music in the creation of the local form (Steingo, 2008a: 78), I am acutely aware of the importance of considering the outside influences in my examination of South African bubblegum or "township pop"[4].

Bubblegum, as I use it here, refers specifically to the South African form of popular music, characterised by energetic beats intended for dancing. With growing cosmopolitan attitudes, Euro-American bubblegum pop became incredibly popular in township spaces. Commentators have linked the name bubblegum with the transient popularity and a

[4] The phrase used by Louis Meintjes 2003, as cited in Steingo 2008:80. However, Steingo may have jumped too quickly into assuming the synonymity of these two terms, given that it appears that Meintjes' ethnography focused on a more contemporary form.

perceived shallowness which characterised the songs (Boloka, 2003: 99; Coplan, 2005). Instead, Steingo points to the form's connections with the popular bubblegum music from USA and Europe (Steingo, 2008a: 78).

Authors addressing bubblegum and kwaito highlight several important characteristics of bubblegum music which relate to the history of kwaito and to which I wish to draw attention. Firstly, they claim that the lyrics were mostly repetitive and less important than the dancing (Ibid.). This can be seen as an important departure from mbaqanga before it which, while mostly for entertainment purposes, was still explicitly political. In bubblegum, this apolitical nature is suggested to have allowed practitioners to avoid censorship and to disengage from politics. Coplan has suggested that the name "bubblegum" may have been used to mislead government officials (Coplan 2008, cited in Steingo, 2008a: 79). It also seems fair to assume that the mostly unpolitical nature of the lyrics (or perhaps more accurately the not oppositional or subversive) would have made bubblegum artists less susceptible to censorship, punishment, exile, and so forth. I will discuss the notion of disengagement in the next section.

As is often the case in appropriating foreign musical forms, the earliest insertions of South African forms into localised bubblegum were through using local languages and lyrics pertaining to the life of urban black South Africans. Viljoen (2008: 58) mentions specifically the mixture of English, Zulu, Sesotho and Iscamtho, the latter being a vital part of kwaito language (see, for example, Ndabeni, 2018: 80–92). Boloka compares this to mbaqanga, which was mostly monolingual, noting the change in the broader cultural landscape between ethnically divided radio and the introduction of television which catered to black audiences more generally (Boloka, 2003: 101–102). Songs like Fassie's *Weekend Special* and Yvonne Chaka Chaka's *Umqombothi* discuss South African-specific contexts.

Authors raise the importance of township spaces in relation to this musical trajectory as well. Mbaqanga was closely associated with township spaces, most notably through its performance at shebeens (township bars and clubs) (Boloka, 2003: 99). Viljoen similarly connects the consumption of bubblegum to black townships (Viljoen, 2008: 58). This is a crucial feature of kwaito and amapiano, not only as the primary space of production and consumption, but also as a source of identity and authenticity.

The emphasis on dancing which characterises amapiano can be traced through these musical forms, all the way back to marabi, but arguably further back to the oldest forms of music in Southern Africa. What does set these popular music forms apart from earlier ones is that most developed out of a need purely for entertainment, usually for migrant labourers. Coplan quotes Johnny Clegg:

> "Good time" music is reconstitutive because it says, climb inside and I'll make you whole, get up off your chair, don't feel so bad, let's move together, a bit more strongly with each repeated cycle of the song . . . It is defiant. It expresses the determination that every one of us will be free one day. It cannot be explicitly political . . . it expresses in its tone, in the sound of the voice and the sound of the instruments, the soul of the black South African (cited in Taylor, 1997: 82, 80, cited in Coplan, 2005: 16).

Viljoen similarly highlights bubblegum's emphasis on dance, specifically how dance is prioritised over lyric-writing (Viljoen, 2008: 57). The party space is simultaneously a temporary freedom from harsh socio-political circumstances and a "defiance" against such circumstances.

Finally, the music itself. Descriptions of bubblegum usually draw attention to the use of synthesised sounds (Viljoen, 2008: 66). Meintjes takes note of how bubblegum (or "township pop" as she calls it) made use of "absolutely electronic, contemporary-sounding timbres", which were programmed and sequenced, designed not to emulate acoustic instruments but to be wholly new sounds (2003:154, cited in Steingo, 2008a: 80). She notes the use of signal-processing effects which are added to the voice, namely reverb, chorus and echo (Ibid.)., all of which are vital components of amapiano whose local meaning and use could be traced back through kwaito to bubblegum, although significantly changed by new international influences (such as deep house). Boloka points out another important musical form important in kwaito which also features in amapiano; call and response (Boloka, 2003: 102). He describes how this strengthens the interaction between singers and listeners, using Arthur's song *Mnike* (Mafokate, 2000) as an example.

<u>Brenda Fassie:</u>

I will now return to the notion of "political disengagement" which both Stephens (2000) and Boloka (2003) point out as an important facet of kwaito. While it is certainly true that the

lyrical content of many bubblegum songs, and subsequently kwaito and amapiano songs, do not express overtly oppositional politics against the apartheid and post-apartheid government, it is too simplistic an observation to call this a "disengagement" from political discourse. As Clegg mentions earlier, the very act of having a good time as a black South African under apartheid was defiant, in much the same way that having a good time as a working-class black youth of the township is today. Several songs have been put forward as examples of political discourse 'creeping' its way into kwaito songs, but I would argue that these are not unusually political, but rather part of a form that does politics differently. While kwaito's re-interpretation has been discussed elsewhere (see Steingo, 2007, 2016; Ndabeni, 2018: 1–12; Livermon, 2020; amongst others) and will be addressed later in this thesis, here I argue that the kwaito mode of political engagement is linked to earlier forms and finds an early expression in the life and music of bubblegum legend Brenda Fassie and her song *Weekend Special*.

One of the most important names (arguably the most important) in South African bubblegum music is Brenda Fassie. Coplan goes as far as to say that "bubblegum begins and ends with the recent tragically ended career of Brenda Fassie" (Coplan, 2005: 12). While Coplan's statement offers an exaggerated view which ignores her blurring of the boundaries between musical forms and her later life, Martina Viljoen argues the importance of Fassie's legacy on kwaito in her article *On the Margins of Kwaito* (2008). Here, she argues that, while best known as a bubblegum artist, Brenda Fassie's music of the 1980s was "hugely influential on later kwaito musicians", and that her tracks in the early 1990s may even be considered to be kwaito (Ibid., 51). Viljoen considers bubblegum to be "part of the continuing globalization of the South African music industry and the world-wide emergence of disco and house styles", connecting South African bubblegum with the Euro-American form of the same name (Ibid., 57). She cites The Soul Brothers as an early example, followed by Fassie, Yvonne Chaka Chaka and Chicco Twala (Ibid.). Viljoen notes how Fassie blurred boundaries of local and global and the stylistic differences between kwaito and bubblegum (Ibid., 69).

Brenda Fassie's song *Weekend Special* offers a good example of this new mode of political engagement. This song has been put forward as an example of a song with lyrics bordering on the political (Coplan, 2005: 12). *Weekend Special* responds to the issue of infidelity of

black men seen in the practice of “weekends-only” girlfriends[5]. Specifically, Fassie protests “I’m no weekend special”, implying feminine agency by calling out men who use women in this way. Earlier commentators, such as Coplan, imply that this is somehow less political, saying “*Weekend Special* was political only in the sexual sense” (Ibid., 14). While the argument as to why sexual politics such as this one should not be viewed as any less than other forms of the political is beyond the scope of this chapter, I wish to briefly explain why this statement must be read as a political one. The apartheid system was designed in the defence of white patriarchy. Many articles have been written on how traditional gender roles where misconstrued by the apartheid government to reinforce male power, even amongst the black population (see for example Meintjes, 2004). The migrant labour system itself, one of the primary causes for the “weekends-only” girlfriends, was imposed by the apartheid government. In this sense (there are many other arguments that can be made), this is a clearly defiant statement.

However, I would like to take note of how this obviously political statement has been received in South Africa. Many misremember and mishear these lyrics to saying, “I’m your weekend special”, rather than “I’m no weekend special”. While this does not entirely change the meaning of the lyrics (the former could be read as though the man is being called out for treating the woman as though she is just a weekend special, rather than simply rejecting the idea as is done in the actual lyrics), the corrected lyrics do contradict the common understanding of the song, specifically that it is a positive sentiment to be a “weekend special”. This inevitably leads to misrecognitions, for example I remember seeing a white, middle-aged family friend singing this to his wife. This points to the music’s primary role as entertainment. Although this song does discuss a sociopolitical theme, its rhythms are infectious, and its melody is catchy. Many are perfectly happy ignoring the political sentiment of the song’s lyrics in order to simply dance for enjoyment instead. Marjorie Mubili commented said “It's 2022 and am [sic] still enjoying listening to this jam. Evoking fondest childhood memories” (*Weekend Special*, 2022).

I do not wish to take away the positive social potential of popular music, but I do wish to nuance this notion of “disengagement”. As Brenda Fassie herself said "As a black woman I

[5] This refers to expecting sexual or romantic favours from a woman on the weekend, but ignoring her for the rest of the week.

am very political. I eat politics, I sleep politics. Everything in my life is political because I can't run away from it" (Rogers 1990:1, cited in Viljoen, 2008). Bubblegum, kwaito and post-kwaito forms such as amapiano as I will argue later, do not represent a disengagement from the political, but rather a new mode of engagement. Coplan notes how sound and movement can be seen as the primary medium for the message of kwaito, and how this redefines the political (Coplan, 2005: 25). While I agree that kwaito used sound and movement in its expression of the political, one cannot exclude the role of lyrics in this, and therefore that the entirety of the sensory experience is political, while simultaneously committed to fun. To conclude, I would argue that amapiano's approach to the political should not be seen as "disengagement", but as part of this historical mode of engagement through movement and sound, through every part of the sensory experience.

<u>Bubblegum's conclusion:</u>

Finally, this discussion is incomplete. Perhaps completing it is an impossibility. While it is clear from the above that Euro-American and local influences from mbaqanga converged at the moment of bubblegum's emergence, this idea risks forgetting other influences from both outside and inside the country, including pantsula and kwela. Livermon points out that pantsula, too, was more than a mere genre, but a way of life in much the same way as kwaito and was later accompanied by kwaito music (Livermon, 2020: 39–40). It implies that bubblegum, mbaqanga and marabi were "genres-apart", a notion Coplan uses to argue that kwaito did not emerge in a single moment, nor as a single form (Coplan, 2005: 11), and thus emerged as separate forms almost overnight. In fact, there would have been as much overlap as we will soon observe in kwaito and amapiano.

Kwaito and the moment(s) of freedom:

To perceive kwaito as a single, stable form would be to misunderstand it entirely. In much the same way, to limit its origin to a single moment would be to miss the multiplicity of organic structures from which it emerged. This chapter thus far has been concerned with significant moments in a larger historical continuity. Now, I wish to focus on several of these moments and their nuances. Here, again, kwaito functions as both amapiano's history, in that the latter is a post-kwaito phenomenon, and as a methodology for studying its history, because it emerged in much the same way as kwaito.

In his work *South African Music After Apartheid: Kwaito, the "Party Politic," and the Appropriation of Gold as a Sign of Success*, Steingo posits a "(traumatic) break" between pre- and post-1994 kwaito (Steingo, 2005: 336). He argues that Nelson Mandela's inauguration as the first fully democratically elected president of South Africa dramatically changed kwaito music, marking the beginning of its maturation (Ibid.). He suggests that this change involved a dissociation from earlier movements such as bubblegum (Ibid.), legislation which promoted local music and boosted the popularity of kwaito (Ibid., 337) and a radical change of heart from radio stations and recording companies regarding kwaito (Ibid.).

In a later work, namely *Historicizing Kwaito*, he criticises the "fissures" or radical breaks that are implied by a historicisation which suggests that kwaito began after 1994 and the moment of freedom, using Niq Mohlongo's biography to show that Mandela's inauguration did not bring about any immediate changes to the lives of South Africans (Steingo, 2008a:82-85; Mohlongo cited in Ibid.). The 2005 article, then, suggests a traumatic break, while the 2008 article rejects the idea that such sudden changes could have taken place. Is his argument in 2008 an updated, or perhaps corrected version of the argument presented in 2005? Or, as I would argue, do these two arguments form yet another undecidability regarding kwaito's history? Steingo concludes the introduction to the 2005 argument with this: "If at times my analyses seem ambiguous or are difficult to comprehend immediately then I have succeeded. I do not wish to rob kwaito of its inherent ambiguity, nor do I wish to reduce it to a point." (Steingo, 2005: 334). This is because the emergence of kwaito is not a single moment, but a gradual process with several significant moments.

The same, again, is true of post-kwaito musical forms such as amapiano. In her article *On the Margins of Kwaito* Martina Viljoen writes "I attempt a more nuanced historicization of kwaito in this article and seek to uncover continuities as well as ruptures in the post-apartheid period", again acknowledging the importance of highlighting both the gradual process ("continuities") and significant moments ("ruptures") (Viljoen, 2008: 51). Livermon puts forward the notion of "remastering freedom", referring to subtle changes to the meaning of freedom for black South Africans in the post-apartheid period (after the music production concept of remastering as opposed to the quick, obvious changes of remixing), further reflecting the dual existence of significant moments and continuity (Livermon, 2020).

If kwaito's emergence is a gradual process with several significant moments, what is the first one? Early academic accounts suggest that Mandela's release from prison, the excitement for the end of apartheid and finally the democratic elections of 1994 were responsible for the birth of kwaito. This implies that the primary function of the form was celebratory. In *Historicizing Kwaito*, Steingo notes how authors, such as Angela Impey and Bhekizizwe Peterson, draw a parallel between the end of apartheid and the beginning of kwaito, thus implying that the musical form emerged as a celebration of apartheid's demise and intended to disengage from the oppositional politics of the apartheid era (Steingo, 2005: 76–77). Instead, Steingo places the origins of kwaito in the 1980s, a period characterised by protest against, and the violent response of, the apartheid government. As Coplan has argued, however, kwaito was never a "genre-apart", that "its most skilled and creative exponents, such as Arthur, Abashante, Trompies, M'du or TKZee were swimming in the broader stream of South African pop traditions from the very first plunge" (Coplan, 2005: 11). In *South African Music After Apartheid* Steingo shows strong connections between kwaito and earlier, influential forms, such as how members of kwaito group Trompies, namely Spikiri and Jakurumba, started off as dancers in a bubblegum group led by Chico Twala and how Eugene "Donald Duck" Mthetwa (also a member of Trompies) had played keyboards for South African reggae artist Lucky Dube (Peterson, 2003: 202; Steingo, 2005: 336). It is from this broader stream of South African pop traditions that kwaito emerged. However, not without outside influence.

Livermon points to three examples of Afrodiasporic influences on kwaito. The first pertains to pelvic and hip-centred dance movements which were likely inspired by Congolese dances such as the kwassa-kwassa, circulated by migrant labourers and cassette tapes (Livermon, 2020: 48). Secondly, he notes the ragga-muffin chanting style used by artists such as Junior Sokhela reminiscent of that used in Jamaican dancehall music (Ibid.) Finally, he points to the use of slowed down house tracks, arguing that they are evidence of "post-Fordist global circulations of Black youth musics and cultures that are not confined to hip-hop" (Ibid., 49). He argues that this was a result of the sociopolitical similarities between the emergence of Midwestern United States house music and kwaito (Ibid.). Livermon states that kwaito spawned from "cover versions", with increasingly local flavour, of house tracks as a result of the local success of international house music (Ibid., 50).

In the late 1980s, house music was referred to as “international music” (Steingo, 2016: 36). Steingo notes how international house tracks came to be known as “kwaito”, possibly due to a link with specific taverns such as KwaKwaito (Kwaito’s place), or because of its use as a slang word for a cool guy (Ibid., 42). A common origin story is that someone DJing international house music accidentally put the record on at the wrong speed, which was well received by the crowd (Ibid., 35). This was the origin story that Thulani Headman told me (personal communication 9 September 2021). Steingo mentions how M’du takes credit for the creation of kwaito, how Oscar “Warona” Mdlongwa started giving local feeling to international house tracks and Arthur claims to be the king of kwaito (Steingo, 2005: 335). This process also went by other names, such as guz, s’ghubhu and d’gong which may represent separate forms, or, as Impey suggests, are all forms under the umbrella of “kwaito” (Impey, 2001: 46).

The end of apartheid was certainly a significant moment, although it is more accurately a series of significant moments; the release of Mandela, the easing of the cultural boycott, the election, the Truth and Reconciliation Commission amongst many others. Many of these significant moments were significant moments for kwaito, too. Steingo notes the changes in legislation that affected local music at this time, particularly how radio opened up for kwaito musicians (Steingo, 2005: 337).

Another significant moment during this time was the release of Arthur’s 6-track EP *Kaffir* in 1995. This is seen as the first kwaito ‘hit’ (Steingo, 2005: 338). Post-apartheid South Africa was received as a time of hope for a newer, brighter future for black South Africans. However, the ANC instead prioritised the growth of a small, black elite. Livermon notes how their neo-liberal policies left entire classes of Black South Africans without the agency to make any political change (Livermon, 2020: 8). Post-apartheid kwaito was then quickly mobilised by the black youth to re-claim freedom for themselves. Livermon adds in the conclusion of *Kwaito Bodies* that kwaito asked whether the establishment in the post-apartheid moment would allow for all forms of freedom for everyone, and if not, could it truly be considered freedom? (Ibid., 233). Using Audre Lorde (1984), he argues that the post-apartheid South African government turned inward to police its own community, rather than focusing attention on the oppressor and thus “reproducing the structures of

white supremacy” (Ibid.). Kwaito, then, experimented with the limitations of freedom and thus exposed this government for its self-seeking and hypocritical mode of freedom.

As can be seen throughout the history of kwaito, there are several contradicting accounts between notable agents. I have merely scraped the surface of the variety of origin stories and those who claim to have invented the form. I do not see this as a negative thing, nor do I deny the possibility of each of these stories being true. Instead, I would argue that kwaito emerged as the result of many different forces and many individual contributions, travelling in a way they had never been able to travel before, which converged and continue to converge today. An organic emergence where each agent is connected and exerts influence overall.

Van Toeka Af (From Long Ago):

Before examining the emergence of amapiano, I wish to briefly turn to another important aspect of historicising kwaito. Particularly, I would like to show how kwaito artists create unique historical connections for themselves and how memory can act as a historical tool, even if such memories are not historically accurate.[6] Mafikizolo and their adoption of the memory of Sophiatown is exemplary in this.

In a chapter titled *“Mafikizolo and Youth Day Parties: (Melancholic) Conviviality and the Queering of Utopian Memory”*, Livermon discusses kwaito band Mafikizolo and their use of the popular historical representation of Sophiatown (Livermon, 2020: 188–224). He theorises a “musical memory” which allows “actors who have no previous historical connections with one another” to use music to “communicate a feeling of common purpose” which is “fleeting and situational” but can be “recorded and reproduced, and enter into memory, individual as well as collective, to such an extent that it can be recalled and remembered at other times and places” (Ibid., 189). Mafikizolo drew on a Sophiatown constructed (maybe even imagined) as a collective musical memory through fashion, language, dance and musical elements (instruments and musical styles, most notably jazz and its closely related forms, associated with the Sophiatown renaissance). In this case Sophiatown becomes the image of racial cooperation during the apartheid regime, with

[6] I do not wish to imply any negative connotation with “constructed histories” such as this one. What history isn’t a construct?

Blacks, Indians, Coloureds and whites living in "relative harmony" (Ibid., 191). Livermon argues that while this representation is not entirely historically accurate, it informs us of the desired history, an imagined past which would help to create identities for their present and future (Ibid., 192).

Unlike typical conceptions of kwaito musicians as apolitical and obsessed with materiality, Mafikizolo not only shows themselves to be cognisant of history, but also active agents in its construction. They create a historical connection between themselves and Sophiatown which traces a history of kwaito different to the one mentioned above and uses the memory of Sophiatown to create contemporary meaning.

Amapiano: the how and the when

Uncovering the history of amapiano is a difficult task. Sources and accounts differ on or even contest the location, date, and key agents of its emergence. Co-founder of record label *Born in Soweto*, Siphiwe Ngwenya, has said "If you put one hundred guys in a room and you asked them where [AmaPiano] started, you'll get one hundred answers and some very heated debates" ("Charting the Meteoric Rise of South Africa's AmaPiano", 2019). The music has changed dramatically since its earliest days, with many of its sonic characteristics being new additions. However, considering this chapter thus far, these issues are not new. Instead, they can be read as part of a longer history. In this section I examine the available history of amapiano through the lens of kwaito historical methodology, once again, viewing kwaito as history and as a method of history. This section will commence with a discussion of the complications surrounding historicising and how kwaito's history might help in this, followed by several aspects of its earliest emergence.

Various aspects resembling those found in kwaito complicate historicisations of amapiano. First, there was a large number of producers involved in the creation of the music made possible by the internet and increased access to the required technologies ("Charting the Meteoric Rise of South Africa's AmaPiano", 2019). The internet allowed producers to share their music quickly and easily through file sharing sites and social media creating a web of inter-connected producers through which the characteristic features of the form could take shape (Ibid.). Digital music production tools were also more accessible than earlier analogue equipment, and premium tools could be downloaded and shared through "cracked" or

pirated versions (Barnes, 2020; Mohlomi, 2021). Gqom began in much the same way (Eaby-Lomas, 2021: 106).

The nature of earlier amapiano compositions further complicate historicisations. Seroto describes these as "experimental and represented a spirit of freedom, devoid of any specific style but drawing influence from many. And the absence of gatekeepers would seed organic growth across cultural lines” (Seroto, 2020). It was during this early period of experimentation that characteristic components of its contemporary sound were added and thus it would be difficult, if not impossible to say where an older style ended and amapiano began. Kabza emphasises the role of experimenting township DJs, saying “These boys like experimenting, and they always check out new plugins. So when Mdu figured it out, he ran with it, and when I got it, I jumped into [sic] the bandwagon, and I ran with it” (quoted in De Vries, 2021).This model reflects that of gqom, where new sound characteristics were added by individual producers and then mimicked by others, effectively adding them to the sound itself (Eaby-Lomas, 2021: 105).

In addition, there are polarising arguments about the township of origin. Many sources insist that the musical form emerged from Johannesburg townships, namely; Alexandra, Soweto, East Rand, Tembisa, Vosloorus and Katlehong (Mitchual, 2020), while others emphasise Pretoria townships’ role; Mamelodi, Atteridgeville, Hammanskraal and Soshanguve (Seroto, 2020). David Ngoma, producer and Kabza De Small’s manager, notes that each township had a producer whom they supported (Papercutt TV, 2019). This would likely have led to an over-exaggeration of the role of these producers by the communities that supported them. However, a de-emphasis on the origins of the form is supported by its fans and practitioners. Da Kruk, for example, says that amapiano’s origins don’t matter in the face of its exponential growth, arguing that the future is more important (Mohlomi, 2019b). This is confirmed by Wandile Thema, narrator of amapiano documentary “SHAYA!”, who closes the documentary saying “amapiano is the future, it is here to stay” (Papercutt TV, 2019). Ngoma argues that its spatial origins are unimportant and that it belongs to every kazi (township) (Ibid.). Seroto, however, criticises the popular narrative that the precise place and time of birth are unknown and emphasises the agency of early adopters such as DJ and producer duo MFR Souls (Seroto, 2020).

Despite these various complications surrounding its origin date, it is generally accepted that the sound first took shape in 2012 (Mazaza, 2020; Mohlomi, 2021; "Amapiano", 2022). Much like kwaito's origin story, that a DJ accidently played a house track at the wrong rpm on a record player to form the basis of the sound, amapiano is said to have emerged during DJ performance, too. MC and artist Mark Khoza recounts the use of piano (electric keyboards) at DJ gigs as the first important moment in amapiano history (Papercutt TV, 2019). "There is this other guy who started this thing, when someone [DJ] was playing he'd take the piano as if he is in church and started playing" (Mark Khoza in Ibid.). Da Kruk also links the emergence of amapiano to a "DJ culture" ("Charting the Meteoric Rise of South Africa's AmaPiano", 2019). The practice then moved into the studio. Khoza credits this innovation to Kabza De Small, who played this early form known as 'inumba' or 'number' along with DJs such as JazziDisciples, MFR Souls and Gaba Cannal (Papercutt TV, 2019; Seroto, 2020; Mohlomi, 2021). Like kwaito again, amapiano went by many names. MFR Souls are credited with having coined "amapiano" in response to the increasing prominence of keyboards (Seroto, 2020).

Much like the musics mentioned above, amapiano resulted from contacts with "international musics", often transatlantic, as well. In the case of amapiano, deep house music has, and continues to be, an important influence. Others include various hip hops, but mostly American hip hop, as well as Afrodiasporic forms such as Afrobeats. In line with many of the musics discussed in this chapter, and reflecting a longer history of township music, amapiano has appropriated many of these forms to create a thoroughly local musical form. Viljoen says similarly of mbaqanga earlier; "mbaqanga gave birth to a local appropriation of Euro-American bubblegum in the 1980s" (see pg 20). A reviewer of this thesis commented on the tension inherent in these forms between sounding 'African' enough to appeal internationally and 'cosmopolitan' enough to appeal to local audiences. Marabi was an 'Africanized' form of jazz in much the same way. Steingo notes that house music in South Africa was often referred to as "international" in the late 1980s, and the experience of such was in defiance of the censorship of foreign music in South Africa (Steingo, 2016: 34–36). He discusses how it was used as a label for international music and local music with an international appeal (Ibid., 40). While the notion of local and global will be discussed later in the thesis, and especially Chapter Five, I wish to note these connections

here for how they relate to a longer history of such tensions in South African, black township music.

New technologies played a major role in the emergence of amapiano, in much the same way that they had on kwaito (Stephens, 2000: 259; Impey, 2001; Steingo, 2016). Much like gqom and kwaito which came before it, the music was pioneered by innovative youth with minimal resources. Setumo-Thebe Mohlomi describes amapiano as the meeting of various influences "with the creative, tech-savvy and DIY spirit of the country's youngest generations" (Mohlomi, 2021). These innovators made use of "cracked" (illegally downloaded) Digital Audio Workstations (DAW) like FL Studio, which they taught themselves to use (Barnes, 2020). Kabza de Small remembers struggling to comprehend this software, and being denied help from those who did know because he would grow to be their competition for gigs (Papercutt TV, 2019). He recalls making mixtapes on two DVD players, rather than a professional DJing setup (Ibid). Barnes recalls the role that economic limitations had in the emergence of kwaito (Barnes, 2020), and the same happened in gqom (Eaby-Lomas, 2021). These restraints have led to a "self-sustaining underground" infrastructure which relied on its own modes of dissemination (Barnes, 2020).

The internet has played a vital role in the distribution of the musical form, both between and beyond township spaces (Machaieie, 2019; "Charting the Meteoric Rise of South Africa's AmaPiano", 2019; Seroto, 2020). Firstly, is the Facebook-owned, freeware, messenger app, WhatsApp, specifically using the app's group function (Maneta, n.d.). Countless groups have been created for the purpose of sharing the latest amapiano tracks quickly and inexpensively. Groups include "Amapiano World", "Amapiano music" and "Amapiano fan base" (Ibid.). Kwiish SA states "when you send music through WhatsApp, there is no stopping it. So the name Kwiish SA was already on kids' phones and I would hear my music being played in local taxis, not knowing exactly how it got there" (Mohlomi, 2019b). Hundreds of new songs are shared through messaging apps and free file-sharing sites every day, with some enjoying short-lived fame and others becoming anthems of the form (Mohlomi, 2019a). These practices have had a unique effect on the democratisation of amapiano's (and related musical styles') dissemination. Da Kruk notes that a popular song can come from anyone, giving anyone fair opportunity (Mohlomi, 2019b). The internet has allowed for contact with many more influences, the biggest in amapiano being the role of

deep house music. Like the influence that Euro-American bubblegum had on South African bubblegum, and international house tracks on kwaito, deep house has significantly shaped amapiano aesthetics.

Similar to the earlier kwaito and gqom, amapiano was dismissed by radio stations as inferior, with many of them refusing to engage with the new sounds (Seroto, 2020). One radio host, DJ Da Kruk, saw the music's potential and dedicated an hour segment of his YFM radio show to playing the latest tracks (Ibid.). YFM had an enormous impact on post-apartheid kwaito (Steingo, 2016: 71). Many of these were unmixed and unmastered and arguably unsuitable for radio, however, Da Kruk was captured by their basslines and keyboards and played them regardless (Papercutt TV, 2019). Record labels were hesitant to engage with the new sounds, many of which would only sign artists after they had received international attention (Barnes, 2020). Da Kruk suggests that radio stations' apprehension to play the music was also linked to a racial inequality. He argues that dance scenes such as amapiano serve as the "voice of the majority with the minority of resources", and questions what freedom can mean for black South Africans if corporate South Africa remains in white hands looking after white interests (Ibid.). Da Kruk states that through corporate buy-ins and sponsorships, white-owned media (record labels, radio stations and festivals) continues to prioritise white musicians (Ibid.).

Much like kwaito, and many of the musical forms discussed here, amapiano has never been a single, stable form with a single moment of origin. It was not a "genre-apart", but instead existed in a "broader stream of South African popular music", to quote Coplan on kwaito (2005). Several agents, such as DJ Maphorisa and Busiswa have spanned many of these traditions. Themba Sonnyboy Sekowe, better known as DJ Maphorisa, began his career at kwaito established record label Kalawa Jazmee Records and has produced house, afropop, gqom and most recently featured importantly in amapiano. Busiswa first worked with kwaito star Oskido and has been involved in kwaito, gqom and amapiano projects.

On an episode of Oskido's Joy Ride, amapiano producer and DJ Kabza de Small explains the tendency among township DJs to slow down tracks for consumption in the townships, most likely referring to international house tracks (De Vries, 2021). He mentions specifically finding songs at 125 bpm and playing them at 115bpm. Kabza notes how this resulted in

producers emulating this feeling in their own productions. He credits Mdu[7] for introducing the characteristic bass instrument, the log drum to these remixes, positing "Amapiano music has always been there, but Mdu is the one who came up with the log drum sound." Oskido links this to the importance of slowed-down house tracks in early kwaito, mentioned earlier.

I was told about this interview by an amapiano producer and fan in Langa, Azile (personal communication 17 March 2022). Kabza's revelation that Mdu was the one to introduce the log drum is important, and this was the reason Azile pointed me toward the interview. However, the first half of Kabza's statement is equally important, that "amapiano music has always been there". Kabza views amapiano as part of a longer trajectory, or continuity, made up of significant moments, such as Mdu's addition of the long drum. Seroto similarly calls the emergence of amapiano "coincidental" (Seroto, 2020). This is in much the same way that kwaito artists, DJs, fans and scholars saw kwaito as a significant moment and response, or rupture, in a longer history.

Conclusion

With a new set of practitioners, a new sound, new local and global influences, as well as various other distinguishing factors, amapiano represents an independent and contemporary musical and cultural form. Catering to a new black youth, it represents a significant rupture from kwaito and its predecessors. Through the influences of circulating, Afrodiasporic musical cultures it has emerged on its own terms for its own purposes. However, its form, its aim and its approach are undoubtedly a continuation of earlier forms. Because of the shared lineage and formal similarities between their histories, kwaito is certainly a helpful tool in the study of this distinctive sound. It is to this sound I now turn.

[7] That is, amapiano artist MDU AKA TRP.

Chapter 2

Listen for the Shaker, Wait for the Log Drum: The Sound Characteristics of Amapiano

Amapiano's distinctive sound is unmistakable to a trained ear. Within the first few seconds, fans can recognise their favourite artists despite only having heard a small collection of percussive samples. Much like gqom and kwaito before it, amapiano emerged from other forms of music as practitioners began to experiment with new sounds and has since established what one might call a "standardised" sound. This chapter aims to describe this sound by examining its components and in so doing demonstrate how the sound of amapiano itself is simultaneously autonomous and connected with other forms of music.

In *Producing Kwaito: "Nksoi Sikelel' iAfrica" After Apartheid*, Gavin Steingo presents one of very few musical analyses of a specific kwaito song (Steingo, 2008b:110-111). Most of the kwaito literature focuses exclusively on the cultural meaning of kwaito and analyses seldom include any references to the music itself, beyond a brief descriptive introduction. Steingo aims to take seriously Susan McClary's assertion that "the study of popular music should also include the study of popular music" (1994: 38, cited in Steingo, 2008b). I agree that music cannot be studied in context without sufficient study of the music itself, that is its structure, sonic elements, approaches to harmony and melody, and the like. For example, the connection between kwaito and post-kwaito forms are historical (shared lineage) and contextual (for example, the township or the party), but also musical. If one wanted to study these connections, an analysis of the post-kwaito form is necessary to demonstrate how the one music has influenced the other, as well as how they differ. Thus, this chapter aims to present an extensive (but incomplete) analysis of the music called amapiano to illustrate its connections with other forms, its key features and how it is written for specific contexts. In addition, it serves to archive this musical form at a moment in time.

I have titled this chapter "Listen for the shaker, wait for the log drum". When I mention the topic of my thesis, I will often be asked what it is that sets amapiano apart from other closely related musical forms. To help hear the difference I usually use the aforementioned

phrase. While there are many other things one could listen for, I would argue that these form the backbone of amapiano's distinctive aural aesthetic. While the shaker is usually a good indicator from the beginning, it is waiting for the entry of log drum and the fun that it represents that are fundamental to this unique sensory experience that allows a song to continue for eight minutes.

Standardising Sounds

This chapter focuses on highly popular amapiano songs. In conversation with local producers, these are usually the songs that come up most regularly and get the best responses at gigs. I see these examples as the culmination of a long development from the earliest forms of the sound, and thus describe this as the 'standard' sound. Most often, the variations of the sound are described in comparison to this sound. Surveying multiple types of amapiano would result in a scope too broad for analysis and would be inaccessible without significant fieldwork across the country and beyond.

While the overall aesthetic that can be described as amapiano developed through experimentation and collaboration (in much the same way as gqom, see Eaby-Lomas, 2021: 104), I would argue that it is maintained through close listening and repetition, as well as through the practice of sample packs. Amapiano music is sampled-based, much like hip hop and house musics. The production is based on several characteristic sounds. These are either downloaded as "one-shots" (sound bites of a single sound such as a snare or a C note of a synth) or "loops" (pre-arranged sounds designed to be played repeatedly such as a percussion loop) from various websites or downloaded as "patches"[8] for DAW synthesisers. Many of the sounds associated with the form are then shared (freely or at a small monetary cost) within creative communities and the sound continues to develop, while constantly being added to and manipulated by its community.

In its recent maturity amapiano has given birth to subgenres or "schools". These involve variations in sound and structure, often to suit different aesthetic needs and contexts. Three important subgenres, as pointed out to me by Azile Manxiwa (DJ Blackish), are called "street" (often dust), "private school" and "tech" (personal communication 13 April 2021).

[8] Patch here refers to a set of settings for a digital instrument which is downloaded as a file and loaded into the synth.

Street amapiano, as the name suggests, is amapiano characterised by its relative rawness and urban sounds, perhaps most closely resembling hip hop and kwaito. It usually features rapping and plays at a quicker tempo than private school. Private school, unlike the name suggests, is not associated with the middle class, but instead refers to a strain influenced by deep house music. These slightly slower songs feature a stronger emphasis on keys and melody, smoother and more soulful melodies and sounds, and a less aggressive log drum. This allows for a more mellow overall sound, and while still danceable it is intended for a more relaxed mood. The vocals are usually smoother and considerably less rhythmic; however, they are not always present. Finally, tech is a more experimental form with a freer structure and more improvisation. Usually this requires a skilful DJ who can experiment with these sounds live.

Other variations exist, such as that which draws influence from DiBicardi, another musical form originating in Pretoria. None of these are a genre-apart and there is usually much overlap.

General characteristics:

Amapiano songs are usually below 115 beats per minutes. Private school is usually between 110 and 112 beats per minute. This can be compared to gqom which emerged around 128 beats per minute and kwaito which averaged at about 100 beats per minute. Deep house can range from 110-125 beats per minute, making amapiano equivalent to its slowest tempos. There is a small range of tempos used in amapiano. Most songs are between 112 and 115, as opposed to hip hop which has a much larger range (some slower than 80 and others faster than 120 beats per minute).

The majority of contemporary amapiano tracks are in minor keys, although some centre around the major key. However, this is seldom a conscious decision by producers who aim for a particular sound rather than applying Western music theory. Often in studio Azile would use triads or quartads on white notes to create the chords and then experiment to create any melodies on top of that. Yamkela Kope (Antii) would often say “it isn’t about the theory, it is about the sound”. Usually, the aeolian mode (natural minor) is preferred.

I have written about the subordination of melody and harmony and the emphasis on rhythmic elements in gqom (see Eaby-Lomas, 2021: 110). However, unlike gqom[9], amapiano artists make extensive use of melodic and harmonic elements. The name "amapiano" refers to this, where 'piano' refers broadly to keyboard instruments that have been a vital component of the sound since the beginning. Jazz-inspired vocals feature more often in amapiano. However, many of these aspects are used to contribute to a complicated overall syncopation. Simply put, the boundaries between melody, harmony and rhythm are far less strict and obvious in amapiano than I have discussed about gqom.

Sound Characteristics:

In this section I will discuss the sonic elements which form part of amapiano's distinctive aesthetic, as well as the role each of these play in giving a song its sense of forward movement. Through this, connections with other genres will emerge. I will begin with the two most important components, without which a song ceases to be amapiano, the shaker and the log drum. Wherever possible I will introduce these sounds as they appear in Young Stunna's *Adiwele*[10] but will reinforce each with other examples too.

Shaker:

The shaker is a crucial part of any amapiano song. Forming part of the opening beat, it is present from the beginning of the track and often sounds unceasingly until the end[11]. It can be heard from 0:00 in *Adiwele*. The earliest example of the shaker I could find by amapiano artists was in a song called "Gift from God" from MFR Souls' EP *Bless the Souls*, released in 2015.

[9] My article used a pre-2015 gqom track for reference. Many changes have occurred in gqom since then, notably a slightly slower tempo and further incorporation of melodic and harmonic sounds. However, melody and harmony have always played a more important role in amapiano than in gqom.
[10] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PSyVSfMWHQ
[11] Exceptions do exist, such as De Mthuda's "John Wick" which delays the entrance of the shaker until 0:18, or another song from the same album, "Abekho Ready – Maplankeng Reshuffle", which doesn't use a shaker at all. Instead, the shaker's role in the metric framework is replaced by the offbeat open hi-hats in both cases.

While shaker rhythms do vary, the most common is represented here in Western notation as figure 1 and as waveform in figure 2 and can be heard as audio example 1. These all represent one bar of the shaker at 112 bpm.

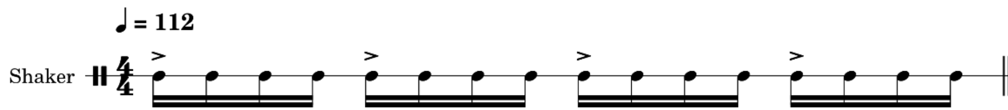

Fig. 1: shaker rhythm

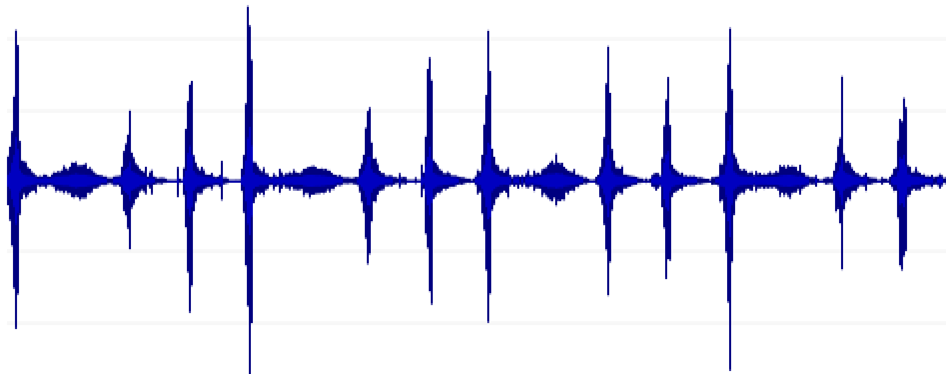

Figure 2: shaker waveform

Shaker 112bpm.wav

Audio example 1: Shaker rhythm

Here the shaker rhythm is made up of straight semiquavers. Figure 2 shows that the first note is the loudest, followed by the quietest. In fact, the second note is almost inaudible. The third and fourth note, then, get louder until the first of the subsequent bar is the loudest once more. The accented first beat outlines the 4/4-time used throughout amapiano. This is further emphasised by the kick drum (discussed later), which typically

sounds at the same time, as can be seen in figure 3. While this pattern is used in *Adiwele*, it can be heard more clearly in *Tanzania* by Uncle Waffles and Tony Duardo[12].

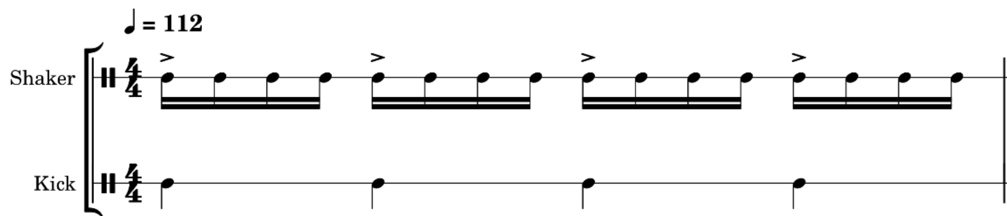

Figure 3: common shaker and kick drum combination

While the other rhythmic components of the opening beat are mostly syncopated, these two elements are rhythmically even and consistent. Therefore, I would argue that the shaker and kick drum work in conjunction to lay down a metric grid around which the other percussive elements can fall in and create syncopation. The other sounds that land on one of the 16 shaker beats in the bar are therefore grounded by this component.

This even metric structure additionally provides the foundation for dancing. When not performing other moves, the typical dance consists of moving the body's weight between the left and right feet on the four beats of the bar. A dancer will lightly place their right foot on the floor on beat one, and then put their weight on that foot for beat two, swopping to the left foot for beats three and four. This aligns with the strong beats of the shaker and the kick drum pattern.

<u>The Log Drum:</u>

On the opposite side of the spectrum, in terms of both function and rhythmic consistency lies amapiano's characteristic bass instrument, the log drum. It is first heard in *Adiwele* at 3:00. The sound originates from a patch on the Yamaha DX7 hardware synthesiser which is possibly intended to emulate the African instrument often referred to as a "log drum" or "slit drum". The patch was then included as part of the standard patches on the DX10 synthesiser which comes standard with FL Studios, the most common DAW amongst amapiano producers. MDU AKA TRP is credited for having introduced this in earlier amapiano examples (Masia, 2021).

[12] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zi7kX1jkRuA

In our first conversations about amapiano, Thulani Headman (DJ Fosta) pointed me to a kwaito example where the bass “sounds just like a log drum”. The bass line in “Siya Jola” by M’du is equally syncopated and carries a melody in a similar way to the log drum in amapiano.

It is a pitched, synthetically created instrument (using a digital synthesiser in the case of amapiano) with a fast attack (effects are usually used to emphasise this) which, as a result, sounds percussive. Its use is unique to amapiano and is representative of its sound. Below (figure 4) is the waveform for a log drum. The quick and strong attack and medium decay are evident.

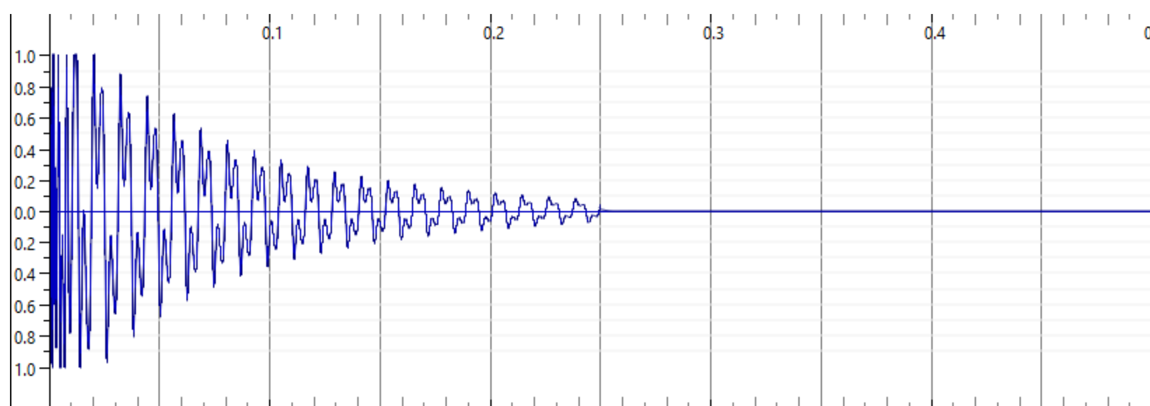

Figure 4: log drum waveform

While this is the most typical shape a log drum will take, some forms of amapiano edit this log drum. For example, private school producers remove most of the attack on the log drum to compliment the more soulful sounds associated with the subgenre.

Most bass instruments in electronic music provide the foundation for a song, and thus use stable rhythms and seldom change. Instead, the log drum’s function is closer to that of a percussion instrument as it is highly syncopated and often varies. Figure 5 below is a notated form of *Adiwele*’s log drum.

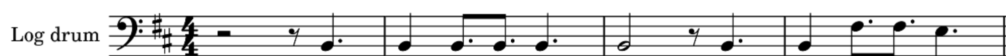

Figure 5: Log drum part for *Adiwele*

The log drum can furthermore be used to improvise. This can be heard prominently from 1:43 in Uncle Waffles’ *Tanzania*[13]. This section is accompanied by improvisatory vocals. The

[13] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zi7kX1jkRuA

log drum begins sporadically and builds into a complex improvisation using rhythmic motives, a glissando (melodic slide), and sustained as well as short, staccato notes. No bar is repeated exactly.

It is important to note in this example, however, that while the vocals and log drum are improvisatory in nature, they are supported by familiar elements simply repeating earlier material (with some joining to build the tension) and thus stabilising the overall experience. Other techniques used in these improvised sections include breaks (where the log drum briefly stops playing an established pattern, perhaps alongside a pause in other sounds as well), fills (brief, melodic additions to the established patterns), and rapid repeats of the same notes to create a stutter effect (4:29 of *Ke Star* by Focalistic and Vigro Deep[14]).

The log drum is most frequently heard for the first time at the peak moments of the song. Figure 6 shows the waveform for the song *Adiwele*.

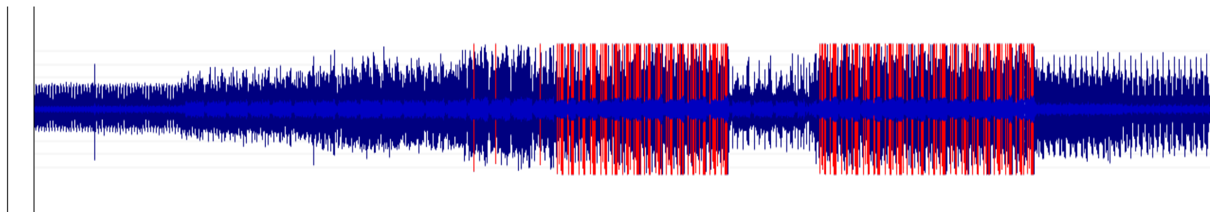

Figure 6: Waveform for *Adiwele*

Here, the red lines indicating that the sounds are 'clipping' (they have surpassed the desired decibel count) show the peak volume and activity of the song, as discussed earlier. It is important to note, however, that these coincide with the activity of the log drum. The two sections with considerable clipping contain a prominent and active log drum. Thus, the log drum is indicative of the peak moments of the track.

Ensuring the audibility and prominence of the log drum is a vital consideration for amapiano producers. Because amapiano songs typically contain several bass instruments (a synth bass, a kick drum, a low-end tom/conga), the log drum can be difficult to mix. As a lead instrument, the log drum needs to be heard clearly over the other bass instruments. Several tutorials on YouTube are aimed at creating desirable log drums. When producing my tracks in Reaper[15], I opted to use samples for the log drum. Rather than using a digital synth plug-

[14] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSVEoHVhLUI
[15] An affordable but less popular DAW.

in, I downloaded log drum sounds and inserted them into a sampler. I struggled to have the log drum heard over the other parts and thus doubled it at the octave. When listening to my beat, artist and manager Wanda Mdivasi told me that the log drum didn't "hit hard enough", in other words it was not punchy enough. When mixing my beat, Azile replaced my log drum with FL Studio's one, stating that the sampler "doesn't allow the same control over the final sound". This does, however, indicate the high value placed on the log drum.

Also, during this same session, which was my first-time making music with practitioners in Langa, Wanda, had prepared a rap part as a verse for the song. The log drum pattern at this point introduced a break in the song's activity. Wanda decided to delay the entry of his vocals to allow space for the beat "to speak for itself", thus subordinating his vocal part to the log drum. He then suggested rearranging the song to ensure that there was time for people to dance without vocals but with the log drum still prominent.

Because the peak of the track (discussed later) is also characterised by a prominent presence of the log drum, the bass instrument is often closely associated with dancing. The log drum even has its own associated dance moves. For example, to emulate the impact of the log drum, the dancer points their elbow away from them and juts a closed fist in time with its syncopated pattern (see for example Nvcho's move at 1:55 of the music video for *Bakwa Lah*[16]). This obviously requires an awareness of the log drum and its pattern and is often performed by the DJ.

The percussive introduction:

Amapiano songs begin with what I refer to here as the percussive introduction. Before harmonic and melodic elements are introduced, a group of percussion instruments will play for several bars. These will sound almost unceasingly throughout the song. The shaker is an important part of this introduction, but I will now describe the other important elements which characterise it. I will begin with the kick drum.

[16] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aq6zkFOHEiw&ab_channel=MajorLeagueDjz

Kick drum:

This "four-on-the-floor" kick drum (simply four crotchets) creates an even metric structure typical of house music and shows a strong connection to deep house. Artists such as the well-known Black Coffee use this kick pattern as the foundation for their music. What is unusual about the kick drum in amapiano, however, is that it sounds quietly. This contrasts with house music where it features prominently (often referred to as "doof doof" music as a result). Instead, an amapiano kick simply supports the shaker and provides a soft low-end frequency to the beat. On a bigger system this produces a soft thumping that can be felt rather than heard. In fact, the kick sounds so softly that many described amapiano as characteristically lacking a kick drum (Seroto, 2020). While the kick in some songs is unobtrusive but obvious (such as *Tanzania* by Uncle Waffles), some songs feature a kick drum so quiet that it requires a boosted low-end to hear it, such as *Emsotra* by Soa Mattrix[17]. A possible reason for this dynamic provided by producer Antii is to create space in the mix to push the other bass instruments louder. Given that amapiano has an unusual number of bass-range instruments, one of which (the log drum) features as a lead instrument, this is likely to be the case.

Open hi-hat:

An offbeat open hi-hat is a common feature of the contemporary sound. This involves a hi-hat played on the offbeats to the kick drum as can be heard in *Adiwele*, figure 7 below.

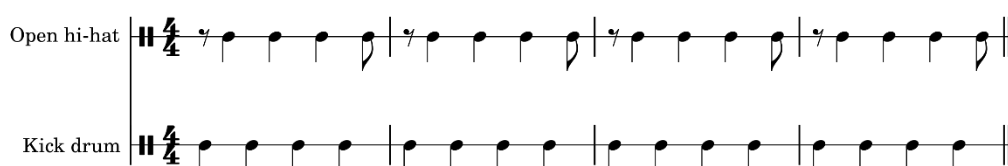

Figure 7: Open hi-hat and kick drum combination in *Adiwele*

Although unusual, this pattern can be used to replace the shaker. However, it is more commonly used as an extra part of the opening beat or to create interest for the listener and added later in the song (such as *Tanzania* by Uncle Waffles beginning at 1:59). Importantly, figure 7 is also the most common drum pattern in kwaito music, albeit at a different tempo. This is due to the influence of international house tracks on kwaito. This

[17] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z87cuQbz7Uo

offbeat hi-hat pattern, then, may be the result of new house influence of amapiano or the influence of older kwaito, but most likely both.

Snare:

With the kick and the shaker providing the rhythmic matrix, the other percussion sounds used to introduce an amapiano song are usually more syncopated and unique in sound. While not common, a shaker and kick drum pattern could easily open a deep house song, however, it is the other percussive elements that give amapiano its character in the opening seconds. These sonic elements provide the space for producers to assert their individuality and the individuality of a track. Most prominent is a sound that acts as a snare. This could be a snare sound, or any other percussion sound with a quick attack and usually a quick decay to match. In the case of Adiwele, I would consider this to be the pattern played by the sound resembling the woodblock, notated as figure 8 below.

Figure 8: Adiwele woodblock

This 'snare' seldom aligns with the kick drum, thus adding a strong sense of syncopation, and usually sounds around three times per bar, often with added ghost notes toward the end of the bar. It is common to double this with other sounds, resulting in multiple sonic characters. Alternatively, two distinct sounds can form the snare pattern. In the case of *Adiwele* the woodblock is softer than the usual snare but has a strong influence on the overall sound.

Other components of the percussive introduction:

Congas, bongos, side sticks, djembes, crashes, cowbells, tambourines, toms and other miscellaneous percussive instruments make up the rest of the opening beat. These are usually a little softer, adding timbral variation while not distracting from the other elements. The patterns seldom line up with the other elements already discussed, unless intended to change the character of the other percussive sounds through layering two of these to create a new sound. These sounds then fill in gaps left by the snare to create further interest. Alternatively, drum sounds can have their pitches shifted to form melodies which are

usually much softer than the other sounds, and rhythmically active, such as the congas in the second half of the bar of Young Stunna's *Adiwele*[18], demonstrated in figure 9.

Figure 9: Conga part in *Adiwele*

This helps to fill in the frequency spectrum where there are no 'pitched' instruments present as well. These sounds can also be digitally processed in several ways, notably with reverb, but are mostly unedited and can therefore be recognised across songs. They form part of what I will call amapiano's sound palette, a relatively small pool of sounds made characteristic of the aesthetic through sampling, specifically, the use of downloadable sample packs, discussed below. These packs will contain folders for the various types of percussion, such as the "KS4 Amapiano Sound Kit" in figure 9.

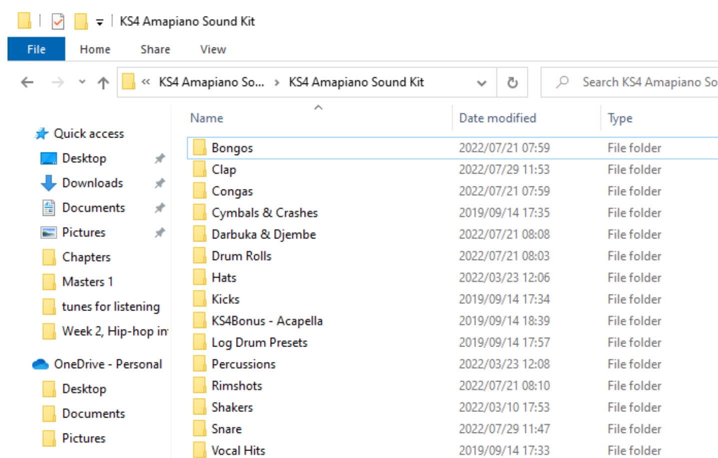

Figure 9: KS4 sample pack with individual folders for groups of sounds

Small cuts of vocals can be used similarly, further contributing to a song's distinct identity (such as *Tender Love* by Sha Sha[19], where the vocal used from 0:51 is her own voice). Short, quick attack vocals such as a breath or a shout are preferred as they can take on the quality of a percussive sound, like the male vocal that enters at 0:34 in *Catalia* by Junior De Rocka and Lady Du[20]. These resemble the vocal cuts regularly used in gqom beats, such as the bark-like sound used in earlier gqom tracks (for example in Citizen Boy's *Ghetto Mafia*[21])

[18] I often found this technique used on beats made by Kabza de Small and DJ Maphorisa, both of whom featured on this song.
[19] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Cp0g1BwWJMY
[20] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NmzXIw7MC4
[21] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=arVqJlP5pT0

which are still found in songs today (the opening of *Ama Cider – Extended Mic* by Loktion Banger[22]). Like gqom, many of these sounds have become part of the standard sonic palette and are included in downloadable sample packs. However, these are not as common in amapiano.

An uncommon approach is to use idiophones to add another percussive sound to the overall texture. These use simple melodic motives which are repeated throughout, such as the opening beat for *Abalele* by Kabza de Small and DJ Maphorisa[23] or *16 Inch – Dance Mix* by MDU aka TRP[24].

Common elements that do not appear in the percussive introduction:

While the above represents the common (and less common) elements which characterise the percussive introduction, I will now turn to the other parts of amapiano's characteristic sound, beginning with other percussive sounds, and then sounds which add melodic and harmonic interest.

Percussive sounds:

Risers (sounds which gradually get loud until a sudden end), impact sounds (loud sounds with a strong attack and a gradual decay) and snare drums can be used to indicate larger structures such as groups of bars or to introduce new material. These are usually used in conjunction with each other. A riser will begin shortly before the end of the section and increase tension leading up to the next bar, while the percussive sound (impact or snare) will mark the beginning of the next bar. An example of this can be heard from 0:30 of *Adiwele*, where a riser begins to grow in volume until the drum at 0:34 is heard, introducing a new section containing a pad and bass instrument.

[22] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=iIBUzUfmk04&ab_channel=LoktionBanger
[23] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Lm9fq66W7J8
[24] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=plDRtOcZaro

Risers can be created in several ways and are common throughout electronic music. The simplest example can be found in reversing a crash cymbal. First, figure 10 and audio example 2 represents the waveform of a standard crash cymbal.

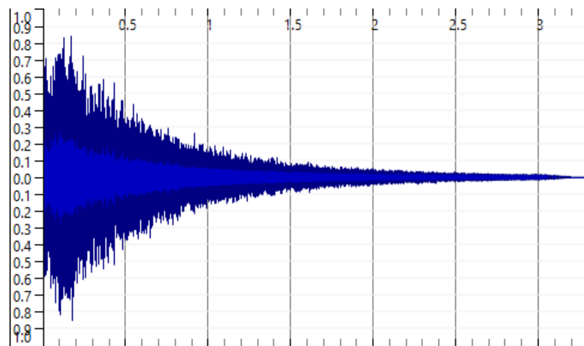

Figure 10: Crash cymbal

Crash cymbal.wav

Audio example 2: Crash cymbal

The first impact of the sound is loud and gets quieter exponentially. Figure 11 and audio example 3 represents the reverse of this sound. Notice that now the sound starts quietly and gets exponentially louder.

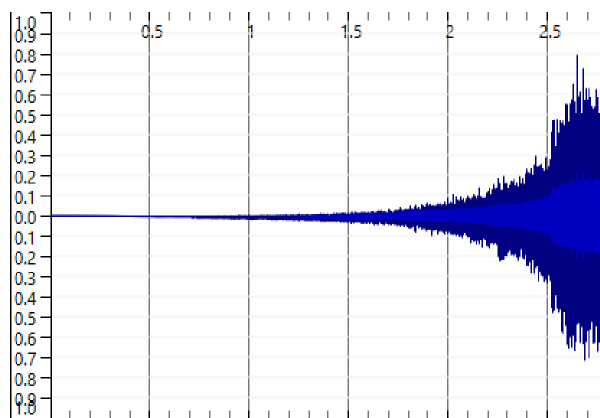

Figure 11: Crash cymbal reversed

Crash cymbal reversed.wav

Audio example 3: Crash cymbal reversed

Fills serve a similar function. These are usually percussive sounds played in an improvisatory fashion and often sampled (the same fill is often found across different songs). The drum fill starting at 0:30 of *Jazzidisciples (Zlele)*[25] by Zuma and Reece Madlisa is an example of this. Focalistic's signature opening line "Ase trap tse ke pina tsa ko kasi"[26] also acts as a fill, as can be heard from 1:04 of *Ke Star* by Focalistic and Vigro Deep.

The riser or fill is usually followed by a percussive sound with a long decay (the sound gradually gets quieter rather than quickly cutting off) often created by adding a sizeable amount of reverb. The crash cymbal at 0:35 of Kamo Mphela's *Nkulunkulu*[27] or the impact sound at 0:52 in *Ke Star* by Focalistic and Vigro Deep are examples of this. It is common to use the riser in reverse (in the case of a reversed crash cymbal, to play it forward) to signal the new bar. The sound then forms a mirror of itself around the turn of the bar, such as in *Isingisi* by Semi Tee and MDU aka TRP[28] where the riser begins at 0:28, turns around at 0:34 and ends at 0:40.

Non-percussive sounds:

While percussive sounds are a large part of amapiano's overall aesthetic, there are several characteristic sounds which perform an entirely different role that need to be discussed. These include keyboards, synthesised sounds (pads, melodies, basses) and vocals.

The keyboards of amapiano are a core element of its characteristic sound. Considered to be a 'staple' ("Charting the Meteoric Rise of South Africa's AmaPiano", 2019; "Amapiano Lifestyle", n.d.; Mazaza, 2020; Mohlomi, 2021), these keyboards provide the harmonic content of the song. They are usually credited for the music's 'soft', 'soulful', and 'sweet' character (ref). 'Piano', as it is used in 'amapiano' usually refers more generally to keyboard sounds, as hearing an actual piano or piano-emulating sound is uncommon. More often the keys resemble a thick pad-like sound, mellow electric keyboard or an electric organ. An example of this can be heard at 0:34 in *Adiwele*, where an airy pad sounds a B minor chord.

[25] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7nMtRbXiueA
[26] The meaning and significance of this phrase will be discussed in the final chapter, by the same name.
[27] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=KHzLzgcZZ3M
[28] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=9LtO_VfK_oE

While some producers play keyboards well, such as Kabza de Small, most simply ‘draw the midi’, referring to manually inserting the notes using a computer mouse onto a DAW. Thus, these keyboards need not sound as though played by a human. While these keyboards can play melodies, they more often give wide, spacious chords to set the harmonic context for the song.

A synthesised off-beat plucked sound is common to most amapiano songs and is found throughout gqom. Usually sounding as off-beat quarter notes, this sound complements the shaker rhythm and is associated with the release of many dance moves. For example, moving your head forward would usually take place on the main beat and then releasing and moving it backwards would happen on the offbeat. Although the sound begins earlier in a kind of half time, an example of this can be heard in the synth pluck from 3:34 in *Adiwele*. Most often, this sounds the first note of the scale as a single tone, or two tones an octave apart. This sound is often brassier than the other synths mentioned here, and I have heard it referred to as a trumpet.

Synth melodies are common, such as the synth line which begins at 0:34 in De Mthuda’s *Abekho Ready – Maplankeng Reshuffle*[29]. Alternatively, a short melodic motif can be used, such as the three note descension in *Idlozi Lami* by DJ Obza, Nkosazana and DJ Freetz[30], beginning at 1:08. Finally, synthesised basses are also common, such as the dark bass often used on DBN Gogo songs, such as *Khuza Gogo*[31] from 0:51 onwards.

Vocals

Finally, amapiano vocals are diverse. Many songs feature a type of rhythmic singing which emphasises the percussive textures of songs. This style usually features singing with a relatively simple melodic curve but with strong accents, such as those used by Young Stunna on *Adiwele*. Other styles include rapping by artists such as Zuma and Reece Madlisa, eastern-inspired singing such as those which begin at 1:26 on *Woza* by Mr JazziQ[32], and a unique, improvisatory style which Azile referred to as “the chants to our ancestors”

[29] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LBgAnnnO6bQ
[30] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eW6rD4OIoo4
[31] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7WcPcVy3ksY
[32] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tdbfBbqk1nc

(personal communication 25 October 2022), which can be heard at 1:42 on *Tanzania* by Uncle Waffles.

Unlike kwaito, few vocal styles are strictly gendered. In kwaito, chanting and rapping was usually the domain of male vocalists and singing the domain of females. In amapiano both men and women rap and sing. Gender specific styles such as the throaty, gruff vocals which begin at 0:57 of *Amaneighbour*[33] by Killer Kau and Mr JazziQ, are likely to be the influence of earlier styles such as kwaito.

Structure:

This section will provide a brief overview of the structure found in most amapiano songs. I will demonstrate this through a detailed structural analysis of *Adiwele*.

Amapiano structure is characterised by the gradual addition (and later subtraction) of elements, usually in a standard order. This can be compared to the 'slow burn' structure I have described of gqom elsewhere (Eaby-Lomas, 2021:111). *African Album Review* calls these "long, drawn-out build-ups" part of amapiano's sound and its appeal, specifically amapiano tunes of South Africa which are characteristically much longer than those by Nigerian artists making their own versions of amapiano (*Young Stunna - Notumato ZA, African Album Reviews*, 2021). Typical commercial amapiano tunes last around six minutes, with seven-minute (and longer) songs being common.

As I have already mentioned, an amapiano song will begin with the percussive introduction. This forms the foundation for the rest of the song, to which elements are added as the song builds towards its peaks and subtracted from when the song enters quieter sections. It is unusual for a song to ever drop all these first elements at any point, and thus at least some of these beginning sounds are present throughout the song. This introduction additionally sets the tempo and structuring of bars for the song. It is important to note that this introduction seldom contains any harmonic or melodic elements, much like that of gqom (Eaby-Lomas, 2021: 110–112).

[33] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Z3DPLuYjjuM

The structure of this introduction can take several forms. The most common are one or two bar percussive collections which repeat several times. If a two-bar structure is used, most of the elements from the first bar will be repeated in the second and the change will be small, but easily recognizable. It is also common to conceive of a larger four-bar structure which features an extra percussive element in the first bar, thus forming an ABBB structure across the bars. An example can be seen below in the percussive introduction for *Adiwele* in figure 12.

Figure 12: *Adiwele* percussive

Repeating these bars forms larger structures across several bars, which can be marked by risers[34] or other percussive sounds such as a crash cymbal, impact sound[35], or another snare drum. These are usually grouped in eights[36] and will set the pace for new elements to be added throughout the build up towards the songs first peak. Therefore, a song's percussive introduction can last 8, 16 or 24 bars, sometimes longer. A new percussive element can be added to the overall collection as well, commonly at the 8th or 16th bar. *Adiwele*, which uses a four-bar percussive introduction structure, repeats these four bars four times before the next element is added.

The next element to be added is pitched and commonly takes the form of a pad, keys, a bass or a synth line. At the end of the 16 bars, *Adiwele* introduces an airy pad sound playing a B minor chord, along with a synthesised bass line, which can be heard from 0:34. In some

[34] In electronic music, riser is used to refer to a sound with one of its parameters gradually increasing, commonly volume and/or pitch. Did you not explain these terms before?

[35] Impact sound, here, refers to a sound effect like a knock or an object landing on the floor.

[36] In the case of a one bar loop, the bar will be repeated eight times, and in the case of a two-bar loop, both bars will be repeated four times.

cases, this can be delayed by an extra cycle by adding a new percussive element instead, commonly the open off-beat hi-hat.

It would be inaccurate to consider these elements as exclusively harmonic or melodic in function as they contribute to the rhythmic framework by either adding new syncopations or by grounding pre-existing materials. This is added to the established beat and gives the impression of expectation as it begins the build-up to the most active part of the song. The convergence of these two elements (the new and the established) results in a new overall sound, which I will call the "emergent property" after Steingo (2016:180), discussed later.

The pitched element is usually followed by the addition of other elements at regular intervals (usually marked by the risers or other percussive sounds mentioned in an earlier paragraph) until the entrance of the vocals, which are usually heard just after the first minute, but can be introduced even later (two minutes is not uncommon). Therefore, by the entrance of the vocals various emergent properties have formed as new sounds are added to the established material and thus a significant build accumulation has already taken place. The vocals, then, continue to build, often by starting softly at a lower range and amassing toward a chorus or 'hook', the section of the song most often characterised by short repetitive phrases related to the title. More vocals can be added to reinforce this build up, as well.

In *Adiwele*, Young Stunna's voice is faded in from 1:00 as he sings with the bassline. At 1:09 he hums a new melody, which will later sound as the hook for the song. At 1:25 another instance of the singer's voice is introduced, which begins to sing at 1:42. An accompanying synth line is introduced at 2:00. The vocals build in energy until the repeating of the phrase "Nami ayang'biza amathousand" at 2:32.

The accumulation and build up toward a climax usually with the sounding of the log drum and a rhythmic emergent property or change in rhythmic 'feel' can be heard at 3:00 of *Adiwele*. This happens usually shortly after two minutes and provides a sense of relief after the lengthy build. The release coupled with easy, repeatable vocals usually signals the height of dancing and movement. It usually repeats several times before the next section and can be followed by an instrumental section.

The next section is intended to build toward a second (and final) peak, by experimenting with new combinations of older material to create interest. This might include instrumental sections, a log drum solo or new vocals from a featuring artist. Within this is a quieter section characterised by a softer, less active sound. This smaller section begins with the removal of several elements and thus a smaller number of sounds are heard, the combination of which can often result in new emergent properties. After 3:25, Young Stunna returns to humming the hook's melody while the instrumentals from the earlier section remain. A new verse begins at 4:00, and leads to a repeat of the hook, both of which are shorter and again maintaining the high intensity instrumentals. At 4:42 the beat is stripped down to the shaker, a handful of percussion instruments, the synth bassline, pad and the hummed vocals.

After the song reaches this second peak, similarly, distinguished by a loud, busy instrumental and short, repeated phrases for vocals, usually identical to the first, elements are then slowly removed as the song returns to its bare rhythmic elements once more. It can either end on the original opening beat or with a new combination of rhythmic materials. With the return of the hook at 5:17, *Adiwele* has reached a kind of 'turn-around' point. After several repeats of the hook, the humming returns at 6:08. At 6:42, the vocals and log drum are removed as the percussive introduction is heard along with a percussive vocal, the synth melody, the off-beat pluck and the opening bassline. A riser introduces another change at 7:17 where only a new percussive section sounds, resembling the introduction but with new elements such as the vocal and a snare drum. The pad remains as well, and this new emergent property concludes the song.

This structure is well exemplified in the graph below.

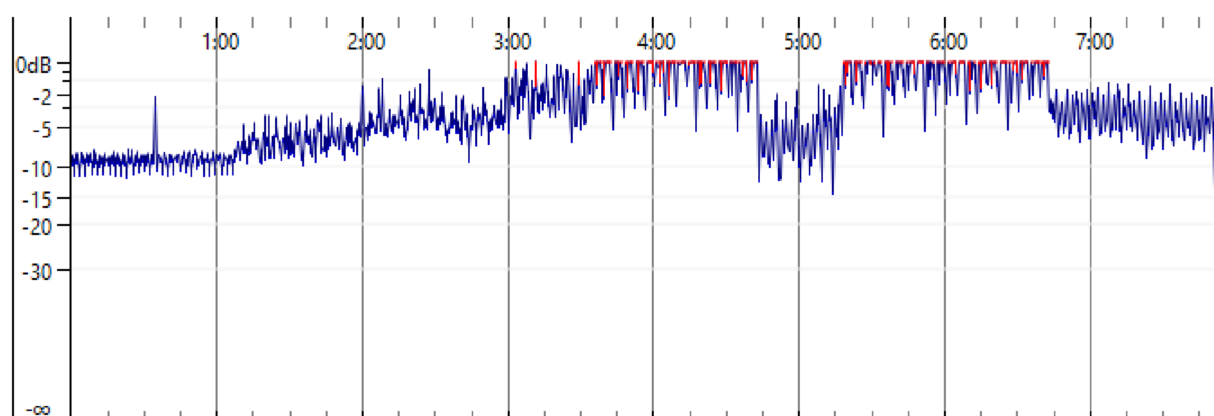

Figure 13: *Adiwele*'s structure represented in terms of loudness

The X axis represents time in minutes while the Y axis shows decibel count (loudness). The first minute of the song sounds at around -10dB, with an outlier just after 30 seconds where the riser, impact sound and new bass line sound simultaneously. The song begins at a low volume and through the introduction of new elements, as well as a manual raising of the overall volume to emphasise the builds, the song gathers momentum until the peak moments, represented here as the red lines indicating clipping. A quieter section then follows, with a build up to a second climax. The ending usually mirrors the beginning of the song.

Two criticisms may emerge in the reader's mind of this structure. The first is that it is restrictive. However, amapiano producers take great liberty to manipulate this structure to suit their needs and it should rather be understood as a characteristic aesthetic decision than a set of rules. In this it resembles closely related forms of house music and kwaito musics (discussed in the next section). Given that the primary mode of performance is through DJing, this structure also allows a DJ to have an idea of what will come next in a specific song and to arrange their set accordingly.

The second possible criticism is that it is derivative. Here, I must emphasise the emergence of amapiano as a collective project amongst many producers, even without them having direct contact. Compare this with the organic emergence of gqom (see Eaby-Lomas 2021:105). The structure is not the invention of a single artist, but rather all of them collectively. Perhaps important to mention here is that this structure is characteristic of the South African amapiano sound. *African Album Reviews* describe this structure, specifically the gradual build ups as distinctive to songs by South Africans, whereas the Nigerian appropriation of the sound usually features shorter build-ups (*Young Stunna - Notumato ZA, African Album Reviews*, 2021). However, even in the latter case, a percussive introduction and the gradual addition and removal of elements is the central focus in moving the music forward. The challenge for a producer, then, is to introduce and re-arrange introduced materials at the right time, so as not to lose interest of the listener.

In summary, amapiano's distinctive structure is characterised by a percussive introduction followed by the gradual addition of sounds to build tension into its first peak moment, then

containing a quieter section with less activity which again builds into a second peak and concludes with the gradual removal of these elements once more. While this structure can be related to house (or even electronic) music more generally, I would argue that it is more importantly related to kwaito which will be the discussion of the next section.

Kwaito (as) Structure:

It is at this point I wish to draw attention to how this structure links post-kwaito forms more broadly. I have already mentioned the use of slow-burn structure in gqom, however, a comparison of the use of this form in either form will aid a deeper understanding of the structure of amapiano, and post-kwaito forms more generally. That said, I would assert that the structure can be linked to kwaito itself, specifically using the analysis of kwaito structure provided by Gavin Steingo in *Kwaito's Promise* (2016: 174–184). Thus, this section will compare kwaito structure as discussed by Steingo with the amapiano structure described above, and then again with gqom as described by my own earlier paper (2021: 111–112).

In the section "The Order of Production" in his chapter *Black Diamonds* Steingo analyses the layered structure of kwaito songs *Kaffir* by Arthur[37] and *Amadlozi* by Bongo Maffin[38] through the lens of 'acoustic assemblages', a notion borrowed from Ana Maria Ochoa Gautier, used here to refer to the building of a track from composite "layers" (Gautier, cited in Steingo, 2016: 180). Here, Steingo uses an example raised by Jacques Attali (2005, cited in Steingo, 2016: 180) of the producer being like "a Lego player, adding and subtracting blocks to build different acoustic assemblages". He defines a layer as "a fragment of musical material between five and twenty seconds long that is stored in a computer and "activated" at various points throughout a song" (Ibid., 175). Thus, a song is perceived as a body created by programmers (producers) and the various vocal parts performed over this body, but simultaneously a body made up of several composite parts which include synth lines, bass drums, synth chords, amongst others. These individual layers are described as "discrete, unchanging musical blocks" and are thus either sounding or not, "on or off" (Ibid., 179-180). Vocal lines, while less consistent and repetitive than the other parts, are also subjected to similar manipulation and can be cut, shifted, and looped in much the same way. The process

[37] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eucgo57ocEE
[38] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=TROW-wmTWK0&ab_channel=BongoMaffin-Topic

thus begins with a programmer, sees the appearance of an artists to perform vocals in the middle and then the body and the vocals are processed and sequenced by the programmer in the final stages of the song.

Steingo adds to this the notion of "emergent property" to describe that which is not within the composite parts which emerges when two (and usually more) layers are sounded together (Steingo 2016:180). In other words when multiple layers sound simultaneously something new emerges, and then new layers are played simultaneously (as some get "turned off" and no longer sound) resulting in new emergences. Steingo goes as far as to assert that the "*emergent property of various layers is kwaito itself*" (Ibid., italics in original), arguing that it is these emergences that make a 5-20 second loop into a full-length song.

Steingo notes "it is more common for programmers to create electronic tracks before giving any thought to what the rest of the song may sound like". When producing a beat with Azile and Antii, our approach was to build up a loop like the one described by Steingo above. Arranging the loop into a song happened afterwards, mostly through a process of switching components on and off. Much like the description above, sounds are gradually switched on and off as the song progresses. In the case of amapiano, components are frequently added or removed to create these "emergences" which give the song its sense of movement and progression. An example can be seen in the various sections of *Adiwele*, which sound as distinctive sections because of the specific combination of layers, or emergent property, at that point in the song.

However, amapiano structure offers an important difference to the approach of kwaito producers as discussed by Steingo. Rather than the seemingly random combinations chosen in the examples given in his work, amapiano producers are intentional about the way they add elements to a growing substrate of sound. The opening beat forms an almost constant foundation onto which elements are gradually added and removed. This contributes to the building of tension which distinguishes amapiano from kwaito, where movement is led by one section moving into another.

It is important to point out that neither form's structure is entirely unique. In fact, a shortfall of Steingo's analysis is that it ignores that this form of song creation is not unique to kwaito. He does argue that emergent property is an important feature of all music (Steingo, 2016:

180), but the use of fixed individual layers being turned on and off, resulting in emergent properties is common amongst various electronically produced musics. Therefore, by discussing how kwaito's structure can be used to understand and link amapiano to the older form, I am in no way implying that this structure was exclusively informed by kwaito and is instead the result of the convergence of several influences.

Concluding Thoughts:

This chapter has offered an attempt to describe the sound called "amapiano". I have done this through highlighting general characteristics, common sounds, and its distinctive structure. I believe that this has been generative and beneficial for the thesis going forward. Firstly, I have begun to describe what amapiano sounds like. After all, even though amapiano encompasses more than just a musical category, but also an entire sensory experience, the musical style is still at the centre with artists and producers being vital manufacturers of this experience. Secondly, the above demonstrates a musicological connection between kwaito and amapiano, further demonstrating my earlier assertion of amapiano as post-kwaito. The kwaito literature (although lacking in this area) has provided a point of departure for my analysis because of the similarity in the styles. Finally, while the above is by no means a complete description of the sounds to date, offering no trajectory for the sounds of tomorrow (which are being composed as one reads this), I hope that it has prepared the reader for the mainly contextual concerns which follow.

Chapter 3: Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: The Aesthetics of Amapiano

As if acknowledging the claustrophobic urban sprawl in which it is made, while also trying to encourage the listener to imagine more than that, through their instinctual need to dance to its groove (Kalia on Native Soul's dark sound, 2021).

Like kwaito before it, amapiano is often associated with images of consumption. Luxurious lifestyles are celebrated throughout music videos. Expensive cars, name brand fashion, flashy accessories and crowded parties feature prominently both on the screen, through the lyrics and throughout social media. At the same time, the music has emerged from and is largely consumed in South African townships. These underdeveloped areas created under the racial segregationist policies of apartheid South Africa continue to be characterised by poverty, immobility, overcrowding and unemployment.

At first the presence of these two elements appears to be a jarring juxtaposition, or even an irreconcilable contradiction, but further investigation reveals this to be an important tool to mitigate, escape and even overcome these harsh socioeconomic conditions. It becomes a means to imagine a reality apart from these circumstances and produces a hope for a brighter future for township practitioners. Far from being as simple as hopeful aspiration, the tensions inherent in this require constant navigation.

I refer to this procedure as "aestheticizing freedom". This tool is not new, and can be clearly traced to earlier forms, notably kwaito. I thus begin this section by discussing the notion of freedom as it is addressed in the kwaito literature. Three important assertions from the literature help to develop a theoretical basis for this chapter. They are Peterson's "redemptive fantasy", Livermon's "conviviality" and Steingo's "aesthetics". I combine this into a broader "aestheticizing freedom" before turning to this process in amapiano. To discuss amapiano's imaginings, I discuss two ethnographic encounters at length, namely, a performance I attended at a craft beer bar and an interview. I examine how each used sensory experience to imagine a freedom from socioeconomic circumstances and boundaries.

Finally, I have chosen to refer to this as “aestheticizing” over less tangible words such as “imagining” to convey the potential of change to the environment. In the next chapter I will discuss this difference more clearly in a comparison between “aesthetic formation” and “imagined communities”, but for now I wish to defend the notion of aestheticizing in that it implies an ambiguous relationship between sensory experience and ‘reality’ or the concrete world. While imagined implies that the invented freedom exists only in the mind and constructing implies a concrete change in reality every time, I rely on the navigation and uncertainty of the phrase for my analysis. Being in the unique position to be starting my research on these musical forms many years after the decline in kwaito’s popularity, I also challenge the effectiveness of this aestheticizing.

Kwaito as Aestheticizing Freedom:

The notion of freedom occupies a central place in the kwaito literature. How kwaito afforded black South African youth a space to imagine, explore and push the boundaries of the new ‘freedom’ granted by the end of apartheid is often seen as its primary political function. The post-apartheid state soon made it obvious that only certain kinds of freedom would be allowed. While increased access to the economy, improved living conditions and forms of employment, equal access to services such as healthcare, amongst many others were the hope of black South Africans, many were soon disappointed by a state that promoted only a black elite and did little to uplift the rest of the country. Importantly, certain behaviours, especially with regards to the youth such as economic and sexual freedom, continued to be prohibited and policed by broader society.

In this section I will examine the notion of freedom in the kwaito literature, specifically how kwaito was used to imagine and hope for a freedom which has yet to be fully realised. To do this I examine several theories used to study kwaito’s imagining of freedom, namely, Bhekizizwe Peterson’s “redemptive fantasy”, Xavier Livermon’s use of “conviviality” and Gavin Steingo’s assertions regarding “aesthetics”. I take these as complimentary and nuanced theorisations of a broader “aestheticizing freedom” and emphasise the role of fun in this.

Gavin Steingo’s aptly named book *Kwaito’s Promise: Music and the Aesthetics of Freedom in South Africa* pivots on the idea that kwaito practitioners used aesthetics as a tool for the

imagining of freedom (Steingo, 2016), an idea to which I will soon return. He quotes Zola 7's statement that the post-apartheid struggle was the struggle of freedom or perhaps even against it (Ibid., 2). Similarly, Lara Allen considers kwaito to be black urban youth expressing their experience of freedom (Allen, 2004: 82). Xavier Livermon notes kwaito's response to new opportunities for freedom in the first few pages of *Kwaito Bodies: Mastering Space and Subjectivity in post-Apartheid South Africa* (Livermon, 2020: 2). He notes a freedom to perform the body differently, to envision the future of freedom and its connection with materiality in the introductory chapter (Ibid., 4, 10, 14). David Coplan argues that explicitly sexual dancing was an expression of freedom, "breaking away from the hypocritical apartheid-era repression of black sexuality, the controlling condemnation of their elders and the finger-wagging moralism, however well intentioned, of the anti-AIDS campaigners" (Coplan, 2005: 20). Esinako Ndabeni notes the sexual freedom that kwaito provided for women, as a space outside of typical patriarchal societal limitations (although these were, and still are, in constant tension) (Ndabeni, 2018: 65–79). Gibson Boloka (2003: 106) and Thokozani Mhlambi (2004: 16) also highlight the new freedom of expression which kwaito provided.

Freedom in kwaito is usually characterised by tension. Livermon calls freedom in South Africa a "matter of becoming", as opposed to an event, asking whether or not freedom without equitable access to the economy is possible (Livermon, 2020: 52). According to Livermon kwaito asks the question of whose freedom was achieved in the post-apartheid moment, a response to an inward policing within the black community which limited the freedom of the youth (Ibid., 233). Livermon illustrates this with Boom Shaka's controversial performance of the national anthem. Here, the originally solemn hymn is performed to a kwaito beat with matching erotic performance. Many South Africans considered it degrading and irreverent, thus exposing the competing ideas of freedom promoted in the post-apartheid freedom (Livermon, 2020: 42–47). Peterson similarly points to Sandile Memela's assertion that kwaito is void of meaning and Joel Pollack arguing that it ignores the actual material and social conditions of its listeners, describing them as "common conservative description[s] of kwaito" (cited in Peterson, 2003: 200).

Several theories have highlighted how kwaito deals with the notion of freedom and how practitioners demonstrate the potential for freedom while it has yet to be fully realised. I

would argue that while each of these theories carries its own nuance, they can be summed up as forms of aestheticizing freedom. I would suggest that each are important to our understanding of amapiano.

Peterson calls this imagining freedom “redemptive fantasy”. Drawing from Jacqueline Rose’s *States of Fantasy* (1996:4-5, cited in Peterson, 2003: 197), he notes the use of fantasy in kwaito as an expression of the agency of young, black South Africans, as a means to create their own narratives and in response to the socioeconomic conditions they experience (Ibid.). He argues that there is “no way of understanding political identities and destinies without letting fantasy into frame” (Ibid.). Fantasy involves a journey through the past, aiming to take charge of the present to open potential futures (Ibid.), and thus fantasises (or aestheticises) alternate futures for freedom.

Livermon posits a “conviviality”, borrowing from Paul Gilroy’s notion of conviviality as “processes of cohabitation and interaction that have made multiculture an ordinary feature of social life” (Gilroy 2004: xv, cited in Livermon, 2020: 190). Conviviality simply refers to friendliness and liveliness, which Gilroy uses to analyze moments during which rigid conceptualisation of race, class, sexuality, and gender are temporarily unstable. In the chapter dedicated to this theory, Livermon uses conviviality to investigate kwaito group Mafikizolo and parties celebrating youth day (Ibid.). Thus, through practices of fun, kwaito practitioners could create moments of class, racial and gender instability. Importantly, its opposite is seen to be melancholia built up on segregation and white supremacy (Ibid.).

Steingo theorises the notion of aestheticizing freedom through the notion of aesthetics, specifically the modality of sensory experience (rather than the theory of the beautiful and its judgement) (Steingo, 2016: 6). Using Jacques Rancière, Steingo argues that music, and in particular kwaito music, allows practitioners to "double reality” (Rancière 2006: 6, cited in Steingo, 2016: 6). That is, music allows artists and listeners to envision realities apart from their lived conditions which can be a powerful tool for imagining, and in the case of kwaito, imagining freedom. Steingo rejects notions of “deception, mystification, ignorance, delusion”, as these suggest truths to which only some have access (Ibid., 7). He critiques earlier conceptions of aesthetics, specifically those that imply the need for “demystification” which requires a scholar to explain the hidden politics under a form (Ibid., 16-20). Further,

he aims to develop a modern African aesthetic theory, one which situates aesthetics as an attempt at overcoming modernity from within and "describes the experience—forged in an encounter between West and non-West—of an autonomous domain in which separation does not yet exist" (rather than the view that Western music is separate from life, while African music is part of life) (Steingo, 2016: 17).

Finally, one of the key features of aestheticizing freedom amongst kwaito and post-kwaito practitioners is fun. Fun and pleasure available to black bodies in South Africa were restricted under apartheid and often continue to be on account of socio-economic conditions of the majority of black South Africans. Peterson notes fantasy as a site for license and pleasure (Peterson, 2003). Steingo points to the emphasis on pleasure and good times which ignore lived conditions and distract from larger political issues, arguing that this is what makes the music political (Steingo, 2016: 7). Kwaito's overall emphasis on fun through lyrics and considerations during production, as well as its consumption as party music in party spaces demonstrates a doubling of reality through sensory experience which allows for an aestheticizing of freedom. Livermon's use of the idea of conviviality is characterised by parties accompanied by kwaito (see Livermon, 2020: 57–91 and 188–223). One example of this is his chapter on Youth Day parties during which attendees dress in their own take on a school uniform to party in remembrance of the June 16 student protests of 1976 where the government responded to the peaceful protest with violence, killing hundreds of students (Livermon, 2020: 217).

Several kwaito scholars have thus argued for various forms of aestheticizing freedom, each of whom add their own nuance but ultimately argue the role of imagining/fantasising/doubling reality, often through practices of fun, in constructing identity/challenging boundaries/rejecting lived conditions. But how does this play out in post-kwaito forms such as amapiano? How does amapiano contribute and shape the long history of "good times music" (see Coplan, 2005: 16). It is to this I now turn.

Aestheticizing Freedom in Amapiano: Two Encounters

This next section probes into two examples of such aestheticizing which I encountered during my fieldwork. The first takes place in a craft beer bar called Saggy Stone, where I was invited to attend a performance by amapiano DJ/producer and friend, Azile Manxiwa. The

second is an interview I conducted with two Bridges alumni which I have titled after the words of one interlocutor, “faking it ‘til you make it”. I will discuss these as encounters in line with Livermon’s text. Freedom here, much like it the kwaito literature, refers to moments granted by amapiano where practitioners gain the power and right to act independently of the limits of socio-economic backgrounds.

To begin, I discuss the notion of encounter and briefly reflect on my ethnographic engagements as encounter more broadly. I then turn to the examples, beginning with the encounter at the Saggy Stone which I use to demonstrate conviviality in amapiano. The interview serves to illustrate Steingo’s aesthetics. While the former consists of a lengthy description followed by an analysis, the latter is structured thematically into writing passed circumstance, amapiano as lifestyle and amapiano as a broader sensory experience. Through these I wish to demonstrate that such aestheticizing is still a vital part of the post-kwaito music of amapiano, but also demonstrate what makes its form of aestheticizing unique.

<u>Encounter:</u>

Before I begin, I wish to discuss the notion of encounter. Livermon makes use of Samuel Delaney’s description of urban encounter as “the opportunities created by urban institutions that enable interclass contact” (Delaney 1999, cited in Livermon, 2020, p. 67). Livermon puts forward nightclub spaces as an example of such opportunities (Livermon, 2020: 67). In response to Gilroy’s concept of conviviality, Livermon uses the Sestswana word for “mixture”, motswako, which “refers to the variety of possibilities and spaces of interaction through and across modes of difference” (Livermon, 2020: 73). Emerging from South African cultural forms including a multilingual and multicultural television show and a hip hop/kwaito crossover, both by the name, it describes the differences of not only race, but class, location and nationality which emerge through interaction (Ibid.). Finally, Livermon considers personal experience, the experiences of others, and embedded social history as important considerations in this reading of urban spaces (Ibid.).

<u>Ethnography as Encounter:</u>

Encounter, then, has great potential in the analysis of my ethnography. The moment I entered the field an encounter was introduced. My fieldwork began at Bridges located in

Langa township. If we take encounter to refer to "opportunities created by urban institutions" to allow contact "across modes of difference" (see Delaney in Livermon above), then Bridges represents the urban institution which generated an opportunity for mixture. Specifically, an encounter between black, working-class musicians from the township and a white, middle-class student from the Southern Suburbs. During apartheid such contact was forbidden, however, today it is usually limited to education and welfare. I have already mentioned that white presence in the township usually involves teaching and/or charity work. Interestingly, my presence was a reversal of a standard encounter. I was entering the township to be taught, not to teach. I required knowledge, rather than brought it to be disseminated to the deserving. I had to prove myself worthy of receiving such knowledge, rather than the other way around. That said, I did enter the space as a guitar teacher[39], and often struggled explaining that I was in fact there to learn. In this sense, all ethnography involves some sort of encounter and each of my experiences can be analysed as such.

Encounter at the Saggy Stone:

Saggy Stone is a craft beer company which was founded by brothers Phillip and Adrian Robinson in Robertson, South Africa ("Saggy Stone: About Us", n.d.). Originally the farm grew fruit, but later added beer-brewing. They proudly advertise their use of fresh mountain water and their support of the local music industry. They have five locations, or "taprooms" throughout Cape Town and the surrounding areas. Their marketing is typical of craft beer with majority white models in advertisements and a strong emphasis on the natural (seen in photographs of the farm and festivals presumedly in Robertson) ("Saggy Stone Brewing Co.", n.d.).

This specific encounter took place at their Kloof Street location in the Cape Town city bowl. Having been named one of the "coolest" streets in Cape Town, or even the world, for its restaurants, galleries and fashion boutiques ("Kloof Street voted the 'coolest street' on the planet", n.d.), it is already a space of "mixture", characterised by converging cultures. While the restaurants and bars cater mainly to a middle-class clientele, it is additionally home to a

[39] Here I taught beginner guitar lessons weekly to a group of adults involved in various kinds of music-making at the institution in order to meet possible interlocutors.

significant homeless community and with a wide variety of shops and other services, many people find themselves in the space across race and class boundaries.

On 23 April 2022, Azile (DJ Blackish) whom I met through Bridges, invited me to the Saggy Stone bar on Kloof Street to watch him perform a DJ set of amapiano music. I offered to give him a lift and we met at Bridges in Langa, along with my wife Danielle (Danni) and his two brothers Azania and Bathandwa. Azania, the older brother, shared openly about his previous employments and his rather broad taste in music. His younger brother, Bathandwa, spoke little and almost fell asleep a few times in the car. We arrived at around 19:30 to find a relatively empty bar. The bar was located next to the exclusive Ayepyep (pronounced a-yep-yep) which featured a large, bouncer wearing a red tie who oversaw a velvet rope strung across the doorway and controlled who was allowed to enter. Just after we arrived a fancy car pulled up across the road and the bouncer jogged across the road to let someone who must have been of high position inside. Ayepyep is owned by DJ Sumbody and named after his song by the same name. DJ Sumbody now produces amapiano music, however, deep house music is more common at the club.

Azile led us into the Saggy Stone and through to the DJ decks, which were currently occupied by the resident DJ who was playing instrumental hip hop. This was toward the back of the bar, just before the exit to the outside section where the pizzas are cooked, and the marijuana is consumed, both of which we could already smell. Azile explained that the decks are usually against the wall so that both the front and back section have equal access to the DJ, but tonight the DJ could only face into the back room. We were one of two occupied tables in this section, with the table opposite us gradually growing as friends joined them. They were well dressed, with shiny glasses and name brand clothes. There was an obvious difference between their “Kloof Street” fashioning and that of Azile and his brothers in their township style. I had brought a limited amount of cash for the evening and while the rest of the table was alright not ordering anything, I felt obliged to order some pizzas for us to share. As the music grew in volume, we slowed down our conversation and focused on listening. Bathandwa fell asleep and I was unsure how he was going to stay awake long enough to hear Azile’s set.

Shortly after finishing our pizza another DJ took over as the crowd began to grow. Azile was due to play next, but it appeared that the resident DJ had prioritised this DJ, perhaps because he felt that his style of American hip hop would be better suited to the crowd. His set was well received as the crowd loudly sang the songs with him and began dancing. As is typical, when he took charge of the decks, the DJ raised the volume and continued to do so gradually for some time (Azile explained that this is to signal a shift to the new DJ). Soon the growing crowd and the loudness of the music had overwhelmed me, and I suggested that Danni and I go back onto the street to get some fresh air, discuss the night so far and buy an ice cream.

We arrived back at 21:35, shortly before Azile was scheduled to play, to find that the crowd had grown substantially in both inside rooms as well as outside, probably to about three quarters capacity. The night was now in full swing as they exuberantly shouted lyrics and danced with high intensity. We had to push our way through tightly knit crowds of sweaty dancers to find our table again. They were obviously familiar with these songs, and I began to worry that Azile's amapiano set might not fit the mood that was building. Azile told me afterwards that he was "feeling freaking nervous", too, fearing that they may not know the songs he was planning to play. Azile, Azania and Bathandwa now occasionally joined the dancing. I was particularly surprised by Bathandwa's involvement, given that he was falling asleep earlier on in the set. As the crowd grew, the difference in the room became increasingly obvious. As more attendees styled after broader middle class black aesthetics joined in, the more obvious Azile and his brother's township styling became. But even more obvious was Danni and I who were the only two white attendees thus far. I feared that our presence would interrupt the fun of the evening, that the suspicion over our presence would prevent others from fully enjoying what had become a black space.

The time had come for Azile to take over and while the room eagerly continued their festivities, I waited nervously for his first song. He inserted his flash drive and scrolled through his options, faded out the previous song and brought forth amapiano's characteristic shaker and percussion introduction. The crowd exploded in excitement and quickly adjusted their dancing accordingly. Originally, Azile had intended to play private school amapiano, to match the mellow crowd we found upon entering the Saggy Stone. Before beginning his set, he told me that he had changed his mind and was going to play

commercial amapiano (see *Listen for the Shaker, Wait for the Log Drum* chapter earlier) instead. He felt that this faster and more dance-orientated style would fit the atmosphere better and be recognised by the crowd present. He was right. During Young Stunna's "Bopha" (to tie or to bind), everyone performed its associated dance move, which involves placing one wrist face down onto the other facing upwards with your fingers in a loose fist, as though your wrists are tied. The dancer then swops the orientation of their hands, while maintaining the connection of their wrists.

Easily audible from the road, Azile's set drew a large audience, well beyond the capacity of the venue. Danni and I were invited to dance by a local attendee who taught us the basic moves. Danni caught on quickly, but eventually the patient teacher gave up on me entirely. Thankfully I had seen several of the popular moves during my research and could emulate them well enough to show my familiarity with the style. Azile was in his element, exuding confident coolness as he put forth song after song with approval from the now intimate crowd. Azania joined Azile behind the DJ equipment, adding to his hype, but also closely watching Azile's performance to learn how to DJ himself. Bathandwa, on the other hand, dominated the dance floor with his pantsula flair. The crowd grew in diversity, too, as groups of both black and white party goers came inside. The 30-minute set was extended to an hour which concluded at 23:00. Azile was grinned excitedly about how the set went but confessed that he was ready to go home now, to which I wholeheartedly agreed.

Discussing the notion of encounter, and specifically encounter as primary, William Mazzarella argues in *The Mana of Mass Society* that we should see the iteration of encounter, in other words the feeling of continuity, as more surprising than the rupture that encounter often causes (Mazzarella, 2017). Given the instability of human interaction, he calls our ability to experience relatively continuous worlds extraordinary. While one could read Azile's presence at the Saggy Stone as rupture, and even more so my presence, the ritual of the multicultural space that is the late-night bar or club can never be repeated on two evenings and thus always represents encounter.

I wish to begin my analysis of this evening by examining the various boundaries which our partying temporarily destabilised. If we take conviviality to refer to moments of instability of class, race, gender, and other boundaries, specifically through practices of fun, we can

analyse this encounter as a convivial experience. The space itself was host to various forms of “multiculture” (see Gilroy earlier). Why did Azile and his brothers stand out from the rest of the crowd at first? Firstly, they were unfamiliar with the other partygoers. While Azile had performed here before, he had not befriended anyone outside of our table. The other attendees had all come in groups that had either gone out partying together or had formed over the course of the evening from smaller groups who had. If these groups regularly did this in similar locations, then intergroup relationships would form. Secondly, various visible elements pointed to a difference in background, arguably that of class. Others in attendance had fashioned themselves in “middle-class” ways, including name brand clothes usually ensembled characteristically of a broader cosmopolitan black community. The brothers were instead styled in a way common of the township, usually based on what was available to them. That is not to say that they were not well dressed for the evening, because they were, however, the styling was noticeably different. They did not consume in the same way as the others in attendance. They did not purchase alcohol or food, unlike the other tables who purchased in abundance. The prices reflected the middle-class nature of the venue and Azile was not paid for the gig. Finally, and perhaps most obviously, they were sitting at a table with two white attendees. All the white attendees in the space that evening had been brought by black friends. Due to inexperience, Danni and I did not dress in a typical clubbing fashion and our reason for being there may have been somewhat uncertain to onlookers. I would be naïve to posit that these were the only differences in the space that evening. The majority of those in attendance were students, or of student age. Many attendees spoke English, possibly as a unifying language across different linguistic backgrounds. Some may have been Xhosa, Zulu, Sotho, Pedi, and so forth, while others may have been from outside of South Africa.

The space was certainly one of mixture or motswako. But how were these boundaries challenged or blurred through the experience? What did this instability look like? How long can these instabilities last? I would suggest that these occurred on varying levels. Perhaps a significant moment in this was when Azile took control of the DJ decks. This in itself is an interesting event. Azile now became the facilitator of the sensory experience, deciding in which direction it should move. However, the attendees could simply reject his decisions and leave, so his role is one of careful navigation. His township-styled body was elevated

with this promotion, seen through his positive interaction with an audience that had side-lined him earlier (until this point the three brothers had only been comfortable to dance around our table). Azile had to work hard to convince the resident DJ that he should play, which could suggest that the other DJ was either nervous about the style change or didn't trust Azile's ability to take over. But due to the reception of the audience, he was willing to extend Azile's set. This provided the brothers with social currency for their association with Azile, including access to the space behind the decks and increased mobility across the dancefloor. Perhaps this can be read as the inter-class contacts that conviviality allowed for. It is vital, however, to note that these are only temporary. Azile and his brothers still needed a lift home to the Langa that evening.

But my association with Azile was more complicated. At one point Azile played my favourite song and pointed me out in the audience. He invited me to dance, which gave me access to the dancefloor which I had previously felt uncomfortable to enter. However, despite these opportunities, I failed to embody the music in the space, dancing awkwardly and not being able to sing the words. While I was not rejected from the space, my limited abilities did prevent full engagement with the other dancers in attendance, who would soon lose interest to find someone more experienced.

This exemplifies the potential of practices of fun in the destabilising of socially constructed boundaries, while simultaneously showing the delicacy and impermanence with which this occurs. The music at the centre of the experience joined those in attendance in a way that exceeded such boundaries and pointed out their constructed nature.

"Fake it 'till you make it": Post-kwaito consumption and material imaginings

Kwaito was often criticised for its emphasis on material consumption. Peterson notes this criticism by the "guardians of society" for its dissention of the morals pushed in post-apartheid South Africa (Peterson, 2003). Gibson Boloka adds the perceived failure to connect lived experiences and kwaito, notably through the "meaningless" lyrics (Boloka, 2003: 101). Livermon notes that consumerism led to its dismissal as "lacking critical consciousness to address challenges of post-apartheid South Africa" (Livermon, 2020: 15). As I have already mentioned, many restrictions to freedom remained for the youth with the post-apartheid ANC government. Several are clear through kwaito's criticism, such as the

sexual freedom and freedom of consumption that was emphasised by kwaito youth but severely criticised by older generations. While many criticised kwaito's strong emphasis on consumption, kwaito scholars such as Livermon consider it to be a crucial component of the form and thus emphasise it as an expression of a new right to consume, one previously unavailable to black South Africans during apartheid (Livermon, 2020: 11). I wish to now turn to consumption in amapiano. In many ways this acts identically to kwaito and can be seen as a continuation of the "party politic", but the styles are distinct and can be seen to represent a wider range of cultural sources. Throughout this section I will be quoting from an interview I conducted at Bridges with Uncle Baguette (Wanda) and Eric Lee (Eric Sicelo). While I will be referring to several conversations, news articles and observations I made, this conversation will be the common thread as it reveals the complicated perceptions surrounding consumption in amapiano. Rather than summarising and then analysing the encounter as in my first example in this chapter, I have chosen here to deal with the content thematically. Each theme can be traced back to kwaito conversations, as well.

Wanda and Eric are good friends who studied together at Bridges. Eric is a singer and plays various instruments, notably the marimba. Wanda can be seen as a music entrepreneur, primarily acting as an artist manager but occasionally rapping for recordings and DJing. I met them on 21 November 2021 when, after a guitar lesson, I was showing some of the members of the group a beat that I had produced and Olwethu, who is part of the management team, said that I should show it to them. They came in, listened to the beat, and immediately started to improvise vocals. I spent the rest of the afternoon recording with them. It was during this session that I met my key interlocutor, Azile. As a result of this session, we set up a formal interview which took place 9 March 2022[40].

Writing passed circumstance:

Shortly after introducing himself Eric mentioned several challenges that he had experienced in his music career thus far, mostly because of his background and explained that he had already overcome many of these. I then asked what these challenges were, and both Eric and Wanda mentioned several throughout the course of the conversation. Eric mentioned

[40] It will be noted that the majority of contributions from this interview come from Wanda. Of the two, he is the more outspoken, with Eric being rather shy in comparison. However, Eric did agree on most of these points.

that he did not have any instruments of his own at home, which had limited him in his ability to perform and practice. Later, I asked what equipment they had for recording at home, and both said only their cell phones. Eric frequently records with Azile, but it costs a taxi fare every time he wants to get to him, and they are usually limited by the availability of the studio at Bridges.

The lack of mobility and the reliance on other people's equipment experienced by these musicians is a huge hinderance on their ability to be creative and how frequently they can release music. Whenever we wanted to organise a studio session, several members had to rely on me for lifts. On 21 July 2022 I organised for us to use the studio at the South African College of Music for the day. We were all going to meet in Langa, however, getting everyone there was more of a challenge than originally anticipated. Azile was the only one of the five musicians I was meeting that day who managed to make it to the meeting site. Antii had to finish chores and we drove to his house in Langa to pick him up. Unathi JaLi took a taxi from Mitchell's Plein, but his phone died on the taxi, and we couldn't contact him until we found him walking toward the meet up point, after some time looking for him. Eric had taken a taxi to town because Azile had reasonably thought that "the University of Cape Town was in Cape Town". Finally, I had come from Wynberg to Langa, only to find out the Athi lived a few kilometers away from me in Wynberg. After a fruitful recording session that day which went much later than anticipated (I was hoping to leave before dark), I then needed to give everyone a lift home because the taxis were no longer running, which meant driving to Langa, Mitchell's Plein, Nyanga and then back home to Wynberg.

Despite the limitations we experienced that day, the song that was recorded complained about women wanting only a man's money in the typical "gold digger" trope. While I expressed my personal distaste for the misogynistic lyrics, it is worth noting that the amount of money spent on the hypothetical women mentioned was R10 000 ("10k" in the lyrics of the song), a large sum of money. If we did, in fact, have access to this money, we could have solved most of the issues we experienced that day. The conversation that followed the recording seemed to reveal that they had had relatively few experiences like the one implied in the song, and that the lyrics were in fact based on a wider perception of women. The song was also intended to be relatable, with several lines calling for men to comment

on the situation, but it does not comment on the unequal distribution of resources which leaves township musicians with severely limited access to the equipment they need.

This demonstrates the use of amapiano to ignore or perhaps mitigate their difficult socio-economic situations. The gold digger trope can further be interpreted as reflecting the lack of resources available to black men, especially youth, to provide for partners and families as a result of unfair and unequal distribution of wealth. Either way, the musicians effortlessly created regardless of the circumstances. We made no intentional decision to forget the experience of the day so far, but amapiano's potential in creating an alternate reality through sensory experience supports Steingo's notion of the aesthetics of kwaito.

Amapiano as lifestyle:

Throughout our interview Wanda emphasised the phrase "amapiano is a lifestyle". One of the WhatsApp groups I joined as part of my ethnography was called "Amapiano is a lifestyle". Various popular publications make this claim, such as Apple music's article "Amapiano Lifestyle" and the SHAYA! documentary opening with the words "it's a lifestyle" (Papercutt TV, 2019; "New age house music", 2019; "Amapiano Lifestyle", n.d.). Eric, who brightens and smiles excitedly, explains further "I want to drive that expensive Benz on my video [laughs] and dance with a lot of guys, a lot of ladies, just that, its lifestyle", to which Wanda added that it is more than the car, it involves dancing, women, and to show those who didn't believe that it was possible and to make those who did believe proud. Thabang Moloto who produced a documentary on amapiano titled "SHAYA!" confirms this by saying

> You associate it with nice times, a nice lifestyle. It makes you forget your pain. A person could be from the brokest background, and when they dress nicely and go to party, they look like they've made it in life. And for that moment, none of their problems matter (Papercutt TV, 2019).

In this section I draw four observations I wish to briefly discuss from this notion of amapiano as lifestyle, each of which are intimately linked. The first is its role in the discourse of aspiration surrounding post-kwaito musics. The second is the careful balance that is struck between consumption and authenticity. Thirdly, what role do parents play in the lifestyle? And finally, I wish to examine how it points to amapiano's role as a broader sensory experience.

Aspiration:

Amapiano as lifestyle acts as both a present and a future notion. In the present it refers to every aspect of what we might call an “amapiano culture”. Wanda and Eric have already linked amapiano music to practices of dancing and romantic and/or sexual encounters. Both are already involved in this “lifestyle”, attending parties and performing. Simultaneously, they have linked the lifestyle to consumption by mentioning cars. Amapiano’s lifestyle is often depicted by luxury and ease, with designer brands, large houses, and expensive cars. In this sense, amapiano as a lifestyle represents a hopeful future. Wanda and Eric do not yet have access to these lifestyle aspects and the mobility that they provide, yet they still identify with such a lifestyle.

Boitumelo Kgobotlo notes that this lifestyle is often referred to as the “grootman lifestyle” (literally “big man”, or even Ayepyep, mentioned earlier). Whenever posting about famous amapiano practitioners such as Kabza de Small, Azile would refer to them as “grootman”. The dictionary of South African English explains this “urban (especially township)” slang as “a term of respect for an older man or a leader” (“Definition of grootman in A Dictionary of South African English”, n.d.). However, in the context of amapiano and considering linking this to the broader “lifestyle”, the phrase can also refer to someone that has “made it” or been successful, and thus deserves respect. This implies that the “grootman” is worth imitating.

Such aspirations were equally prevalent in kwaito (see Peterson, 2003; Allen, 2004; Swartz, 2008). Steingo demonstrates this with the conclusion of M’du’s music video for *Shisa Nyama* where M’du is seen driving away in a new Mercedes Benz, followed by him leaving in an older one which breaks down and the woman he is with leaves him (Steingo, 2016: 204). He analyses these to be male aspirations and reality, respectively, and insists that such aspirations should not be seen as false consciousness but as an “aesthetic ‘doubling of reality’” (Ibid.).

Closely tied to the notion of aspiration is the means of attaining that lifestyle. Throughout our conversation, Wanda emphasised the importance of hard work in achieving their goals. He would say “if you want something, go get it”, explain his various marketing strategies, and detailed how he regularly attended parties simply to network. Azile always emphasised

the role of his “dreams” and aspirations in achieving his goals, joking “we got no time for sleep homie” (personal communication 17 November 2022). Successful artists are praised for their hard work, to which their new, luxurious lifestyles are a testament. Peterson links kwaito with the “hustlers” and notes that kwaito represented the only “legal hustle” available to black youth (Peterson, 2003). In fact, amapiano artist Mr. JazziQ stated that he wanted to change the perception of the hero in the townships, that township youth usually only see success in figures involved in illegal hustling such as “spinners” and “hijackers” (Papercutt TV, 2019). He proposed amapiano as an alternative lifestyle to these (Ibid.).

Authentic consumption:

Toward the end of our conversation that afternoon I asked why amapiano’s lifestyle came with such an expensive taste, especially given its connection to the township. Both Wanda and Eric reacted in a way that suggested that the answer was a difficult one (both whistled, and Wanda said “sheesh” and put his hands on his head). Wanda explained the “fake it ‘til you make it” philosophy discussed later, but then mentioned an important example which illustrates the complex balance between consumption and the notion of authenticity. He told me that amapiano producer Mr. JazziQ had recently bought himself a new car, a VW Golf 7. However, he pointed out that while it costs just under R1 000 000 (around R750 000), he had still bought a “car from the hood”. This is because the VW Golf is a popular car in the township. JazziQ also owns a VW MK1, which is modelled on the original VW Golf. Wanda said that Kabza had similarly bought a Gusheshe (a BMW 325iS) for a similar price, which, too, was based on a classic township car, the BMW E30. Wanda argued that, while they could afford a Porsche, both men had chosen to instead buy what they had always wanted when they were children.

While I discuss the role of township authentication in Chapter Six, I wish to focus here on the connection between authenticity and consumption, which I believe these cars demonstrate well. While the experience of the majority living in South Africa’s townships is characterised by poverty and immobility, and that much of the aspirational message of amapiano as lifestyle involves creating ease and luxury through hard work and thus creating an opportunity to leave behind the conditions of the township, the lifestyle is still rooted in the township and its symbols. Too much consumption may lead to a disconnect between

the “authentic” township experience, and thus artists must root themselves in the townships. Peterson likens this demonstration of both the township and material success as a juggling act, to which Steingo adds its role as a “double consciousness”, comparing it with the double consciousness of the mission educated elite balancing colonial civility and their rejection from such civility based on their being natives (Peterson 2003:210, cited in Steingo, 2016: 165). Those who have not yet achieved material success similarly hold a double consciousness, the balance between the lifestyle of the present and the hope of the one in the future mentioned above.

Parents:

There are also external tensions to the amapiano lifestyle. The opinions of parents were one that was raised during our conversation. Eric explained that while his parents loved his music, they were not in support of the “lifestyle” associated with it. Wanda added that the concern was that they would be out all night and may end up taking drugs or excessively consuming alcohol. For his parents the concern was that he was investing time into something that may not bring in the necessary income to support the family. Wanda said “it confuses me because you were a big Brenda Fassie fan and you used to jam to her music and you used to say she is making moves, how about your son does it? Like they don’t give us much hope with music”. In this quote he has pointed out the similarities between the lifestyle associated with amapiano and earlier popular musical moments in South Africa, in this case bubblegum. Not only does he link the emphasis on the party, but he points out a double standard as his parents partied in much the same way. Azile’s father has had a similarly difficult time accepting his decision to pursue music. However, through recent strides in Azile’s career, he has managed to convince his father that there is a potential career along these lines.

This demonstrates the inextricable ties between these musicians and their socio-economic circumstances. Parents similarly envision a life for their children beyond these circumstances and discourage the pursuit of music as they do not feel that it will provide the necessary outcome.

Sensory experience:

Finally, amapiano as lifestyle points to the music's role in a broader sensory experience. As has already been mentioned, the music is inseparably linked to practices of dancing, consumption, and visual aesthetics. When a fan or artist claims that "amapiano is a lifestyle", they are asserting that it is more than simply a sonic experience but includes a way of being. This phrase can be linked to Steingo's assertion that kwaito is more than a genre, but is instead a "particular arrangement of sensory experience" "that suspends normative modalities of hearing and knowing" (Steingo, 2016: 21). In fact, Wanda could not have been clearer on this when he said "amapiano is not really a genre, it's like a lifestyle".

While I believe this to be true, it is the assertion of this truth from practitioners in the phrase that is of particular interest. They are arguing that amapiano represents more than just music, but a way of life which is often in stark contrast to the vision of the post-apartheid government, parents, religious organisations, and so forth. It represents freedom defined on the youths' own terms. A freedom they imagine and aim to realise by enacting such freedom.

"Fake it 'til you make it": Concluding Thoughts

When I asked about the expensive tastes of amapiano, Wanda responded that "Amapiano comes with a fake it 'til you make it" attitude. This popular aphorism is often used to describe the process of feigning confidence or competence to achieve the actualisation of those qualities and their result. It involves ignoring your current experience (usually nervousness and apprehension) and imagining an alternative experience (optimism and excitement) to eventually achieve the desired results. In the context of amapiano, I believe that Wanda was referring to performing confidence to give the impression that you have overcome your circumstance, so that you might build confidence and then actually overcome your circumstance, in other words, until you "make it".

I would argue that this "fake it 'til you make it" attitude reflects Steingo's assertion regarding aesthetics. It is an intentional ignoring of lived conditions to imagine both a present and a future freedom. However, I must note that Wanda also referred to this mindset as a "stigma" in the perception of amapiano. I believe he is referring to the possible

interpretation that the “fake it ‘til you make it” approach is lying. Steingo notes that the criticisms mentioned earlier confirm that no musician or listener can ever truly escape their social conditions (Steingo, 2016: 4). Even when aesthetically creating an alternative reality, they are still seen through the lens of their poverty. Later, he quotes Mbembe who argues that such conditions obligate people to lie to escape their conditions (Mbembe 2006: 92, cited in Steingo, 2016: 20). It is the ability to ignore such conditions that give this form of sensory experience its power.

As I draw this chapter to a close, I wish to raise one final question about this form of politics. While the form has been helpful in providing a space to escape and to imagine a brighter future, one has to ask; does it work? Here, I would like to paraphrase from *Born to Kwaito: reflections on the Kwaito generation*, specifically Sihle Mthembu’s chapter “Producer’s Paradise” where Robbie Malinga stated “at first, it was music about celebrating this freedom that we’d just got, and so we made a lot of party songs. But you can only party for so long” (Mthembu in Ndabeni, 2018, p. 202). In almost 30 years of the post-apartheid period, little actual change has taken place as far as the socioeconomic conditions of previously marginalised communities go. But how effective have kwaito and post-kwaito forms been in making those changes? Changes in policy need to take place and wealth needs to be fairly redistributed. What if amapiano artists were to use their platforms to openly support such change? Would this undermine the fun?

In conclusion, amapiano has continued kwaito’s legacy of aestheticizing freedom, through its convivial experience of the party, through aspirational fantasy and through the sensory doubling of reality. While the modes of consumption are different, its overall purpose is the same.

Chapter 4:

Constructing Communities: Amapiano as Aesthetic Formation

"They create possibilities for different ways of coming together . . . and they also impede how we form ourselves as we-formations, across the past, present, the future." - Keguro Macharia, 2016, cited in Livermon 2020:13.

One of the challenges of studying contemporary youth music is the question of community formation. In an increasingly interconnected and arguably globalised and individualised world, what is it that binds people together? Now more than ever, urban citizens balance a plethora of cultural groupings. A single person can be involved in a group dedicated to underground punk music, another to learn Japanese, and another to care for house plants, all without leaving the house. How is a sense of community formed amongst amapiano practitioners? What exactly contributes to we-formations in relation to this music? How could this relate to amapiano's aesthetic?

It is to these questions that this chapter is dedicated. To do this, I begin by investigating several theories which may prove constructive in the theorisation of this music and the people who make and consume it. I discuss each of these in turn and settle on the notion of aesthetic formations. This, then, follows on from the notion of aesthetic to analyse amapiano groupings as fluid and dynamic organisations who are bound through shared sensory experiences. As has become custom in this thesis, I begin by reviewing community construction in the kwaito literature. I then discuss the shape that this takes in amapiano by addressing how this might relate to amapiano as lifestyle. Specifically, I address language, dance, and fashion as three aspects of a broader sensory experience and how these function in the construction of amapiano as aesthetic formation. Finally, I will discuss how the aesthetic formation is performed and promoted by producers and artists in the form of "collaboration".

I draw on various forms of media to discuss this notion in amapiano. While my ethnographic fieldwork does play a role, I also examine music videos and social media in my discussion.

Tuulikki Pietilä has argued that "kwaito performances and music videos give momentum to an imaginary community or nation (Anderson) by combining styles and symbols of local black history with those of the contemporary Black Atlantic (Gilroy)" (cited in Pietila, 2013: 143). Video content then plays a key role, both in community making and my study of it. I do not intend to focus exclusively on virtual or digital communities, but instead wish to examine several ways in which amapiano practitioners are involved in communal (aesthetic) experiences, whether online, offline or a combination of both. Additionally, I would like to note that amapiano functions on multiple levels of community making simultaneously. I use aesthetic formation to analyse groups as small as two friends to a party of one hundred people, to a festival with thousands of attendees, as well as group formations in digital spaces across multiple temporalities (such as viewing the same Instagram post at different times). I am not uncritical that the processes may differ across these types, but I wish to examine this in the broader context.

Throughout this chapter I will refer to amapiano practitioners as "yanos". Typically, this refers to both makers and consumers of amapiano (Conteh, 2021; "Landing page", 2021). It is also a reference to the more common pronunciation of amapiano as "amapyano". I have chosen to do this as it represents the community being formed on their own terms and serves as a continual reminder of the agency of individuals and conscious effort to construct such formations.

Subcultures or Neo-Tribes?

In *Subcultures or Neo-Tribes? Rethinking the relationship between youth, style and musical taste*, Andy Bennet argues that the notion of subculture no longer holds any value for sociological work on youth, music and style (Bennet, 1999: 599). He notes that subculture had become a catch all for any intersection between young people, style and music (Ibid., 600). He critiques subculture on the grounds that groupings are not tied to issues of social class but rather much more fluid in late modern lifestyles where identity is constantly navigated and constructed, not a fixed given (Ibid., 599). Furthermore, he argues that subculture usually ignores similarities to other subcultures and instead focuses on the deviance from the "dominant national norm", and that it fails to consider rituals and behaviours of participants when not participating in the subculture (Ibid., 603-604). Vitally,

for the study at hand, he demonstrates this through a study of contemporary dance music in Britain, making use of Michel Maffesoli's concept of tribus, which argues that instead of mass society creating a mass of individuals, it has created a tribalised society, from his book, *The Time of the Tribes: The Decline of Individualism in Mass Society*, (Maffesoli 1988, cited in Bennet, 1999: 599–600).

In its place, he posits understanding these groupings as a "series of temporal gatherings characterised by fluid boundaries and floating memberships" (Ibid., 600). He calls this a neo-tribe (Ibid., 605). This conceptualisation involves an emphasis on 'sites' over groupings, consumer-based cultures, and, quoting Maffesoli, refers to an "ambience, a state of mind, and is preferably to be expressed through lifestyles that favour appearance and form" (Maffesoli 1988, cited in Bennet, 1999: 605).

While neo-tribalism has raised several interesting points, I have chosen not to use it in the chapter which follows. This is because its fluidity is captured in aesthetic formation, and also because of the history and possible confusion with tribe and tribalism in both a South African and African context (see, for example, Mafeje, 1971). However, Bennet's concerns and considerations will be an important contribution to this chapter, especially his assertion of the fluidity of contemporary music groupings, the agency of the individual in identity construction, and the notion of lifestyle over social structure (discussed later). Subculturalist Phil Cohen's argues:

> latent function of subculture is […] to express and resolve, albeit "magically", the contradictions which remain hidden and unresolved in the parent culture [by attempting] to retrieve some of the socially cohesive elements destroyed in [the] parent culture", and the resulting analysis of the relationship between 'subculture' (amapiano) and 'parent culture' (kwaito) (Cohen 1972:23, cited in Bennet, 1999: 601)

The above is important as I continue to examine amapiano through the lens of kwaito. However, I am not implying here that kwaito is a pure cultural form, nor instead simply a subculture of another parent culture, which implies a kind of family tree which will result in a dominant parent culture, which is an inaccurate depiction. I will thus avoid the term subculture altogether.

Imagined Communities or Aesthetic Formations?

In a similar fashion to Bennet, I will now discuss the notions of the imagined community and aesthetic formations through Birgit Meyer's critique of the former and theorisation of the latter in her religious anthropological work, *From Imagined Communities to Aesthetic Formations: Religious Mediations, Sensational Forms, and Styles of Binding* (Meyer, 2009). The imagined community was introduced by Benedict Anderson to analyse notions of national identity as binding citisens in postcolonial nation-states (Anderson 1991, cited in Meyer, 2009). Here, the community is imagined because it can be seen to be "existing in the minds of its members and called into existence via a new reading public generated by the rise of "print capitalism" (Anderson 1991, cited in Meyer, 2009). This is important because it does not rely on face-to-face communication as previous theories had done and it theorises the community as a formation that emerges through the "circulation and use of shared cultural forms and that is never complete", rather than as a pre-existing entity which is expressed through a fixed set of symbols (Meyer, 2009: 2–4, and Latour 2005, cited in : 4).

According to Meyer, the issue with this is the failure to recognise the material components and bodily sensations of such communities which take the experience beyond the imagination to become tangible (Meyer, 2009: 5). As Meyer puts it "in order to become experienced as real, imagined communities need to materialize in the concrete lived environment and be felt in the bones" (Ibid.). She outlines the benefits of substituting the words "aesthetic" for "imagined" and "community" for "formation". The first involves a similar logic to Steingo's use of Rancière's aesthetics discussed in chapter three of this thesis as Meyer suggests a return to Aristotle's *aisthesis* (Ibid., 6). Using Meyer and Verrips (2008, 21) who call aesthetics "our total sensory experience of the world and our sensitive knowledge of it", she roots community construction in sensory experience, thus giving that which is imagined a real, felt experience (Meyer, 2009: 6). One may argue that aesthetics are not tangible experiences, thereby contradicting the need for such communities to involve the material, however, Meyer includes all five senses in her conceptualisation, thus including touch. The second contribution is formation over community, which links to Bennett's argument for neo-tribalism over subculture. Formation, as Meyer argues, has the connotation of fluidity and dynamism and includes both the social entity and the process of forming (Mahmood 2005: 17ff, cited in Meyer, 2009: 7), as opposed to the more fixed and

bounded conception of community (Meyer, 2009: 7). Furthermore, she raises another important consideration in her decision against aesthetic community because of its previous usage to imply a lack of substance in such formations (Ibid., 8). Thus, while these formations are fluid and changing, they are not to be disregarded as superficial.

I came across Meyer's notion of aesthetic formations when reading Heike Becker's *A hip-hopera in Cape Town*, which discusses the Afrikaaps show which was held in Cape Town and aimed to highlight the black history of the Afrikaans language through various musical forms, notably South African styled hip hop (see Becker, 2017, p. 248). It is interesting that Bennet's paper studies a musical grouping and Meyer's theory has also proved helpful in studying communities organising around music. In fact, Bennet says that "processes of neo-tribalism, as these relate to sensibilities of style and musical taste among contemporary youth, have been highlighted considerably by the current urban dance-music scene, particularly the musical and stylistic fluidity which underlies this scene" (Bennet, 1999: 608). Not only does this confirm the usefulness of such theories when studying music, but further demonstrates the usefulness of music-centred cultural groupings in the study of community building more generally. In this sense this chapter offers a case study of interest to social theorists dealing with young people broadly.

Constructing community in kwaito:

While community and the building thereof has been addressed throughout the kwaito literature, few authors have dedicated chapters or articles to it exclusively. Here, I name some examples of theorisations surrounding the construction of community in kwaito music. While I will refer to many of these in the discussion that follows, I would argue that this aspect of the kwaito literature does not receive the same attention as other concerns discussed in this thesis. Instead, binding (the process through which we-formations are made) is usually considered in its relation to other concepts. Additionally, I believe that the literature would benefit from a robust consideration of the implications of aesthetic formations as this links several loose threads across kwaito's literature.

Tanja E. Bosch's *'Ek se, heita!': Kwaito and the construction of community* explores community radio station Bush Radio's broadcasting of kwaito music as community creation (Bosch, 2006). One example of how this happens is through language, such as practitioners

singing songs in languages they don't know and learning such languages through contact with people who do speak them (Ibid., 96). The author notes the potential of this practice to bridge divides of people from different linguistic backgrounds within a single township (Ibid.). She argues that the radio stations deliberate broadcasting of kwaito despite its many criticisms reflects a conscious desire to construct and uphold a community, specifically a unifying black community (Ibid., 98). She argues using both Boloka (2003) and Anderson (1983) that such communities are "imagined, multiple and temporal" (Ibid.). Xavier Livermon notes how a sense of community across various backgrounds is created through shared sensory experiences at kwaito festivals (Livermon, 2020: 110). Bhekizizwe Peterson, quoting Tricia Rose, argues that "contradictory articulations are not signs of absent intellectual clarity; they are a common feature of community and popular cultural dialogues that always offer more than one cultural, social, or political viewpoint" (Rose 1994, cited in Peterson, 2003: 203). Gavin Steingo adds Robert Thornton's conception of an "unimagined community" to explain the role of nonhuman actors in community building, specifically devices such as MP3s, memory sticks, and hard drives (Steingo, 2016: 140). This, then, is a form of community which is unseen and unimagined, as an alternative to the other examples mentioned here which involve active imaginings (Ibid.). The notion of Afrodiasporic space, an important theory in the next chapter, gives a sense of transatlantic black community as Tuulikki Pietilä has argued, again making use of Anderson's imagined community (Pietila, 2013: 143 and 152).

Amapiano as Lifestyle:

How, then, does amapiano function as aesthetic formation? How does Meyer's decision to replace the idea of imagined with aesthetics better reflect the nature of community building amongst amapiano practitioners? What are the tangible material components of such formations? How are amapiano groupings more fluid than what the fixed concept of a community allows for? Why is aesthetic formation a better conception?

As I have addressed elsewhere, "amapiano is a lifestyle" is a popular phrase to refer to the music being at the centre of a wider aesthetic experience. I would argue that this is a vital component of amapiano as an aesthetic formation. In this next section I will look at various components of amapiano's lifestyle and how these demonstrate both the role of the

aesthetic in we-formations and how these formations form and reform repeatedly. Kwaito was similarly, although less commonly, described as a lifestyle. Gabi Le Roux, producer for kwaito icon Mandoza, said kwaito "has become to SA what hip-hop is to American youngsters. It's not just a genre of music, it's a lifestyle" (Pile 2001, cited in Swartz, 2008).

I will begin by addressing Bennet and Meyer's use of "lifestyle", and then discuss the role of language, fashion, and dance amongst amapiano practitioners in constructing community/communities. Throughout this section I will discuss representations of the formation on social media, music videos, the media, and parties.

I have already addressed how amapiano as lifestyle can be read as an assertion that the musical form is not simply a genre, but rather a set of ways of being which involves its own distinctive aesthetic. This demonstrates the value of replacing the notion of an imagined community with an aesthetic formation, where the focus becomes the experience of practitioners through their sense rather than simply their minds. Interestingly, Bennet posits the notion of lifestyle as an alternative to "structuralist interpretations of social life", arguing that this positions individuals as agents who self-construct their identities, rather than such identities being determined by conditions of class (Bennet, 1999: 607). Rather than abandoning structural issues, lifestyle offers practitioners new ways of negotiating such issues (Ibid.). He identifies experimentation as a central characteristic of this (Ibid.) which is a vital contribution to the conversation at hand as amapiano fans do not consume the music because of their socio-economic circumstances. This is made clear in that the music has expanded far beyond the township and is not always the favourite of the young township resident either. Instead, the notion of lifestyle (and formation) places the yano in a position to choose their identity and the we-formation, of which they would like to be a part. While there are obvious links between township spaces and the enjoyment of the music, practitioners decide for themselves to invest into the broader community, for example, how much of the fashion they would like to adopt, how regularly they would like to take part in the formation, and how much they'd like to know about the artists. Yanos are free to form part of other formations. For example, Antii formerly produced hip hop and now produces gqom and other cross-over styles, as well. Wanda is very involved in the local hip hop scene, often promoting other hip hop artists. Bridges is mostly involved in DJing other genres, like afro-tech, house and techno music, often performing at events

specialising in these genres. Members can closely follow sports teams or be part of any number of formations. Membership is thus fluid and dynamic.

Likewise, Meyer uses "style", after Maffesoli, to refer to "'forming form' that gives birth to whole manners of being, to customs, representations, and the various fashions by which life in society is expressed" (Maffesoli 1996: 5, cited in Meyer, 2009: 9). Thus, style is said to go beyond simply a shared interpretation of forms and agreeing on their meaning, to having the capacity to induce in participants a "particular common aesthetic or style", a particular subjectivity and habitus (Ibid.).

Thus, lifestyle can be read as an assertion of amapiano practitioners' agency in constructing their individual and group identities through experimentation, a "forming form" which leads to a common group aesthetic. In this sense, amapiano as lifestyle reflects the notion of aesthetic formation.

The talk and walk:

Language:

One might wonder how amapiano functions across language, or even assume that language would prove a significant barrier to community construction, given amapiano's wide and growing appeal. Fans from all over Africa and other parts of the world listen, dance and sing songs sung in local languages, and often several languages in the same song. The way that amapiano navigates mulitlingualism links to wider forms of interlanguage contacts in popular music throughout the world, as well as earlier national forms such as kwaito. Language and lyrics are subordinate to other parts of the aesthetic formation, such as the music itself and dance. I would argue that the de-emphasis on language (or a de-emphasis on language's direct meaning) is an important component of binding in amapiano. While such a de-emphasis on language as the primary form of communication leads to an inclusive approach to language, there are also words and phrases which are intended to promote the "forming form" of we-formations. Thus, words which are endemic to these groupings are an equally important consideration.

This section, then, aims to address the use of language in the aesthetic formation of amapiano. I will begin by discussing how multilingual amapiano mitigates the need to

understand lyrics and language for aesthetic formations to take place. I then turn to three strategic approaches to language used by young people in kwaito as outlined by Sizwe Satyo, using this to briefly analyse similar trends in amapiano. I utilise these to discuss language on a more local level with phrases unique to amapiano music and its associated lifestyle. I then analyse how this allows for aesthetic formations.

Rather than choosing a neutral language to ensure mutual intelligibility, amapiano artists sing in a wide variety of South African languages, notably Zulu and Sotho (much like kwaito) but Shona, Ndebele ("Landing page", 2021), Xhosa, Sesotho, Setswana, (amongst others) as well as local dialects, including various forms of "township slang" which are specific to different township settings. Kwaito was similarly multilingual. Gavin Steingo notes the use of English, Zulu and Afrikaans, mostly through the township dialects of tsotsitaal (based on Afrikaans) and iscamtho (based on Zulu) (Steingo, 2016: xvii). However, Steingo also notes kwaito group Bongo Maffin's use of "Tswana-based creole", Xhosa and English (Steingo, 2016: 66). A notable difference, however, I have found no examples of Afrikaans being used in mainstream amapiano[41]. This may simply reflect language shifts in the townships of origin. However, it does appear that amapiano's core audience are from "Bantu" linguistic backgrounds (Zulu, Sotho, Xhosa for example) and has not been as popular with the so-called coloured population, although this does appear to be changing.

Bosch mentions that kwaito music had the potential to span linguistic groups to create a broader black community (Bosch, 2006: 96–98). Specifically, she notes how practitioners learnt languages through learning the lyrics of songs (Ibid.). Often amapiano fans learn to sing many songs across multiple languages and don't always understand what they are singing. Important in this is the nature of the lyrics, which often focus on the party and include amapiano-specific vocabulary to communicate this. Because the lyrics carry little meaning beyond this, especially in more commercial amapiano, similarly to kwaito, the party can be enjoyed despite the music being in another language and thus contributes to we-formations which surmount language barriers. In this sense the shared experience communicates beyond the limits of language, however, these only last as long as the shared

[41] An exception here may be found in coloured amapiano artist Big Afrikaans. However, this does appear to be a niche form, albeit with a strong following, and intended for a different audience.

experience. Much like conviviality discussed in the previous chapter, these aesthetic formations then, are temporary.

DJ Maphorisa says that the use of English in amapiano is considered to be “hoity toity” (pretentious) in local contexts but does help to appeal to international audiences (Conteh, 2021). Thus, he chooses to use English to set the context for someone unfamiliar with local languages, or in his words, enough English so that they may “know you are singing about love or heartbreak” (Ibid.). Thus, the use of English represents a tension between alienating local and non-local listeners. An example of this can be found in *iPiano* by Sha Sha and Kamo Mphela. The lyrics are as follows:

Kuzodabuk' iyipika masfika you know the vibe Hit after hit afisa you can't deny (x2)	[Uncertain, likely a regional slang possibly stemming from Shona]
Ayi Ayi Ayi (Sojaiva emini until ebusuku) Asilali ekhaya (Sojaiva emini until ebusuku) (x2)	isiZulu: Ayi Ayi Ayi [expression] (we’re going to dance from the daytime until the night) We’re not sleeping at home (we’re going to dance from the daytime until the night)
I know that you know you know how to party You know that I know get this party started	
Hello bheka mina ke (Ipiano liyenza njalo re tlo jaiva nou) (x2)	isiZulu: Hello look at me (the amapiano does that, Sesotho township slang: you are going to dance now)
Shesheshe sheshe sheshe shehse (Re tlo jaiva nou)	Shesheshe [expression] (Sesotho township slang: You are going to dance now)
Hello bheka mina ke (Ipiano liyenza njalo re tlo jaiva nou)	isiZulu: Hello look at me (the amapiano does that, Sesotho township slang: you are going to dance now)

Here it can be seen that Sha Sha moves between several languages, namely, isiZulu, English and Sesotho slang, with the possibility of a Shona slang, too. Typically, one might think that a listener would have to understand four languages to fully grasp the lyrics in their entirety. However, the words in each language set the tone and context of the song well. For example, the English lyrics read “you know the vibe, hit after hit… you can’t deny, … I know that you know you know how to party. You know that I know get this party started” sets the party scene clearly.

Therefore, the multilingual nature of the song broadens its potential listener base as anyone who speaks any one of the languages will understand that the song is encouraging the listener to party.

Once again, this allows communication beyond the confines of individual languages and thus creates a broader black youth identity, both in South Africa and beyond its borders (most Shona speakers are from Zimbabwe, and regions such as Nigeria and the United Kingdom share English as an intermediary language). This allows for a wider aesthetic formation, where the simple lyric contexts across multiple languages allow for shared sensory experience which is (mostly) not hindered by not understanding the lyrics.

The Aesthetic Pleasure of Language:

An important part of many youth forms is the use of exclusive language, as this allows for youth to express themselves on their own terms to members of their own grouping. Much like dancing, this allows members of amapiano formations to identify one another and thus serves an important function in the construction of we-formations. One means of accomplishing this is the use of township language or slang. Sizwe Satyo writes in his work *A Linguistic Study of Kwaito*, about the use of tsotsitaal for in-group communication amongst young black South Africans and offers kwaito-speak as a viable alternative name which sheds the negative association with criminals (Satyo, 2008: 92). He notes the use of kwaito speech to “distance oneself from the ordinary and reinforce a particularly [sic] identity or image of youthfulness” (Ibid., 93). He mentions three strategic approaches to this form young people more generally make use of, each of which I will discuss in turn. Of particular interest here is that he notes that these “derive considerable aesthetic pleasure” from the use of these strategies in designing and creating new modes of speaking, again drawing attention to the sensory feelings linked to youth formations (Ibid.). These strategies are the “redeployment of existing dialect variants”, “reshaping foreign words according to the way one hears them” and “deliberately inventing one’s own tonal configuration or re-arranging tonal patterns of existing words” (Ibid.).

The first, using existing dialect variants, has many examples throughout amapiano as practitioners often redeploy words from both broader youth lexicons and amapiano-specific language. Discussed at length elsewhere, is Focalistic’s catch phrase “Ase trap tse ke pina

tsako kasi", which is Sepitori (Pretoria township speak) for "this is not trap music, this is what we listen to in the township". The audio clip of Focalistic saying these words has become emblematic of amapiano and has been sampled in many songs outside of his repertoire (see for example, Busta 929's *Ngixolele*). Thus, a thoroughly local phrase is used to construct a wider community appreciation. Similarly, Kaygee Daking and Bizizi's track 'Kokota Piano' uses similar township vocabulary to insist that "amapiano doesn't play, iyakokota" or "it knocks" (Mohlomi, 2019a). Referring to the feeling that the music creates for a listener, especially an initiated one, this seems to point again to amapiano music's function beyond the auditory to include wider sensory experience, and specifically "the feeling in the bones" that is described by Meyer. It exemplifies a clever play on words, as the knocking is said to also refer to the knocking on a door ("Kokota Piano Music Video and Lyrics by Kaygee Daking - Ingoma Lyrics", 2019). Read this way, amapiano knocks on the door to invite the listener to dance.

This can be in the form of a single word, too. When trying to recreate amapiano in a live setting with the UCT's Pan-African music ensemble, the lead voice opted to shout "washa" to queue the end of the song. Simply meaning "to make a plea or appeal" ("Definition", 2018), the word appears throughout amapiano, both in the form of a sample (for example at 4:52 of Officixl RSA's song *The Drumonades*), a response to dancing or a popular phrase on social media. When performing with the Pan-African popular music ensemble at the University of Cape Town's music school, both singers and crowd members shouted out this word and were met by elated responses, thus demonstrating both their membership and pleasure of membership of the formation.

Another such word, which is the title of Papercut TV's amapiano documentary (Papercutt TV, 2019), "shaya", means "to hit" and similarly emerged as a sample and popular phrase. In both cases, the word's meaning is less important than its association with the broader aesthetic. When I asked Azile about the meaning of these words, he responded "that's a tricky question because it's like a lang[uage]… I think washa means fire and shaya means hit but not physically" (personal communication 21 October 2022). He later added "It's great to use them when a track drops or when it comes from a bridge then the log drum is gonna hit strong" (Ibid.).

“Groove” can refer to songs, such as the Spotify playlist entitled “Amapiano Grooves”, a type of amapiano characterised by a stronger danceability (Azile described one of his beats as private school because of its soulful, reflective nature and the other, more danceable, as a “groove beat”) (personal communication 21 July 2022), or a night spent partying (Mazaza, 2020). Similarly, “yano” can refer to a producer, a fan or the music itself (Conteh, 2021; “Landing page”, 2021).

The aesthetic pleasure that comes from the redeployment of existing dialect variants, then, is found in both using broader forms of township speak (for example Sepitori) as well as amapiano-specific language (for example iyakokota, washa and shaya).

On Satyo’s strategy of reshaping foreign words, the name “amapiano” is significant. Firstly, the name itself is a combination between the Zulu plural and the instrument of Western origin, the piano. At first, this may seem to be a reference to both the Western and African aspects of the music, as has been interpreted by Setumo-Thebe Mohlomi (Mohlomi, 2021). However, the name seems to have emerged from the practice of including keyboard styles from black churches which are usually simply referred to as “pianos”, and it is thus more likely a reference to the inclusion of such styles. The foreign word, “piano”, is still reshaped here. The word is given a Zulu plural form to refer to a local music and lifestyle and is thus being localised. Also significant is the pronunciation of the word. Mohlomi writes elsewhere that while the term seems inclusive, how one pronounces it “lays naked one's distance from or proximity to it in language, in culture, in history” (Mohlomi, 2019b). This is in reference to the more “correct” pronunciation as “ama-pyano”, with a strong emphasis on the “p”. Thus, the foreign word, piano, has been reshaped and given a Zulu pronunciation which demonstrates the speaker’s familiarity with the movement and thus contributing to an aesthetic formation.

The final strategy proposed by Satyo is “deliberately inventing one’s own tonal configuration or re-arranging tonal patterns of existing words”. This is found in amapiano in various forms. Several of these have already been discussed (especially the amapiano-specific words above) but another notable example is the use of sounds resembling words which do not carry real meaning. An extreme example of this can be found in the vocal style

demonstrated at 1:58 in Uncle Waffles' song *Tanzania*[42]. Here, the vocalist performs a highly improvisatory collection of sounds. These are sounds for sounds' sake and carry no direct meaning. Again, this was also true of kwaito. Peterson notes "the use of words – or more correctly sounds – that have no meaning (such as when a singer is scatting)" and argues that these "approximate emotions and experiences that are, from the writer/singer's point of view, difficult or inadequately captured in conventional language" (Peterson, 2003: 205). Viewed this way, these sounds go beyond language with direct meaning to a broader form of communication. When I asked Azile about the style used in *Tanzania,* he told me "It's like the chant to *our* Ancestors" (personal communication 25 October 2022). I have not yet found any earlier examples, but this conception of common ancestors between the various linguistic groups represented in amapiano further adds to amapiano's construction as a broader black form. This illustrates my initial position of the de-emphasis on language for the communication of direct meaning mentioned above. Sounds without meaning communicate beyond the restrictions of common languages and demonstrate the emphasis on the fuller aesthetic experience of the music, dancing and togetherness.

The aesthetic pleasure produced by the strategies outlined above further contribute to the group formation. Redeploying amapiano-specific language expressed one's membership of the group and affirms it an as aesthetic formation. The pleasure of such language is obviously pleasurable, seen through animated facial expressions and shouts of agreement, as members of the community associate such language with good times. It becomes clear from the above examples that amapiano uses language as an aesthetic tool to produce a larger, black South African (and even broader) we-formation and group identity.

Dance as aesthetic formation:

In the interview of the previous chapter, both Wanda and Eric identified dance as an important component of amapiano as lifestyle. Dance demonstrates the wider sensory experience which amapiano entails and one way a sense of community is created, both the role of the aesthetic and the dynamic nature of community formation in amapiano. It also illustrates how amapiano travels through digital and physical sites of consumption.

[42] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zi7kX1jkRuA

Wherever amapiano music is consumed, dance is almost always present, with obvious examples being music videos, social media, and party spaces, but alongside listening at home, in the studio, school and university campuses, shopping malls and various other locations, as well. In fact, the music itself is usually produced with dancing in mind and it is almost inevitable to move your body in some way, from the tapping of your foot or bobbing of your head to a full bodily experience. That music is inseparable from dance demonstrates that amapiano as a concept goes beyond simply an aural experience to something that "is felt in the bones", to quote Meyer earlier, encompassing a wider sensory experience and therefore an aesthetic.

The next section examines how the shared aesthetic experience demonstrated in dance creates a sense of community or we-formation. I will address dance as a community archive, that is how dances are created and re-created by the community and dance's role across various digital and physical spaces.

Dance as Community Archive:

I have already mentioned my use of popular dance moves to show my familiarity with amapiano. At the Saggy Stone I re-enacted dance moves I had seen during my research as I could not verbalise my commitment to the community over the loud music. These moves function in much the same way as exclusive language as discussed above, producing a similar aesthetic pleasure and sense of membership. This can take the form of employing dance styles of the broader Afrodiaspora, amapiano-specific dance forms, or as specific as familiarity with a particular song. Dancing, then, can be argued to function as a form of communal archive which demonstrates one's association with the aesthetic formation. The knowledge of dances is shared and embodied by the formation and repeatedly re-enacted.

During our interview, Wanda noted that "every song comes with a dance, that's how you market your songs nowadays". By this, he means that many songs come with their own unique dance moves which are disseminated through various media and often become synonymous with the song itself. The process for disseminating dances usually works as follows. A song is released and often promoted on social media by artists, usually doing the associated dance. A music video will then be released where the dance is featured prominently. TikTok performers will then emulate such dances and post them onto the

platform. Through the digital dissemination, fans are made aware of the dance moves and then recreate them during their own consumption practices, notably at clubs, where they represent an expression of the wider formation. This is not a linear progression, and these events can take several different orders, for example, the dance may only emerge through TikTok videos, or there may never be a music video.

These involve a single dance move (an example can be found in the next paragraph) and do not refer to entire routines. Instead, they are inserted into a larger routine, usually made up of other dance moves associated with amapiano. Through the process described above, artists and fans add movements to the communal archive, which are then arranged into performances made up of multiple movements. Some movements are recognised and even named, while others are taken for granted.

An example of this can be found in the song *Bakwa Lah*[43] by Major League DJz, Mathandos, and Nvcho. The title simply translates to "they're baking" and the music video switches between three scenes, the first features several women in a bakery kitchen dancing while baking (pouring flour, mixing bowls and other related performative gestures) and the other two contain five men in separate locations with DJ Nvcho leading their dancing as he sings the words. While the main dance move is hinted at early on, the first sounding of the repeated chorus words "Bakwa Lah" sees all five men doing the dance move simultaneously, which simulates stirring a large baking bowl, with one hand holding the spoon (usually a fist) and the other representing the shape of the bowl. At 1:55 Nvcho uses the fist and elbow motion described elsewhere to outline the rhythm of the log drum (using a bent elbow lifted to shoulder height, the fist is pushed forward in time with the log drum). At 3:38 one of the bakers performs the Dakiwe move along with one of the members of Major Leagues DJz, which involves leaning backwards in a circular movement and moving your head forward in quarter notes.

Bakwa Lah's characteristic movement is then inserted into other performances as well, such as TikTok videos dancing to the song, or in party spaces while the song is playing. Because of the specificity of this move (few songs reference baking specifically), it will seldom feature apart from the song. However, the Dakiwe move found in *Bakwa Lah*'s music video can be

[43] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=aq6zkFOHEiw

found throughout amapiano media, despite its original association with the song by the same name by Lady Du and DBN Gogo.

Much like insider language, the redeployment of these dance moves provides sensory pleasure to yanos, seen most obviously in the often-exuberant response to the referencing of famous and recognizable moves when they are performed by DJs. In fact, when asked how producing *Bopha* changed his life, producer Felo Le Tee mentions the encouragement he feels when people do the associated dance move at gigs, calling it "the new language" (*Sleazy, Mellow and Felo Le Tee on Making an Amapiano Smash*, 2021).

Certainly, part of the sensory experience is the shared nature of this aesthetic which produces the pleasure and thus confirms the aesthetic formation itself. The archive is held communally and the satisfaction from these references is communal.

Dancing Across Space:

One of Meyer's key concerns when theorising aesthetic formations is the role of digital media, specifically its use in religious contexts. She considers Anderson's notion of imagined communities constitutive for allowing conceptions of binding beyond face-to-face contact (Meyer, 2009: 3). This is helpful in the context of amapiano because the broadest notion of an amapiano formation connects people throughout the world through digital media, and therefore cannot be limited to face-to-face interactions. In this section I will discuss dance as a forming form across space, beginning with smaller formations and then exploring how the same process of forming can be expanded through digital media to include a global 'community'. I investigate how such spaces are often temporary and allow for practitioners to identify with multiple aesthetic formations in succession or even simultaneously, demonstrating the potential of the dynamic and fluid nature of 'formation'.

If we take an on-site party space as a site of aesthetic formation, both the forming and the form become clear. It is a temporary space marked by dynamism and fluidity. Attendees come and others leave throughout the evening. Each enter from a different background as individuals but are bound together through shared aesthetic experience, through a common pleasure felt because of the music and the bodily movement which is its result. However, at the end of the evening the crowd disperses. The process will then repeat on another evening, but never with the exact same set of attendees, nor the same music, nor the same

external events (such as drinks spilling or a fight breaking out). In this sense, the forming is as important to the formation as its results, and both are intimately related and inseparable.

Individuals are not limited to the single aesthetic formation, either on the evening or even at any moment. Anyone could leave the party playing amapiano and move to another venue playing another music or selling food for example. The music may change, such as at the Saggy Stone which featured hip hop and amapiano in the same evening (see Chapter Three), each of which represent distinct yet related aesthetic formations. An attendee may wear a Tupac shirt while partying to amapiano, thus displaying membership of two formations simultaneously.

Gavin Steingo has made a similar point on communal dancing in kwaito. He argues that the dance circle, that is a circle formed around a solo or group of dancers to encourage and witness the dancers, can also act as a barrier against the public, creating a private space for dancers (Steingo, 2016: 202). This allows for experimentation and critique of social norms, especially for women (Ibid.). Common in amapiano too, the circle provides a visual representation of an aesthetic formation, that is a shared sensory experience which produces a temporary grouping.

These spaces are seldom purely physical, either. One could refer to them as "hybrid" spaces which act beyond a simple physical and digital binary, functioning in both the physical and the digital simultaneously. For example, the event may be livestreamed via social media and take place at the local club simultaneously. In this case there is evidence of community making within the physical and geographic location, for example through dancing practices, consumption and call and response, but then in other geographic locations as well, through the digital realm, such as someone who is at home and singing or dancing along, or a second, remote group of practitioners involved in their distinct community making, while simultaneously being part of the club's sense of community.

While such events are in themselves aesthetic formations, there is also the broader aesthetic formation which encompasses all fans of the music and then various levels in between. Here, people who consider themselves yanos, or simply enjoy the music, are bound through other forms of sensory experience, most notably social media. A good example of this is the TikTok dance videos mentioned earlier, but through music videos, too.

Once a video is posted, fans will watch these individually, or in groups. They may then talk about the video, show it to friends or post about it on other social media, thus demonstrating their membership of the community and enacting aesthetic formation.

It is through this shared aesthetic experience that the sense of community is formed. It can be seen from the discussion above that such formations are temporary, dynamic, and fluid. It is for this reason that I would argue the value of the notion of aesthetic formation.

Fashion:

Another key component of aligning oneself with the amapiano aesthetic formation is fashion. Fashion played a key role in kwaito, too. Xavier Livermon identifies fashion alongside sound and dances as components of kwaito which closely resemble contemporary global Black forms of music and performance (Livermon, 2020: 4). He notes the importance of fashion and self-fashioning in preparing for kwaito festivals, using Achille Mbembe (2002) to note these as one of the few spaces that the disenfranchised have control over (Livermon, 2020: 98–99). Finally, Livermon notes the importance of peer groups to borrow clothing from because individuals can usually only afford one or two items of name brand clothing (Ibid., 100). Esinako Ndabeni considers fashion to be an instrument to communicate personal, race, class, gender and identity politics (Ndabeni, 2018: 93)

While kwaito and amapiano practitioners use fashion to articulate both self-styling and representation of the wider aesthetic formation, the two differ greatly in both the specific styles and the style cultures from which they draw influence. Pietilä describes kwaito fashion symbols as the spotti (a floppy sun hat connected with mapantsula), canvas shoes called All Stars and “gangster” styles associated with the tsotsi (Pietila, 2013: 155). Wanda notes another example of this in fellow post-kwaito musical form, gqom (personal communication 9 March 2022). He states “gqom people used to wear carvela”, referring to an Italian, leather shoe without shoelaces popular in South Africa (Ibid.). His association of this style of shoe and “gqom people” demonstrates how fashion can be used to identify as part of a particular we-formation.

When Wanda was younger, he would often style himself after United States hip hop practitioners, wearing baggy pants and Nike shoes. Others would ridicule him for this, saying

"ah, you're tryna be a white boy, you're tryna be those niggers" (personal communication 9 March 2022). But with the advent of amapiano fashion, these forms are desired. While it is difficult to summarise the fashion associated with amapiano, some key features are monotone outfits (especially all-black or all-white outfits), tracksuits (mainly for dancing), hats (peak caps, spottis, beanies), and sunglasses. An everyday outfit can consist of a simple t-shirt and jeans (or tights for women) with name-brand shoes (such as Nike Air Force Ones), while music videos and performances can feature elaborate costumes such as those of artist Kamo Mphela.

It is important to note, however, that amapiano's fashion is usually easily recognised and distinguished from related forms. This allows for practitioners to display their membership of the formation through yet another aspect of the aesthetic experience that is amapiano. This further demonstrates how such formations are not stable, with styles changing, members incorporating other styles from broader black stylings and practitioners simply deciding not to dress in an amapiano fashion for the day.

Working in Community

Amapiano producers and artists also perform and promote the form as an aesthetic formation, emphasising the importance of community through the notion of collaboration. An amapiano tune with a single creator is rare, as almost every song is the result of collaboration between artists and further features from others. The most popular songs usually have a plethora of artists involved, which helps promoting these songs because each feature has their own network.

Young Stunna's album *Notumato* has a featuring artist on almost every song, totalling 16 features across 16 songs (*Young Stunna - Notumato ZA, African Album Reviews*, 2021). *African Album Review* responded to this saying,

> Amapiano is such a group effort, from the beats to the lyrics and everything else, you rarely ever get like you know one person doing it, it's usually someone and someone else and someone else and someone else and someone else, and its normal. It's absolutely normal and I do love that about it, they work together, they don't compete (Ibid.).

Here it can be seen that these collaborations are associated with and affirm the we-formation. Focalistic confirms this when he says,

> The saying is 'collaboration over competition', so, you'll notice a feature in many of my songs. We're at a point right now with African music where it's about showing the true spirit of Ubuntu. It's about lifting each other and working together – that's how Africa's supposed to be. If you want to be the greatest, you won't do it alone. Hip-hop doesn't have that. It's from Brooklyn and talks about gun violence and other things with which I can't relate. I grew up in an environment where you can go and ask your neighbour for sugar, and that's the spirit I want to maintain through my music (cited in Kumona, 2022).

By comparing this approach to hip hop, Focalistic confirms that this collaboration is distinctive of amapiano's aesthetic formation.

Finally, this can even take on the form of pan-Africanist binding. Not only have international artists such as Burna Boy, Davido and Wizkid featured on amapiano songs, but producers like DJ Maphorisa openly express the need to do this to build African unity. When he was asked about injustice or xenophobia in South Africa's music industry, he responded "Yes I do feel the friction, but we always push the narrative of a united Africa by releasing music with people from other African countries" (Mazaza, 2020).

I bore witness to this collaborative process during my fieldwork. On every occasion that a song was recorded there were at least four of us present, with others often entering, listening, contributing and then leaving. While Azile and Antii would often work on beats alone, they often wrote for specific singers and often gave each other feedback on works in progress. Once the group of people have been organised into the same room, we would all take it in turns to share ideas and record short segments which were either met with excited approval or helpful feedback from the rest of the group. Singers would hum guitar melodies for me to play and producers chanted vocals. We would all comment on the arrangement and production of the beats which could be customised to suit the needs of the group. When not recording, we would dance, laugh and sing together. Mixing and mastering was also conducted by Azile and Antii together. The fun and even pleasurable experience of recording together, along with the various communal sensorial forms it involved (for example listening, dancing, and imaginings mentioned above), further reflects amapiano as aesthetic formation.

Concluding remarks:

The social binding which amapiano facilitates certainly goes beyond superficial notions of imagining to a much deeper experience "felt in the bones". Sensory experience through language, dance and fashion shared in physical, digital and hybrid spaces demonstrate the potential of such music in the formation of collectives. Amapiano certainly reaches beyond a musical genre to a 'forming form' centred around a music but encompassing a much wider experience which constructs a sense of community and belonging. At the same time, this form also demonstrates how such construction is fluid and dynamic, changing quickly and frequently. It is for this reason that I would argue that Meyer's notion of aesthetic formation surpasses its anthropology of religion context and proves an invaluable tool in the study of contemporary popular dance music formations.

This is well illustrated in the examples above. The shared aesthetic pleasure of exclusive language usage, dance and fashion demonstrate the very real, tangible aspect of this community imagined through digital media. Party spaces demonstrate how the digital and physical flow into one another and how these formations form temporarily because of the larger formation. A de-emphasis on direct meaning in language shows how language itself can move beyond simple translations to an aesthetic experience. Fashion illustrates the agency held by fans and artists to construct a sense of self while simultaneously identifying within the larger community.

The fluidity of these formations seemed at first a hurdle to overcome in my conception of this chapter, but it is now clear that it is a vital and constructive component of amapiano in its increasingly interconnected and globalising context, which sees cultural formations occurring on multiple levels at the same time. As amapiano represents the most likely shape that future cultural forms will take, both in South Africa and throughout the Afrodiaspora, the notion of aesthetic formation is helpful to both present and future studies of similar musics.

Chapter 5

"Amapiano to the World": A Movement in Afrodiasporic Space

"Amapiano will be a household name in its own right. A force to be reckoned with, the goal is for the sound to be recognised like pop, hip hop, house etc. 5 years from now we will continue to work as a collective to get it there or at least close to there." – DJ Maphorisa (quoted in Townsend, 2022)

"Amapiano to the world" is a popular phrase used to refer to amapiano's exponential growth in popularity, specifically its ability to travel across the world. It comes with the proud affirmation that practitioners are world-class and contemporary and can be read as a call to take up global space by South African black youth. Rather than opposing forces of globalisation, these youth use such forces to disseminate their music, create local meaning and shape globalising spaces using their own self-defining strategies.

The above quote is taken from DJ Maphorisa (Maphorisa in Townsend, 2022), a veteran South African producer and DJ who has been an important part in both the growth of amapiano through his collaboration with founding artists like Kabza de Small, and to its global impact through his contacts with artists throughout the world. His assertion, that amapiano will be a "household name" reveals an aim to share the South African sound with the world. It implies a contribution to a wider, interconnected space, a musical form which transcends national boundaries, and the potential for a plethora of localised meanings throughout the world.

In this chapter I argue that this is an assertion of the agency of young black South Africans in a broader musical and cultural space. In this discourse on the expansion of the sound across the world, amapiano practitioners are insisting on their own place in Afrodiasporic space, a creative resistance against placing Africans in the past. A study of the contacts reveals their nature which are often characterised by interactions between isolated points rather than global flows. They are seldom frictionless and contain various forms of misrecognition and noise. I also examine the localisation of meaning across spaces, noting how music scenes

adapt music which has arrived through the 'global' (usually the internet) to suit the needs of their locales.

The chapter pivots along two significant theories from the kwaito literature, specifically Xavier Livermon's Afrodiasporic space (2020) and Steingo's point-to-point critique of "frictionless musical flows" (2016). In his chapter on Afrodiasporic space, Livermon discusses Beyoncé's *Run the World* (and her work with Mozambican pantsula dance troupe Tofa Tofa) and Boom Shaka's performance of Nkosi Sikelel' iAfrika, and how these demonstrate kwaito's role in circulating black cultures. This frames young (black South) Africans as equal participants in Afrodiasporic space, rather than simply remnants of the past for cultural imperialists to mine. Steingo, on the other hand, critiques notions of musical flow for their implication that music flows unhindered. He observes that contact seldom resembles 'flow' in the sense that contacts are usually made between isolated individuals.

Where in the World was Kwaito? Taking up Afrodiasporic Space:

Authenticity in terms of localness has been a topic of contention in kwaito music in all forms of its discourse, both popular and academic. The form was often dismissed as simply an appropriation of hip hop or house music. This section begins with the notions of local and global as they are found in the kwaito literature, concluding with two important theories for my discussion. Once more, I have chosen to study amapiano through the lens of kwaito's literature and theories used to understand this phenomenon, taking note of how amapiano functions similarly but also re-imagines kwaito's contributions.

In '*Kwaitofabulous': The study of a South African urban genre*, Thokozani Mhlambi asks

> Can kwaito – a genre that is largely influenced by certain kinds of music from the United States of America – be considered a distinctively South African music genre or is it just part of a mass expansion of a world youth music genre, clothed in South African forms? (2004: 116).

To answer this Mhlambi points to the local emergence of kwaito from older South African forms as well as the use of "African signifiers", such as instruments, izibhongo praise poetry and local languages to argue for its localness (Ibid., 125). However, he confirms the international influences of American and European music (Ibid.). In a similar vein, Sharlene

Swartz compares South African hip hop and kwaito in her paper titled *Is Kwaito South African Hip-Hop? Why the Answer Matters and Who It Matters To*, arguing that the question of distinguishing hip hop and kwaito revolves around "origination, authenticity and influence" (2008: 17). Swartz goes on to quote Thandiswa of Bongo Maffin who said that kwaito "is about showcasing out [sic] Africanness, about showing off our continent, our culture and our country" (Pan 2000:74, cited in Swartz, 2008: 17). Thus, the conversation forms part of popular discourse surrounding kwaito. Take for example kwaito artist Zola 7's *Ghetto Fabulous*[44] which praises local township spaces or *Ase Mo States* (this is not the States) by kwaito group Brothers of Peace which criticises South African hip hop artists for appropriating American forms (Mkhabela, 2017). Despite Brothers of Peace's criticism, several members of the group went on to be involved in South Africa's 'Americanized' hip hop scene, as Sabelo Mkhabela notes (Ibid.).

Mhlambi (rightly) criticises Simon Stephens for his lack of knowledge of kwaito's township culture, implying that an understanding of the local was required to understand the form (Mhlambi, 2004: 117). Xavier Livermon highlights earlier conversations about the local and global in kwaito literature in the introduction to his book *Kwaito Bodies: Mastering Space and Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Livermon, 2020: 17). Here he mentions an earlier "vindication" of kwaito, which emphasises "the 'South Africanness' of the musical form and its connection with South African's polyvalent pasts" and thus focused on cultural imperialism and authenticity versus imitation (Ibid.). Livermon points to a shift in scholarship which is "premised on revealing the multiple global dialogues of Black South African youth and evidencing the significance of these global dialogues within local contexts" and thus began to focus on shifts in global political economies and new technologies to discuss the relationship between local and global (Ibid.). An example of this is Steingo's somewhat exaggerated position that "the triumph of neo-liberalism and the end of the Cold War in the late 1980s were more significant events (or series of events) in the history of kwaito than the end of apartheid" (Steingo, 2008a: 80).

Important to note here is that while kwaito was (is) not to be dismissed as an appropriation of global youth culture, it was still intimately connected to it. Livermon notes how sounds,

[44] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcn3sgGlr-8

fashion and dances revealed connections to wider, circulating forms of black styles and performance (2020: 4). Simultaneously, it was a thoroughly local form, with a local history, local languages and most importantly, local meanings. It is thus local and global. Livermon states, “To the extent that kwaito could be linked to the local, it represented a form of creative resistance to the forces of globalization, and thus was worthy of being admitted to the lexicon of South African popular music.” (Ibid., 17). This is certainly not unique to kwaito and post-kwaito forms. In an age of increasing contacts through ease of travel and most significantly through the internet, musics emerging contemporarily present increasingly complex relationships between the local and global. Speaking somewhat more generally, Boloka posits “the global has not replaced the local, but the local has become a path through which the global has to travel” (Boloka, 2003: 97).

How can I analyse this relationship, then? Which kwaito theories could help me to understand the role of amapiano in local versus global spaces? I offer two later kwaito theories, namely, Livermon’s notion of Afrodiasporic space and Steingo’s model of point-to-point nodes as opposed to frictionless musical flow.

Livermon argues that kwaito can be located in and is constitutive of “Afrodiasporic space” (2020: 29). Rather than interpreting the global aspect of kwaito as the unfortunate result of Westernisation or globalisation, the author insists that this form of South African youth culture forms part of a wider, complex interplay of cross fertilisations (Ibid.). Two important contributions of Afrodiasporic space[45], as it is used by Livermon, are an insistence on Africa as a “constitutive and continuous site of diaspora” rather than framing Africa as the past, and that those constructed and represented as indigenous are equal parts of such a diasporic space (Ibid., 30). The latter also confirms that Africa itself is a diasporic space and that Africa and its diasporas inherit the same “conceptual and ideological space, which forms the basis of knowledge production and intellectual inquiry (Ibid.). Thus, Livermon is responding to a view that Africa is simply a site of static culture ready to be mined by cultural imperialists by situating Africans as integral parts of a reciprocal global space in the contemporary moment.

[45] Livermon’s notion of Afrodiasporic space is informed by Gregg (2001:266-267), Jaji (2014), Pierre (2008, 2012), Young (2006), Fabian (2002) and Brah (1996).

Furthermore, Livermon argues that the study of contemporary African cultural practices focuses diasporic studies on "processual, circulatory, and polyphonic" movements, rather than linear, historical flows of earlier engagements (Livermon, 2020: 31). On the other hand, Steingo argues against a "frictionless musical flow" (2016: 121). Using James Ferguson's work on finance (2006:38, cited in Steingo, 2016: 138), Steingo argues that notions of flow and scape fail to take into account the friction of physical and technological mobility[46] in township spaces and that these contacts are better understood as connected through selective global points in a "point-to-point connectivity that bypasses and short circuits scalar mappings" (Ferguson 2006: 42, cited in Steingo, 2016: 139)). He notes that forms of offline distribution travel differently, in a "slowly expanding web" (Steingo, 2016: 139).

What, then, does Afrodiasporic space refer to as it is used in this chapter? It is a polyphonic, non-linear space which connects potentially infinite nodes in point-to-point contacts on local, national and international levels which is constantly re-made by those in Africa's diaspora as well as Africa itself. While amapiano's local function is the subject of the "Self-styling" chapter of this thesis, this chapter focuses on the national and international contacts that amapiano has caused, even intentionally. It is to this I now turn.

Where in the world is amapiano?

While kwaito illustrates the complicated relationship between the local and the global found in contemporary youth musics, as well as confirming notions of Afrodiasporic space and point-to-point contacts, I would argue that amapiano takes these to new levels. While local spaces are being increasingly influenced by global cultures, many amapiano practitioners simultaneously aim to reach a more global audience, as evidenced by DJ Maphorisa's statement at the beginning of this chapter. In this chapter I use several case studies (in a similar fashion to Livermon's first chapter) to demonstrate the circulation of Afrodiasporic youth cultures, specifically how amapiano has positioned itself within these contacts as a creative and constitutive force. I posit that the musical form's practitioners, similarly to those of kwaito although perhaps more outspokenly, have employed a "form of creative resistance to the forces of globalization" (Livermon, 2020: 17), while simultaneously using such forces to disseminate their music, reworking them to create local meaning, playing an

[46] The examples used focus on lack of access to transport and sufficient internet, amongst others.

active role in the construction of new forms in Afrodiasporic space and to define themselves on the world's stage.

More so than kwaito, amapiano's presence in spaces outside South Africa has been significantly shaped by the internet. This has allowed for increasing contacts between distinctive locales through various forms of communication, many of which have and continue to shape amapiano.

Under the headings which follow I will discuss examples of contacts between amapiano produced and consumed in various locales in South Africa and the world to demonstrate its function beyond the borders of the township and the country more broadly. I will discuss WhatsApp groups as a seemingly frictionless digital space which is in fact more often characterised by "noise". I will examine how a Columbian tune travelled the world to influence several amapiano songs to show music's point-to-point travels across digital spaces. I will highlight local amapiano spaces outside of South Africa, demonstrating music's capability of generating multiple meanings and show how South African agents are involved in these spaces exemplifying amapiano producers' agencies in global youth spaces.

WhatsApp groups: Music and Noise

Youth musics are increasingly disseminated through virtual spaces on social media platforms. The internet is often assumed to be a space of unrestricted access to the world; however, it is often plagued by inaccessibility, failure and spam. Both Livermon (2020: 118) and Steingo (2016: 146) note the use of other technologies for the transference of music (Bluetooth and detachable hard drives) because of poor internet access. Here I wish to examine one type of virtual space frequented by amapiano fans to share and receive music: the WhatsApp group. I use it to challenge the assumption of frictionless flow in digital spaces, while simultaneously demonstrating some of amapiano's unexpected contacts with the world.

As part of a hybrid approach to fieldwork, I sought out digital spaces occupied by fans of the music. Early research revealed that Meta-owned instant messaging mobile app WhatsApp has become a crucial part of the dissemination of amapiano. The main vehicle for this is WhatsApp's group chat. With an upper limit of 256 participants, these create spaces for the

sharing of new music and other music-related information (discussions about music, music production advice, and so forth), from cell phone to cell phone across any distance. These groups may be dedicated to a specific type of amapiano (such as private school), a particular artist ("JazziQ Forever") or the musical form generally ("Amapiano Hits" "Amapiano Is a Lifestyle"). At first glance the use of these virtual spaces gives the impression of a "frictionless musical flow" but are in fact more often characterised by "noise" or spam, and inaccessibility.

In *Noise: A Political Economy of* Music, Jacques Attali defines the word "noise" as "a resonance that interferes with the audition of a message in the process of emission" (Attali, 1985: 26). Specifically, I use the term here to refer to interferences to the sharing of music (the intended message) in these virtual spaces.

Joining these groups was surprisingly easy. I found links to a long list of groups on a website dedicated to sharing WhatsApp group links and joined a few that weren't currently full. If one wanted to join a group that was full, you wouldn't have to wait long as members frequently leave and join. In fact, I was struck by the constant changes that took place in group membership, group description and group name, as well as the number of messages shared. I would wake up in the morning to find over one hundred messages on a single group and that a group dedicated to amapiano was now titled "Dee Mand Mack mixtapes" and accepted a music genre called "nostalgic". I was surprised to scroll through the participants list to find that many of the members were not South African. The majority of these were from sub-Saharan African countries with notable amounts from Nigeria, Botswana and Mozambique, but included one member from the United States and one from the United Kingdom. This was unexpected given that no language unites all these countries. One group had managed to bypass the group limit to host 511 participants, which meant that a single message would be sent to 510 locations simultaneously, potentially around the world. Although this grants the potential for intercontinental contact, most of these members resided in Africa. This digital technology and amapiano had converged to make way for an Afrodiasporic, or perhaps more accurately a Pan-African, space.

However, relatively few of these messages are even related to amapiano. My original intention was to conduct informal interviews by opening discourse on the group and then

monitor the responses. I kept this informal as not to stand out in the group, but made my intentions clear. I tried different approaches on different groups, such as trying to open a discussion on one group and asking another to send private messages with responses. However, I did not receive any responses. I believe there are two main reasons for this. The first is that these groups do not primarily function as discursive spaces. Several factors contribute to this, such as the wide array of languages spoken, the emphasis placed on music dissemination as the purpose of the group and the number of participants. Most messages on these groups consist of general requests to send songs, or to identify and send a song from another piece of media (commonly TikTok videos are shared to identify and obtain the song in the video). Because of the large number of participants, messages outside of this purpose are often considered irrelevant (spam[47]) and conversations are usually shut down by the other participants on the group to conserve data and avoid the annoyance of streams of useless messages. Thus, group members likely avoided my messages out of fear of causing spam.

This brings me to the second reason I did not receive responses; spam. If the purpose of the group is to disseminate music, this could be considered music's opposite: noise. While I have mentioned one form of spam already, there are several others. These take four main forms; advertisement and wealth related 'opportunities', malware, religious texts and pornography. The first involves advertisements to join cryptocurrency/stock trading groups or to get free data. Given amapiano's links to under resourced areas, these take advantage of limited data usually to gather personal information which is sold to advertisers. The second type involves files which are shared on these groups under enticing names (most common was a file claiming to be a PDF containing the cell phone number of every woman in a specific area, but instead contains malware software. The third is equally common, although usually from a smaller number of senders and involves videos and PDFs of sermons, usually relating to the end of the world or warnings against 'seductive women of the devil'. The last category is illegal as there are no age restrictions to joining the group and the content is unsolicited. This involves sending links to pornographic groups and websites,

[47] Mariam-Webster dictionary defines spam as "unsolicited usually commercial messages (such as emails, text messages, or Internet postings) sent to a large number of recipients or posted in a large number of places" ("Definition of spam", n.d.).

as well as sending pornographic content directly. Several examples contained animals or school students. Many group descriptions warn against posting pornographic content with the threat of being removed from the group, although this seldom happens. Several artists also use these spaces to advertise their own music (often not amapiano).

The model of the WhatsApp group demonstrates how music is disseminated through virtual spaces. A group chat is a platform which creates a web of contacts through which, as can be seen above, people from distinctive areas can be connected. However, these groups are in no way "frictionless musical spaces". Noise significantly outweighs music on these groups. While these spaces allow for contact between isolated nodes across Afrodiasporic space, they do so with a significant amount of friction.

Amapiano from the World: Afrodiasporic influences and intertextuality in "Banyana"

DJ Maporisa and Tyler ICU's song *Banyana*[48] illustrates the point-to-point connectivity of music travelling across the globe. Specifically, it shows how distant and distinct physical locations can be connected to share cultural products, in this case music. This example links Afrodiasporic Colombia to South Africa's popular music scene through a series of isolated connections, rather than large-scale cultural flows. I trace this trajectory from its origins, examine how each contact reworks the same material for its locale and examine how the result (which may, in fact, not yet be the result) represents a convergence of every influence, thus representing an intertextual web of contacts.

Our story begins in Colombia with José Barros from El Banco, composer of many beloved Columbian songs ("El Pescador", n.d.). One such song was a cumbia titled *El Pescador*, translated "The Fisherman", which offers a tribute to Colombia's hardworking fishermen and their connection with nature (Ibid.). The cumbia is a rhythm, dance and costume which is said to represent "the mixture of Indian, Spanish and African influences" as it is said to have originated as a courting dance between African men and Indian women ("Biography", n.d.).

[48] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39xp8P40eyY

Perhaps the most famous version of this song was sung by Columbian-born Totó La Momposina and recorded by Real World Studios in August 1991[49]. The song was then released alongside her own song *Curura*[50] on the album *La Candela Viva* in 1992. Totó herself is said to embody "that fertile place where Colombia's African, Indigenous Indian and Spanish cultures mingle to create a unique musical tradition", describing her music as both African and Indian with a strong emphasis on percussion ("Biography", n.d.). The song itself can be seen as the result of Afrodiasporic contacts through the transatlantic slave trade. Her exposure to "El Pescador" would have occurred due to its position in Columbia's local repertoire.

Through WOMAD she has played festivals throughout the world, notably in Europe, where the next important step of the trajectory toward *Banyana* takes place. *La Mezcla*[51] was originally released by Swiss producer Michel Cleis in 2009. The title roughly translates to "mix" which could simply refer to the fact that it is a remix or might imply the mixture of two local cultures resulting in a new cultural product. The song sampled the two songs by Totó, *El Pescador* and *Curura*. On Cleis's remix, the Spanish vocals on *El Pescador* are sampled over the flute *Curura*, as well as percussion, likely used from one of the two songs. The flute can be heard from 0:08 and the vocals from 0:30, respectively. The tempos of *El Pescador* and *Curura*, originally 82 and 96 beats per minute, respectively, are sped up to match *La Mezcla*'s 127 beats per minute. At this speed the percussion drives an almost frantic rhythm, an effect increased by his addition of a kick drum. Comparing this to *Hey Lady Luck*[52], another popular song by Cleis, one can see that sampling and strong, sped up percussion are two important components of his style. His remix, then, can be seen as a repackaging of Totó's song for his local context. Interestingly, the percussion sampled from Totó La Momposina's songs contains a prominent shaker serving a similar function to the shaker found in amapiano, even playing a similar pattern, albeit with different accents.

Cleis's *La Mezcla* has furthermore been remixed several times. One such remix was done by British producer Charles Webster, titled *La Mezcla (Charles Webster's Club Mix)*[53] from 2010.

[49] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wN5YcDTx0Y
[50] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr6HhSgY9Es
[51] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Y7D8eUrjMc
[52] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGA4RRLNxck
[53] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDEZU8tf0Cs

This title points to the intention behind the remix, to recontextualise it for a club setting. His mix, then, slows down the tune to 120 beats per minute and adds many elements which give it its dance/electronic feel. Totó La Momposina's flute sample is only heard at 1:36, and her voice singing *El Pescador* only appears at 2:07. The song begins with a quarter note kick, a shaker, and a clap sound, to which more percussion is soon added. Webster also adds a new bassline (heard from 0:32) and chords (0:47) which harmonise the *El Pescador* melody.

The gradual addition of elements, and even the order (percussion, bassline, chords, melody, vocals) closely resemble a typical amapiano introduction, albeit at a different speed using different samples. This may simply represent the connection between house musics and amapiano, perhaps the influence that older songs like Webster's club mix had on the emergence of deep house, which would later influence the South African form. However, the song itself had a significant influence on South African electronic spaces. Most YouTube comments on Webster's remix are from southern Africans and various South African artists have used various elements of this song in their own. Why?

In conversation with fellow master's student Cebolenkosi Zuma, he told me that Charles Webster's remix had been featured on a Soul Candi playlist (personal communication 31 August 2022). Soul Candi began as a record store in Johannesburg with the intention of finding the best house music for South African DJs ("Soul Candi", n.d.). One such song that was widely shared was Webster's remix. One example of the song's influence is South African hip hop artist Kwesta's song *Mayibabo*[54] which makes use of Webster's chord progression throughout, as well as Totó's *Curura* flute melody for the vocals at 1:14. Important to note is that DJ Maphorisa is credited as a featuring artist on this song.

Finally, our trajectory ends (for now) in DJ Maphorisa and Tyler ICU's song *Banyana*[55]. The title translates to "children", but also "girls" and the context suggests the latter. *Banyana*, released in 2021, begins with a typical amapiano beat introduction, with a shaker and various syncopated percussion, followed by an off-beat synth lead. The first reference to *La Mezcla* is heard at 0:34, where Webster's bassline is quoted using a house bass instrument with a slightly different rhythm. This is more prominent in the mix. The next reference

[54] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIRXntOQlYw
[55] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39xp8P40eyY

comes at 0:50 with the entry of Sir Trill's vocals. The melody line is borrowed from *El Pescador*, but the praises of Colombian fishermen in Spanish are replaced by Zulu lyrics describing a club with many women present. Both the solo and call and response part of the melody are used. At 2:00 a new melody is introduced and the influence of *La Mezcla* can only be faintly heard in the bass line, until the entry of the log drum at 2:17 which outlines the bassline with a characteristically syncopated rhythm.

The change in titles in this example illustrates the changes in context for which the different versions were intended. *El Pescador* is intended to celebrate humble fishermen, using 'traditional' music to celebrate a 'traditional' role in the community. *La Mezcla* refers to Cleis's use of the "remix" to recontextualise the material for his own electronic dance scene, thus re-working Totó La Momposina's local to suit his own. *La Mezcla (Charles Webster Club Mix)* does the same, this time for his local club culture. Finally, *Banyana* now reworks Webster's track to suit Maphorisa and Tyler ICU's local context, that of the amapiano party, positioning partying "girls" at the centre.

Banyana does not directly sample any earlier material as Cleis and Webster do. Instead, it simply quotes the melodies on new instruments and with new vocals and words. DJ Melzi's *La Melza*[56] uses the same approach. The keys which enter at 0:34 outline the chords of Charles Wester's club mix, with a much smoother sound with less high end. The second melody of *El Pescador* is introduced at 1:42, sung again with Zulu lyrics, closely resembling those of *Banyana*. The response part is clearly heard, with a less obvious reference to the call part heard in Totó La Momposina's tune. At 2:17 a second set of keys enter, and we hear a whistled melody resembling an inversion of the flute part from *Curura*. The log drum, which enters at 2:52 also outlines Charles Webster's bassline, however, less strictly. Blaqnick & MasterBlaq's remix of *La Mezcla*[57], on the other hand, samples the flute directly, which can be heard at 1:42.

This trajectory begins and ends in what could easily be categorised as Afrodiasporic. The melodies themselves can be described as Afrodiasporic as they emerged through contact between indigenous people groups and African slaves, with Totó La Momposina positioning

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[56] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Bdu2RYuH5ns. The name of the track is likely a reference to the producer's name and carries no particular meaning of its own.
[57] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbfpDiPWiGg

herself at this intersection. The trajectory then ends on the African continent, produced by those constructed and represented as indigenous who thus play an equal part, to paraphrase Livermon (2020: 30). Steingo's notion of point-to-point connectivity is well illustrated in this example, as the process connects individuals, rather than genres or larger spaces. Thus, rather than a global flow, this represented chance contacts across long spaces. For example, Michel Cleis may have used the vocal samples of a different singer, in a different country if he had not heard "El Pescador", and either way those living around him not involved in his local music scene may have never heard either version of the song.

Amapiano's position at the end of this timeline is significant as it directly opposes any form of diaspora study which places African agents in the past. It is important to note that in this case practitioners have reworked global club culture for their own context and thus demonstrate how they fit into a wider youth culture which is the result of globalisation but are still actively defining themselves in resistance to it. However, our notion of Afrodiasporic space seems to be stretched when the Colombian tunes are used by two European producers in their localisations. That said, the amapiano practitioners have still re-localised these forms for their own context, not to mention the plethora of Afrodiasporic influence on electronic dance scenes through black musics such as disco, house and hip hop.

This example is not as smooth and fluid as the above description makes it seem. Livermon notes the presence of misrecognition in Afrodiasporic movements (2020: 32). Scrolling through the YouTube comments by a majority South African audience of Charles Webster's mix reveals that most fans do not know the origins of these melodies. In a sense, through the European obscuring and the new meanings created, these sounds have lost their earliest meanings, especially that which made them Afrodiasporic in the first place. Few South Africans would be able to understand the praise of Columbian fishermen and perhaps fewer would care. However, many comments mentioned how the song inspired *Banyana*, *Mayibabo* and *La Mezla*, which all function as local cultural products that have generated local meaning.

Amapiano in the world: Constructing Local Meaning

Maphorisa's excitement for amapiano becoming a "household name" is well on its way to fruition. Amapiano has made a significant impact on various music spaces throughout the

world. In this chapter I will examine several examples of amapiano in locales outside of South Africa. Returning to Boloka's position that "the global has not replaced the local, but the local has become a path through which the global has to travel" (Boloka, 2003: 97), I will examine examples of amapiano's localisations outside the country to demonstrate both the increasingly Afrodiasporic nature of the music and how local practitioners assert themselves in such spaces. I will also briefly investigate the response of amapiano artists and fans to this growth.

AMA Fest:

September 3, 2022 marks the date for the second annual "AMA Fest". This festival, dedicated to amapiano, hosts mostly South African musicians at the South of England Showground, around 60km south of London. The festival will feature South African DJs and performers such as Cassper Nyovest, Kamo Mphela, Young Stunna and Uncle Waffles, alongside UK-based DJs including Mixolis, DJ Fistoz and Via Seri, each of whom advertise themselves as "Amapiano DJs" and perform regularly throughout the United Kingdom. While the event will include gqom, kwaito, afro house and soulful house, amapiano will be played on all three stages, with the main stage playing the music exclusively. Production trio European 305, who will perform, create their own music combining the amapiano sound with House and Funky from the United Kingdom. Considered to be "the largest Amapiano festival outside South Africa", the festival last year hosted "thousands" and aims to "shed light on the sound of Amapiano, positioning the music genre on a higher pedal stool [pedestal] and increasing its outreach to those that love it most" ("About Us", n.d.). The event also included other South African cultural elements, including food.

The festival aims "to create a community and gateway for local fans and members of the diaspora to unite through song and dance" ("AMA Fest Ticket Sales", n.d.). Here, it becomes clear that amapiano is functioning in a broader, Afrodiasporic space, too. South African artists and DJs are constitutive of that space through music, fashion, food, language, amongst others. However, AMA Fest also aims to "create a community", or perhaps to construct a locale. In this sense, Boloka is right. Local culture moves through the global to reach new locations with their own local practices. South African artists move into local

space (in the sense of a distinctive, confined, physical space) dedicated to amapiano in the United Kingdom which will have its own cultural elements apart from the adopted ones.

How then, did amapiano travel to the United Kingdom? Lee Nxumalo, writing for Bubblegum Club, suggests that this is due to amapiano's success in Nigeria which then extended into the United Kingdom because of the large diaspora there (Nxumalo, 2021). The author notes the similarity between UK Funk and amapiano as pointed out by artists Valee Music and Donae'O as another reason for the popularity of amapiano in the UK (Ibid.). Valee Music describes her first exposure to amapiano through Scorpion King's 2020 song "Emcimbini" (Valee Music, quoted in Ibid.). She goes on to say:

> I think it was a natural transition. Afrobeats has been doing so well for so many years and the thing about being [on this] side [of the world], there is always a hunger for something fresh. We had a time where American R&B was the go-to sound in the '90s and then we had bashment, we had reggae and funk before we got into West Africa with the Afrobeats style. So it was only natural that southern African music would be next. Now everyone is going crazy for the sound here and amapiano is rising and more artists are delving into the sound. It's still fairly new but we're starting to see a lot more collaboration and growth of the genre. (Ibid.).

Here, Valee Music points to the various localised contributions to a wider Afrodiasporic popular music space. She locates these black genres within black communities, for example Afrobeats in West Africa and American R&B, each of which 'take turns' contributing to the wider space. Thus, all participants of the Afrodiasporic space are equally active members.

Amapiano's success in the UK may be partially the result of gqom's presence there. Specifically, gqom has enjoyed popularity in the European experimental underground, by those who produce their own forms of electronic dance musics like grime and lofi-minimalism in a similar fashion on home computers with cracked (illegally downloaded) software (Barnes, 2020). This resulted in various contacts and collaborations, such as UK rapper Stormzy's trip to South Africa to investigate gqom and Zulu culture with South African musician Muzi (Ibid.). DJ Scratcha DVA also combined gqom and UK Funky, to create a "UK gqom" (Ibid.). Jackie Queens suggests that "it speaks to an ancient history, whether it's something that comes from the family they're born into or the communities they live in", implying that UK fans are drawn to the music because of ancestral links with amapiano

and gqom's place of origins. This, once more, would reflect the importance of the African diaspora (Ibid.).

Afropiano: Amapiano in Nigeria

What, then, was the reception of amapiano in Nigeria? Here, the local form has once again travelled through global point-to-point contacts to find itself localised in Nigeria. Afrobeats (borrowing the term from Fela Kuti's Afrobeat and with Nigeria also playing a large part in its origins) is used as an umbrella term for West African pop music. The sound is often cited as the most popular music form in Africa (School Drillers, 2022). The School Drillers website ranks the ten most popular Afrobeats artists in the world, eight of which are Nigerian. Wizkid and Burna Boy are at the top of this list. Contacts between the South African and Nigerian popular scene have a long history which is exemplified in the collaboration between self-proclaimed "Kings of Amapiano" Kabza De Small and DJ Maphorisa (credited as Madumane) and Afrobeats stars Wizkid and Burna Boy on the amapiano song *Sponono* in 2020.

Amapiano has since grown in popularity in Nigeria and has resulted in a new musical form which offers a combination of amapiano and Afrobeats aesthetics, aptly named Afropiano. These songs are characteristically shorter in length than South African amapiano tunes with less build ups and afrobeats-style vocals, samples, and rhythms. Examples include Mozambican DJ Tarico and Nigerian Burna Boy's *Yaba Bukulu*[58] which use a synthesised bass closely associated with amapiano and a log drum, alongside Afrobeats vocals and other sonic elements, and Kizz Daniel and Tekno from Nigeria's more light-hearted and brighter *Buga*[59] which features a snare pattern and drum fill (0:16) often found in amapiano. Songs such as KDDO's *eWallet* also feature South African artist Cassper Nyovest, demonstrating that local cultural agents are still actively involved in the creation of this Afrodiasporic sound. A similar crossover genre has emerged combining Kenyan hip hop offshoot gengetone and amapiano, with producers like DJSlime254.

The most popular West African contribution to amapiano so far was Nigerian Goya Menor and Ghanian Nektunez' *Ameno Amapiano Remix (You Wanna Bamba)* which has been used

[58] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xWd-SpMo0Y
[59] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLF90M96m2Q

in almost three and a half million TikTok videos, has over 27 million views on YouTube and twelve million on the music video. Closer to an amapiano song, but still with a short introduction, this song samples from ERA's 1996 song *Ameno* which contains meaningless Latin-sounding lyrics sung in a plainchant style. The music videos are set in Medieval Europe and the song was successful across several European countries. What might seem like a jarring juxtaposition, the widespread musical influences converge into a dark but fun song which reveals a map of point-to-point contacts.

TikTok:

Much like WhatsApp mentioned earlier in this chapter, social media platform TikTok has become an important part of disseminating amapiano media, especially that of dance. Premised on the sharing of short videos containing built-in music and with over one billion users worldwide, TikTok has become an important site in the dissemination of amapiano trends across South Africa and to the world. A popular use of the application is the sharing of dance videos. Songs usually have associated dance moves which are recorded and posted in high numbers when they are trending. Given amapiano's close association with dance, this has become an important site for the emergence of such trends.

While TikTok dance videos serve an important local (national) function as discussed in chapters 3 and 4 of this thesis, they, too, perform Afrodiasporic functions. TikTok users such as @shosco1 and @isaacmik have posted videos comparing dance moves from various countries, notably Nigeria, Ghana, and South Africa (both amapiano and gqom dances), or simply demonstrating popular dance moves from another country. These are usually in celebration of each dance move (not to demonstrate one being superior to another).

Amapiano and global hip hop:

One last example begins with another DJ Maporisa collaboration, the 2016 song *One Dance* by Canadian hip hop icon Drake. DJ Maphorisa is credited alongside Afrobeats artist Wizkid as a producer and the song samples heavily from UK Funky artist Kyla Smith, specifically her song *Do You Mind*, and thus connects artists from various Afrodiasporic musical spaces discussed above. As an artist, Drake has explored several popular diasporic genres including dancehall, Afrobeats, UK Funky, and various forms of house music. His latest album *Honestly, Nevermind* is rumoured to have been inspired by, or written for, amapiano artist

DJ Uncle Waffles (see Kandi, 2022). Rolling Stones author Mosi Reeves claims that the album "mines deep house styles like amapiano and gqom" (Reeves, 2022). A good example of this is the break at 0:48 of *Currents*[60] which shows clear gqom influence (which featured South African producer Black Coffee). However, there are no clear amapiano references on the album.

Chris Brown, on the other hand, is a much clearer example. He also recently collaborated with Nigerian artists Lojay and Sarz on the song *Monalisa*. The song contains clear similarities to amapiano, again including a log drum. Coming from an American R&B background (another Afrodiasporic musical style), Chris Brown features as a vocalist. It should be noted that Chris Brown's collaboration was with Nigerian musicians, rather than South Africans. I would suggest two reasons for this. The first comes from Antii, a producer in Langa who noted how Afropiano was more accessible to a wider audience because of its familiarity to Afrobeats (personal communication 21 July 2022), and thus I would suggest that the Nigerian sound may have been better suited to the collaboration. However, this may have been the result of the nature of contacts, specifically that of point-to-point connectivity. It is likely that the networks created by Afrobeats would allow for a wider reach of Nigerian produced Afropiano than South African produced amapiano. There are more likely pre-existing contacts between the older and more widely disseminated form and American hip hop and R&B artists, as well. This may, however, cut out South African producers from global record label opportunities.

While the influence of amapiano within American-centric mainstream forms such as contemporary and commercial R&B and hip hop is only slight in the above examples, it does show the wide-reaching nature of the form and its function in wider Afrodiasporic spaces.

Amapiano to the World: Final Thoughts

How is this global flow perceived by South Africans? Katlego Malatji on Sony Music Entertainment Africa has commented on the two opposing responses regarding this expansion; a purist approach which rejects new elements and those looking toward global success. Yamkela Kasana of Bridges expressed regret that others were profiting from the

[60] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1puG2H1QOBA

South African sound often without local practitioners being sufficiently remunerated (personal communication 2 December 2022). There is much concern in this sense as worldwide opportunities increase. But as can be seen above, South African producers are actively involved in this Afrodiasporic youth space, actively resisting by taking up space, exemplified in the artists present at AMA Fest and frequent collaborations with Nigerian artists. As the movement grows, they will need to continue to do this.

On the other hand, many express pride and celebrate the sound's presence in the world. This chapter was originally inspired by a TikTok of an amapiano song sung in French which proudly claimed that this was proof of the genre's ability to travel. After further investigation I found that the song was actually recorded in South Africa by a bilingual South African. However, fans were still excited at the sound's expansion. Producer Azile from Langa proudly shared DJ Maphorisa's earlier assertion that amapiano would become a widely recognised global musical form.

The extent of amapiano's travels seem to further differentiate it from kwaito and gqom. I have found little reference to kwaito outside of South Africa in the kwaito literature. Gqom garnered international attention from small record labels which aided in its dissemination but never achieved the same levels of international prominence (Eaby-Lomas, 2021: 106).

The examples above demonstrate a pattern to amapiano's worldwide travel which reflects Livermon's notion of Afrodiasporic space and simultaneously Steingo's point-to-point contacts. Amapiano's sound travels through digital networks, most notably social media, from one locale to another. For example, it travels from South African local spaces to Nigerian ones, or from Nigeria to the United Kingdom. These create networks through which media (music, dance, fashion, and so forth), continues to travel and in turn create more networks. Over time and through experimentation new cultural forms begin to emerge, illustrated in new forms of music such as Afropiano, but also new cultural spaces, such as Amafest. These forms are Afrodiasporic in nature, both explicitly (see AMA Fest's mention of the diaspora above) or implicitly (black spaces in the United Kingdom constructed around a music from Southern Africa). In this model, South African agents are obviously not passive consumers of globalist culture but are instead at the front of new forms of cultural creation.

They demonstrate just how active Afrodiasporic space is, with media travelling at disorientating rates across long distances.

Chapter 6

"Ase Trap Tse ke Pina Tsa Ko Kasi": The Township as Aesthetic Experience in Focalistic's *Ke Star*

I have already discussed both the township origins and the role that consumption plays in allowing fans and artists to imagine or aestheticise alternate realities apart from their socio-economic circumstances. What emerges, however, is a contrast which is evident in almost all amapiano media, which sees some form of township authenticity placed alongside aspirational consumption which can often look (through music videos and social media) and sound (through lyrics and the music itself) like a contradiction. However, I would argue that rather than these two forms of identity and self-expression forming a binary of opposition, it is the balance between these two forces that *is* amapiano's aesthetic, which allows it to fulfil the role of mediator in aestheticizing freedom.

In this chapter I wish to focus on some of the balances inherent in amapiano and how these are navigated by fans and artists. Primarily, I wish to look at the role of the township, including what Bhekizizwe Peterson calls "the challenge of living between entrapment and flight" (Peterson, 2003: 207). Here he is referring to the forms of incarceration that township life implies, and removing oneself from said incarceration, while remaining authentically rooted in the township (Ibid.). Gibson Boloka similarly posits that kwaito "exists in tensions, between rebellion, tradition, commercialism, local and foreign" (Boloka, 2003: 100). Thus, I examine the role of the township in creating authentic performance and meaning, and how regular contact with the township re-authenticates artists to be qualified mouth pieces for South Africa's young black people living in the township.

At the centre of this chapter lies an analysis of amapiano artist Focalistic's song *Ke Star* as well as the music video for the song. Where applicable, I raise the remix of the song which features Nigerian-American afrobeats artist Davido as well as that music video. By allowing amapiano practitioners to speak for themselves through their media, I again hope to avoid any pretensions of demystification. The song, its music video and other media surrounding it, notably Focalistic's interviews, display township authenticity and material consumption in

a way that does not suggest contradiction. Various themes discussed elsewhere in this thesis are also organically demonstrated through *Ke Star*, such as the way that kwaito/amapiano artists reference other cultural forms and the relationships and meanings this creates; the way that artists confirm and celebrate the agency of young people living in South African townships, as well as amapiano's ability to travel and its increasingly pan-African or Afrodiasporic direction. One final reason I have chosen the song is because it has been immensely popular and is a great example of amapiano aesthetics, in sound, visuals, lyrics, as well as the high standard at which local South Africans are producing music and video.

The Kasi and Kwaito:

The kasi refers to the racially segregated urban areas set up before and during apartheid most commonly known in South Africa as the townships. Segregation along racial lines had already begun in 1908 after it was ruled by municipal authorities that access to white areas by black people would be limited to the role of domestic servants (Steingo, 2016: 94). However, once apartheid became national law in 1948, even the residential areas that were tolerated as multiracial were racially segregated, which included the forced removals of many people of colour (Ibid.). As a result, many more townships were added to the existing ones. However, this was not purely creating racially distinct areas, but was used as a tool to control the movements, available employment (limited to manual and menial forms of labour), education, infrastructure (roads and electricity) and many other freedoms of the various black populations. These areas were further divided into "ethnic" and linguistic groupings, to prevent the black majority from joining forces.

The townships, then, were created, not to allow "separate cultural development" as the state suggested, but rather to provide cheap labour to be exploited by white employers in the city. The lack of access described in the previous paragraph created a living space characterised by overpopulation, poverty, crime and disease, amongst many others. The post-apartheid government has altogether failed to address this as the townships continue to experience such racialised oppression in the form of a harsh socio-economic climate and severe limitations on mobility and access to employment, education, waste disposal and even water. Xavier Livermon cites Achille Mbembe's analysis of the township that it "is and

is not urban”, constructed close enough to the city for its potential labour but simultaneously intentionally peripheral (Mbembe 2008:239, cited in Livermon, 2020, p. 66). Furthermore, Mbembe highlights the “perpetual motion” experienced by those living in the township as they seek employment outside the township, and how this is reflected in their language, dress code and their music (Mbembe 2008:240-241, cited in Livermon, 2020, p. 67).

The relationship with the township has been an important part of the kwaito literature. The argument of kwaito having emerged from bubblegum music (or “township disco”) places it in a kind of “township dance music” continuity (Livermon, 2020: 2). Linking to Mbembe’s statement about the township’s ambiguous position in the city, Livermon argues that kwaito is not of the township, nor the suburbs, but rather both and neither (Livermon, 2020: 90). He demonstrates how cultural forms (including music) have travelled from the township to the city and vice versa (Ibid.). Livermon recounts clubs and party spaces in the city which attempt to recreate township experiences, “announcing a confident black identity that is unapologetic about its township and working-class origins” (Ibid., 76). This is exemplified in chapter 3 of this thesis where amapiano music originating from the township has now become a vital component of party life in Cape Town city (see “the Encounter at the Saggy Stone”).

Kwaito is seen to be the proud product of the township. Poet and music fan Khanyi Mbongwa said of her earlier experiences with kwaito that “it was something we [people in the townships] owned and created, outside of whiteness completely. It represented what was happening in the black population” (Mbongwa, quoted in Livermon, 2020, p. 149). Livermon points to Zola 7’s *Ghetto Fabulous*, a kwaito song which discusses both the trials and triumphs of township life, which is discussed later in this chapter (Livermon, 2020: 133). Esinako Ndabeni writes of fashion brands associated with kwaito that reflect the pride felt in township self-stylings, such as Loxion Kulca (a reworking of the phrase location culture) (Ndabeni, 2018: 100). The use of iscamtho, tsotsitaal and other township dialects in kwaito reflect its connection and origin in the township, but also celebrates the ingenuity of township speak.

Notions of pleasure and consumption are viewed in opposition to the socio-economic limitations of township spaces. Livermon consider these to be “vital conceptual categories that illuminate the politics of the kwaito body: in lieu of the disease, violence, and poverty associated with township life” (Livermon, 2020: 93). Ndabeni and Sihle Mthembu recall an interview with kwaito artists Spiriki who said that he had left the township, but not abandoned it (Ndabeni, 2018: 8). Gavin Steingo highlights the overwhelming demands for financial support for family members, friends and neighbours one of the reasons usually given for moving out of the township (Steingo, 2016: 169).

The township, then, represents both the grounded and authentic lived experience of many black South African young people, including most of the kwaito artists themselves, and a site of limitation and constraint. As a result, there is often tension between leaving and remaining grounded in the township. Peterson calls this the “the challenges of existing between entrapment and flight” (Peterson, 2003: 207). Entrapment as it is used here refers to township life’s various limitations including education, employment, family, and relationships, thus being comparable to various forms of incarceration (Ibid.). Flight, on the other hand, refers to “strategic routes that attempt to transcend the debilitations of ghetto life but that do not always imply escape or even desire to surpass the exigencies of the ghetto” (Ibid.). He interprets flight to represent “a desire for recognition, legitimacy, status, wealth and, ultimately, being allowed membership of mainstream society”, all of which are denied to black South African youth, notably by entrapment in the township (Ibid.). Xavier Livermon similarly identifies “ghetto fabulousness” as a prominent, contemporary and Afrodiasporic notion of straddling between the ghetto (a space of poverty and enclosure) and wealth and excess (Livermon, 2020: 111).

There is, therefore, a careful balancing act for the successful kwaito musician who moves out of the township. The space remains their home, but seldom their house as they aspire to surpass the limitations that the township represents while remaining true to their identity rooted in the township. The result, however, does not demonstrate an unwavering binary between these two existences, but rather a dynamic and fluid relationship. It is this outcome that characterises much of kwaito and post-kwaito’s representation and discussion of township spaces.

Amapiano in/for the township:

This same balance between aspiration and the township is a regular feature in amapiano. Many have described both a "pining" and a "hedonism" in amapiano lyrics (Mohlomi, 2019a), saying "you can feel the pain in the music" even while it accompanies nightlife, desire for wealth and pleasure-centred escapism (Mazaza, 2020). Butchie Seroto described amapiano's demeanour as:

> Paradoxical: it's soulful and innocent yet carnal with bright melodies and occasional raw and repetitive hooks, which deeply resonate in the Johannesburg and Pretoria townships where it was first popularised by bedroom producers" (Seroto, 2020).

In a sense the notion of aesthetic as it is used in this thesis involves a precarious balance between the lived circumstances of amapiano producers and the freedom that they aestheticise for themselves and those around them.

In fact, the sound itself has been argued to represent these two worlds. This is obvious in producer and DJ Kabza De Small's album titled "I Am the King of Amapiano: Sweet & Dust", released in 2020. The phrase 'sweet and dust' is intended as a kind of oxymoron which separates the two main components of the amapiano sound (Mazaza, 2020). Dust represents the 'hard' drum patterns which draw from kwaito's influence, while sweet is said to refer to the soulful, jazz-inspired keyboards (Ibid.). We can take this further, however, and consider the former to evoke the township, perhaps through dirt roads but also through the mention of kwaito, while sweet could represent the life of luxury that the music displays (especially through associations with the more affluent styling of deep house). Either way, the sound is at the same time soulful and reflective, fun and danceable.

The equilibrium of entrapment and flight is present in amapiano, too. As the music grew in popularity and became increasingly lucrative for producers and artists, many were successful enough to move into wealthier suburbs. However, they continue to remain committed to expressing township experience, sometimes in their lyrics, but most often through music videos and the commitment to party beyond circumstance. In Reece Madlisa and Zuma's music video for *JazziDisciples (Zlele)*[61], the duo, along with Mr JazziQ and Busta

[61] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=lGvAKp3fOqg

929, drive a Jeep and a Mustang GT through the singers' home township of Alexandra. The video was shot shortly after the chart-topping success of the song, with the intention of chronicling a "a day in the life of Reece Madlisa & Zuma" (Mr JazziQ 2020). Another example can be found at length in the third chapter of this thesis, in a discussion about balance between consumption and authenticity, illustrated in Mr JazziQ and Kabza De Small's choice to buy premium cars resembling those they had always desired as children growing up in the township. This has been interpreted as a representation of their township authenticity. In a conversation last year, Azile praised Kabza for buying his mother a mansion before buying his own, stating that "it showed that he had not lost touch with his roots" (personal communication 13 April 2022).

Focalistic:

Lethabo Sebetso was born on 26 May 1996 in Zone 6, Ga-Rankuwa in Pretoria. In grade eight he was playing soccer at a national level with local team Kaizer Chiefs, but chose instead to pursue music (Mensah, 2021). As a performer he is known as Focalistic, a name given to him by his cousin (a shortened version of Focalisticcataclism) who said it meant "A focused person who's going to change the world and how people view things" (Kumona, 2022). He is often referred to as Pitori Maradona (in reference to his abilities as a footballer and performer) and President ya Straata (meaning president of the streets). He has graduated from the University of Pretoria with a political science degree, after his father Kgomotso Sebetso previously worked as a political journalist at the South African Broadcasting Company (SABC). He began his music career in hip hop but has since become a prolific creator of amapiano music, which he has performed across the world, notably headlining the UK-based AMAFest (Grootboom, n.d.) and a North American tour earlier this year (Darangwa, n.d.). He received seven nominations at the 2021 All Africa Music Awards (Addie K, 2021). He is currently in a relationship with DBN Gogo, who is another vitally important amapiano artist.

The song *Ke Star*, created in collaboration with producer and DJ Vigro Deep, was released in April 2020, and has since sold over 25 000 copies while the music video (directed by Steezus) has over 9 million views on YouTube. It was later released on his first studio album, *Sghubu Ses Excellent*. The song is his most popular thus far. In February 2021, the song was

remixed to feature Nigerian-American afrobeats artist, Davido. The music video for the remix has over 23 million views on YouTube, almost three times that of a popular amapiano song.

<u>“Ase Trap Tse ke Pina Tsa Ko Kasi”:</u>

The song begins with Focalistic’s characteristic phrase “Ase Trap Tse ke Pina Tsa Ko Kasi”. The phrase appears prominently as the title of his 2019 EP by the same name, which was created in collaboration with Major League DJz. It has since come to introduce several of his songs and is widely used across amapiano. It is spoken in Sepitori, an urban language which combines Sepedi-Tswana, Tsotsitaal, Afrikaans and other Bantu languages and allow for mutual intelligibility across the diverse linguistic backgrounds of the region.

The phrase translates to “this is not trap, it is the music we listen to in the township”, or “it is the songs from the hood” (Masia, 2021). Trap here refers to trap music, a distinctive subgenre of hip hop which has grown to tremendous popularity across the world. Characterised by complex hi-hat patterns, tuned kick drums with long decays (known as the 808), sparse instrumental arrangements (usually heat, kick and snare and then a melody), and a distinctive style of melodic rap vocal delivery, both international and local trap artists have become popular in South Africa.

One might read this statement as a stance against globalisation. However, Focalistic has expanded its meaning to include the world (see “Ase Trap Tse ke Pina Tsa Lefatshe” later), confirming that it is not in opposition to global (and even globalising) movements, but rather reaffirms the agency of South African youth living in the township in wider Afrodiasporic and global forms.

The phrase begins the video in a way that clearly expressed the artist’s aim. He has said in reference to the video “Ase trap tse di pina tsa ko kasi is the movement we’re pushing and there had to be a visual representation” (Le’Afrinique, 2020). Focalistic’s statement, then, asserts that amapiano is a local sound, thus distinguishing it from the popular form of trap music, and associating it with the township through listening practices.

Hip hop and amapiano: constructing authenticity

South African trap usually closely resembles the trap produced in the States, in both sound and the associated cultural styling, albeit often in local languages. In 2019, hip hop DJ Speedsta lamented the stagnation of South African hip hop, stating “We then got too cool and started doing a bit of [trap]; a bit of a different direction, and, when we were going in that different direction, we weren’t adding vernac[ular languages] to our stuff; we were trying to sound too American” (Speedsta 2019, quoted in Madzadza & Mkhabela, 2021). Reflecting this, Twitter user “Mr Long 1226” responded to an argument comparing hip hop and amapiano that “hiphop must leave our country and go to America” (quoted in Moodley, 2019). This has contributed to a disconnect between South Africans and South African hip hop, and has resulted in a call to incorporate more South African markers and styles into the music (Madzadza & Mkhabela, 2021).

“Ase trap tse ke pina tsa ko kasi” (hereafter simply “ase trap”) implies a type of binary between amapiano and trap/hip hop. However, Focalistic has said “people make it like there's two different genres: hip-hop and amapiano. For me, it's never felt like that — it's one thing; good music" (quoted in Madzadza & Mkhabela, 2021). It is worthwhile noting here that Focalistic’s earlier music was in the style of trap (see, for example *K’shubile*) and he has released a more recent song in the style with South African trap star Emtee called *Klippa* in 2020. However, this song did not resonate well with Focalistic’s audience in comparison to the amapiano songs he released in the same year (Madzadza & Mkhabela, 2021). In 2020 Focalistic placed first on MTV Base’s annual Hottest MC list, causing controversy as the list is usually populated by hip hop MCs (Ibid.). He has since stated that he has “quit hip hop”, because amapiano “comes naturally to me” (Kumona, 2022). However, when asked if he was an amapiano artist he stated “My team and I are charting a different path (Ibid.). You could box the sound or what I’d like to be called, but that in itself is an issue”, and thus resists a simplistic binary between these two musics (Ibid.).

Focalistic also draws his authenticity from the township. Livermon cites Jordache Ellapen’s position that township space “has become increasingly valued as the repository of authentic Black culture” (Ellapen, 2007, cited in Livermon, 2020: 113). Chrizelda Kekana calls Focalistic’s sound “authentically South Africa” (Kekana, 2021). Focalistic has stated that the

phrase represents his decision “to make music that represents me” (Ibid.), referring to himself as “the voice of misunderstood youth, I mirror what’s happening in Africa” (Kumona, 2022). This is well reflected in his title “President Ya Straata” or “President of the streets”, referencing his close relationship and knowledge of the local, urban spaces and culture commonly known as “the streets”. Furthermore, he links this with his political science degree, saying “what’s great is that I’ve managed to use what I studied in my music; I’m also a journalist, only over a nice beat. I’m reporting on what’s happening in my life and other people, and that makes people dance” (Kumona, 2022), again seeing himself as a mouthpiece for lived conditions of South African youth. In his own words, “Trap was the glamorous thing, but I was like ‘I don’t want to do that, I want to make music that my mom, my whole hood can relate to and be proud of.’” (Masia, 2021).

Madzadza and Mkhabela mention other artists and producers who began their careers in hip hop but have since either appeared on or moved over to amapiano, including rappers Cassper Nyovest, Khuli Chana and Riky Rick, as well as DJ/producers such as Tyler ICU, Mas Musiq and Major League Djz as well as several examples of crossover, especially where hip hop producers have added amapiano elements (such as replacing the 808 with a log drum in artist K.O’s *K:HOVA*) to their songs (Madzadza & Mkhabela, 2021).

The comparison of house music and hip hop is an old one with misrecognitions dating back to kwaito. Sharlene Swartz asks in *Is Kwaito South African Hip-Hop? Why the Answer Matters and Who it Matters To* whether kwaito simply represented a local form of hip hop (as some had asserted) or a new form, and how the difference is constructed and formed (Swartz, 2008). She links this to issues of origination, authenticity and influence (Ibid., 17). Thokozani Mhlambi similarly distinguishes between hip hop and kwaito, asserting kwaito’s authenticity as a South African form (Mhlambi, 2004: 124–125). While an in-depth discussion of this is beyond the scope of this work, the link between kwaito and authenticity raised in the discourse of kwaito versus hip hop is like the one that Focalistic is pointing to.

Simply put, kwaito and amapiano are constructed as authentic because they emerged as a result of thoroughly South African influences and that they better represent the lived experience of South Africans. This may seem contradictory to the other chapters of this thesis, where I have discussed the Afrodiasporic and global influences on amapiano music,

as well as the way in which practitioners often intentionally ignore their lived circumstances to imagine alternate realities. However, it is important to remember how these external influences are localised and how such imaginings enable those living in such conditions to construct and aestheticize their own freedoms.

Therefore, given that Focalisitic is represented as an authentic, black, South African youth addressing the concerns of the township in the media and amongst fans, the statement aims to distinguish himself from American-style trap music to assert the local origin, relevance and meaning of amapiano music.

Township Aesthetic:

Not only does Focalistic's "ase trap" set amapiano apart as an authentic, local form, but it further expresses a pride in the music and the associated cultural forms which emerge from the township. As the kwaito literature has already suggested, this pride contradicts the notion that the township is purely a space characterised by socioeconomic limitations; that one does not need to leave the township to have fun and be a star.

An earlier example of this can be found in kwaito artist Zola 7's "Ghetto Fabulous". Zola (who also combined hip hop and kwaito in his unique style) named himself after the township in Soweto he grew up in, Zola. In the song he addresses both the challenges and pleasures of township life, which Livermon argues destabilises the idea that to be fabulous one has to leave the township (Livermon, 2020: 113). Zola, too, authenticates himself as a voice of township youth through the validation and praise of the township experience.

Focalistic's song title hints at a similar destabilisation of the negative connotations of the township. "Ke Star" means "I'm a star". Having positioned himself as an authentic member of the township and positioning himself in the township in the music video, the statement "I'm a star" informs the listener that the township does not hinder your ability to be a star. Better yet, through placing himself alongside and equal to other members of the township, as well as the typical method of singing along with the song, participants also call themselves stars. I read this to be an assertion of township agency once more. This is confirmed in his GQ interview, where Focalistic says "It's about lifting each other and working together – that's how Africa's supposed to be. If you want to be the greatest, you won't do it alone" (quoted in Kumona, 2022).

One way in which Focalistic represents his pride for the township is by regularly returning to it, and often filming in it. His cover for GQ South Africa magazine was similarly shot in Garankuwa, marking their first cover to be shot "in the hood" (Kumona, 2022). When asked about the significance of this, he responded "I'm always shooting in the hood and going back there", "These are the streets where I grew up, so it was heart-warming. I never would've thought my music would bring a global brand like GQ to my hometown" (Ibid.).

Ke Star's music video is a good example of this as it was shot in the place in which he grew up. The music video opens with Focalistic dancing atop a minibus taxi in the streets of Garankuwa surrounded by a crowd. His outfit of a black tracksuit from UK-based clothing company SikSilk with matching Dolce and Gabbana sunglasses and shoes has been rated one of his most fashionable outfits (Wee, 2021), likely costing just under R10 000. This can be compared to the income of South Africans earning minimum wage which is R3308. 68 per month (Faro, 2022). Placing this outfit and the township side by side may seem to present a contradiction, but the two exist side by side as a common feature of amapiano. Focalistic is noted for often wearing black, which he usually accompanies with the phrase "blecke ke colour ya Manyora", a phrase from his song *Blecke* which means "black is the colour of the top dog (the best)". The phrase is likely a reference to his being black, in a context where black people have been and continue to be treated as lesser than white. The crowd around him are similarly dressed in black, including black face masks. Rather than styling him in opposition to the crowd, this gives the visual impression that he is a part of the crowd. He has said elsewhere that he does not see the need to be the "greatest" at the expense of others, but rather that he desires everyone to be their greatest (Kumona, 2022).

While the rest of the crowd remains still, he casually dances on top of the taxi before the scene switches to him alone in a grocery store, again in SikSilk, this time a yellow and brown shirt with a white pair of Dolce and Gabbana sunglasses. The visuals switch between the two scenes while he sings the song's introductory lines, finally taking a Hunter's Extreme Energy (an alcoholic energy drink, which often uses amapiano artists in its marketing campaigns, notably Major League Djz) out of the grocery store fridge before the verse begins.

As the verse begins, Focalistic joins the dancing crowd in a series of dance moves, beginning with the dancing crowd following Focalistic, holding up a plaque confirming the gold status

of the song. Here, Focalistic crosses his bent elbows to form an “X”, possibly a reference to a star, or Extreme Energy. For the hook, where the words “Yoh yoh yoh, tsiki tsiki yoh” are sung, he is once again on top of the taxi. The minibus taxi is an important symbol of South African townships as it represents the most commonly used transport by those who do not own cars. Often, these vehicles are fitted with loud sound systems, allowing them to play music while travelling throughout the country. In fact, taxis played an important role in the dissemination of kwaito (Steingo, 2016: 37; Livermon, 2020: 22) and gqom (Eaby-Lomas, 2021: 105). Contemporarily in Cape Town, amapiano is the most popular music played in taxis.

As the song is stripped down to only the log drum and light percussion, the scene changes to a dark room lit up by neon lights, with a prominent “X” in the background, and then again to a room lit by yellow lights full of people dressed in camouflage jackets. The beat returns as Focalistic sings to himself in a backstage theatre mirror, again indicative of his newfound success. The song begins to fade as the visuals switch to TikToks recorded in various locations across South Africa as fans dance to the song. This final scene demonstrates again Focalistic’s commitment to including his fans as participants in the music video itself, and not simply passive consumers, further contributing to earlier notions of aesthetic and aesthetic formations discussed in this thesis.

Tsiki Tsiki Yoh: Amapiano and Soccer

Ke Star contains several historical references which add another layer to its aesthetic. Phrases which Focalistic uses link the song to other important moments in South Africa’s history, which strengthen its links to the township and a township aesthetic. Specifically, this connects amapiano with both kwaito and soccer from 1994. By doing so Focalistic points to a longer history of amapiano and the township, but also to a wider aesthetic connection between sport and music, in particular soccer and kwaito. In this section I discuss some of these references, focusing on the phrase “tsiki tsiki yoh” which features as the hook in *Ke Star*.

In South Africa, kwaito and amapiano as an aesthetic share several similarities with soccer. Many soccer stars share similar aspirational stories with those of successful kwaito artists, born in the townships but through hard work managed to uplift themselves to the point of

national fame (Import, 2014). Both watching and playing soccer are regular aspects of township life and thus both music and sport find massive popularity in the townships. There have been numerous overlaps such as songs about soccer players, soccer players featuring in songs, and songs played at soccer events.

Throughout the song there are several soccer references. The phrase "Ke Star" simply means "I'm a star", a phrase that could describe both a successful soccer player and musician. As mentioned earlier, Focalistic is often referred to as the Maradona of Pretoria and in this song, he refers to himself by this name. Diego Maradona was a world-famous Argentine soccer player from the late 1970s to the early 1990s. Focalistic likely uses this nickname rather that his others to draw attention to his soccer past and the skill that makes him a musical star today. The phrase "goes ruff" could be a reference to soccer, where a player is considered to be playing rough when they cause many fouls.

But more significant than these is the phrase "tsiki tsiki yoh" and its history throughout South African pop culture, including kwaito. The phrase was originally used to refer to Kaizer Chiefs soccer player Thabo Mooki (Gasa, 2020, cited in Powell, 2022). Tsiki tsiki referred to the similarity between his dribbling style and how a DJ scratches (quickly moving a vinyl under the needle to create a sound regularly heard in early hip hop) (Ibid.). The third word is a common South African word for disbelief "yoh", popularised by soccer commentators who expressed their surprise whenever Mooki had the ball (Ibid.). It is certainly of interest that the phrase contains a direct reference to music in the onomatopoeia "tsiki tsiki", especially considering further musical references mentioned below.

This is not the first time that Mooki has been referenced in an amapiano song. Notably, Kabza De Small and DJ Maphorisa's *Lorch*, which similarly refer to him as tsiki tsiki (Gasa, 2020, cited in Powell, 2022). The lyrics go "Ah tsiki tsiki ah Thabo Mooki, Ah Jimmy Tau ah siyabavimba", referencing Mooki as well as another famous defender for the Kaizer Chiefs, Jimmy Tau. *Lorch*, however, praises current Orlando Pirates midfielder Thembinkosi Lorch. The music video[62] for the song features a solo soccer player, as well as various dances emulating soccer moves such as those seen at 2:16, which give the appearance of skill moves without a ball. Much like *Ke Star*, *Lorch* is shot in the Johannesburg township of

[62] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=WfuEP0fDrvY

Alexandra. It was intended to feature Lorch himself, but fans were disappointed when this didn't happen (Herbst, 2020).

The connection between township, music and soccer is not new, however, and is seen most clearly in kwaito. Released in 1998, TKZee's song *Shibobo*[63] is a famous example of a kwaito song centred around the cultural form of soccer dedicated to the 1998 Fifa World Cup. It was later re-released in 2010 for the Fifa World Cup in South Africa, and the group performed it at the opening ceremony. The term Shibobo refers to a skill move where a player kicks the ball between the legs of another player. The music video for the song features internationally acclaimed soccer legend Benni McCarthy and takes place at Orlando stadium in Soweto. TKZee performs most of the song in a gateway to the stadium holding a soccer ball. The song itself is a kwaito remix of Swedish Rock group's 1986 song *Final Countdown* and features McCarthy on vocals.

It is vital to note here that this is not simply kwaito music about soccer, but rather a layered and reciprocal relationship between the two, where kwaito songs about soccer accompany soccer games and are danced to by players, many of whom end up being involved in kwaito songs and media themselves. This is exemplified in the hook of *Shibobo* where TKZee chant "Benny in the 18th area, TKZee in the area, and Bafana in the area" (TKZee, feat. Benni, 1998). 18th area refers to the penalty box on a soccer pitch, the area closest to the goals. It thus suggests that McCarthy is in a strategically advantageous position and is likely to score a goal. The following line suggests that TKZee, too, is in a position to score, and the player, the band, and the South African national team (known locally as Bafana Bafana) are all in 'the area', or a space of strategic advantage. Not only are the three in the same area, thereby associating the music and the sport, but the 18th area may also be in reference to the significance of the historical moment. 1998 marked the end of the first term of the new post-apartheid government and the first appearance in a Fifa World Cup. Later in the song, TKZee and Bafana are mentioned again, alongside Madiba, or Nelson Mandela, the first president of democratic South Africa.

Peterson notes the presence of soccer stars in kwaito as a regular feature, more than any other public figure (Peterson, 2003: 200). Gibson Boloka highlights the use of kwaito in

[63] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BhdxwySgEPQ&ab_channel=TKZEEVEVO

sports more widely as a signal of the local, such as Mandoza's *Nkalakatha* (Boloka, 2003: 103). This song is still played at cricket and rugby games to represent the rainbow nation of South Africa. Kwaito artist Zola 7 compares his performance on stage to a soccer player scoring a goal in *Sharp Sharp: The Kwaito Story*, drawing similarities between the two sensory experiences because of the screaming fans.

An even earlier example of this can be found in 1994. Less than a month after the first democratic elections, M'Du Masilela released *Tsiki Tsiki*[64]. Much like Kabza and Maphorisa's *Lorch*, the song is dedicated to Thabo Mooki, or Tsiki Tsiki. The chorus is made up of the repeated phrase, "Tsiki Tsiki Yoh" over a typically infectious kwaito beat, with alternating kick drum and hi-hat typical of international house music and a variety of synthesised sounds. According to Bheka Gasa this was an immensely popular song, calling it "the biggest Kwaito anthem of the 90's" (Gasa, 2020, cited in Powell, 2022).

There is an interesting to-and-fro present here. The phrase itself is a musical one referencing the performance techniques of a DJ and throughout the song the producer uses similar techniques, such as the pitch shift of the vocals at 2:22. The phrase compares Mooki's dribbling to a DJ scratching, and is then used as the main lyrical content in a musical work, which would also have been played by a DJ, and inevitably used in soccer-related media and danced to by soccer players.

Ke Star was not the first to allude to this kwaito classic. In 2014 rapper Duncan Skuva, popularly known as Duncan, released his song *Tsiki Tsiki*[65]. This song directly samples M'du's song, slowing down the original and adding an acid-style bass synth to it. The slower speed gives the song a hip hop sound but it remains distinctly South African (In fact hip hop DJ Speedsta says many DJs play songs from the 2014/2015 era for their local sound (Speedsta cited in Madzadza and Mkhabela, 2021)). In the song, Duncan reflects on his childhood, how he grew up listening to kwaito and dancing to M'Du. The song contains no reference to soccer or Thabo Mooki and is instead a dedication to M'Du and kwaito in general.

Ke Star uses the same phrase as its hook, where Focalistic sings "Yho, yho, yho, yho, yho, yho Tsikitsiki, yho! Tsikitsiki, yho! Tsikitsiki, yho!". While this may simply be a reference to

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[64] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=mEKMDn7R7u0
[65] https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=zrhZHLbmw_o

M’Du’s song, it is unlikely that Focalistic, as a former young Kaizer Chiefs player, has not heard the phrase used to refer to Thabo Mooki as well. Thus, by using the phrase, Focalistic positions himself into a longer history of the intersection between music and sport in township spaces.

Much like in the kwaito examples mentioned above, various other intersections exist between soccer and amapiano. 24 July 2022 saw the “Celebrity Soccer Games: Soccer and Music Coming Together”, which had teams made up of gqom, maskandi, hip hop and amapiano artists, respectively, compete against each other in a soccer tournament (John, 2022). On 26 August 2022, artist and soccer fan Pabi Cooper and dancer Hope Ramafalo performed for the “Homecoming Activation” of the Mamelodi Sundowns (Luthuli, 2022).

The presence of soccer in kwaito and amapiano, and vice versa is significant because it demonstrates the broader township aesthetic that amapiano is representing. In each case discussed above, township, soccer, and music flow effortlessly into one another, with soccer and music sharing a similar aesthetic relationship with the township. Musical references for soccer players become hooks in songs and other important pieces of media, drawing attention to the importance of both. This relationship confirms that amapiano acts beyond a simple auditory experience to include a wider variety of sensory apparatus in the construction of what is local to both South Africa and township spaces. Soccer has likewise been considered to be more than a sport; “He explained that soccer is more than just a sport in townships. The boys become a family once they have joined township soccer clubs” (Elaine, 2020). In this sense, soccer also acts as an aesthetic formation.

“Ase Trap Tse ke Pina Tsa Lefatshe”: From the Township to the World

The music video for *Ke Star*’s remix features this phrase in its description. An obvious reference to Focalistic’s phrase discussed above, this re-interpretation of the phrase shifts its meaning to include the Afrodiaspora into this music which belongs to the township. The word “lefatshe” in Tswana translates to “world” in English. Thus, the new phrase reads “this isn’t trap, this is the music we listen to in the world”.

Much like the phrase “amapiano to the world”, this is a declaration of the influence that young people in the township can have on the world beyond them. Here, Focalistic is

highlighting the interest in the music beyond South Africa's border, pointing to a mostly Afrodiasporic space where amapiano continues to grow and resonate with Africans throughout the world. When asked about his five priorities for the future, three of Focalistic's answers were Afrodiasporic in nature. Specifically, he envisioned; "a Pan-African remix or song featuring my favourite African artists", hosting a show in South Africa featuring artists from across the world, and taking South African music and culture throughout the world through his performances (quoted in Kumona, 2022).

The collaboration with American born Nigerian Afrobeats artist Davido, the remix and its music video make a strong statement about pan-African solidarity. When Davido sings "it goes down when my G's connect" in the music video, Focalistic joins him in frame and they mouth the words together, with Focalistic indicating using his fists the two coming together. In conjunction with a video ripe with pan-African fashion and dance forms and a song which combines the already Afrodiasporic Afrobeats and amapiano this shows that the South African township youth represented by Focalistic are active members of contemporary African cultural forms, which are in turn alive and well, not trapped in the past. The final scene captures all of these styles from across Africa in a single room as they party and dance for Africa's future.

Concluding Thoughts:

Ke Star draws together numerous ideas discussed in this thesis. It draws attention to and celebrates local, authentic township forms and lived experience, while simultaneously celebrating the freedom for black South Africans to consume material goods. It highlights the wider role of sports and music in the construction of a township aesthetic. It additionally demonstrates a commitment to the larger Afrodiasporic space, recognising the importance of pan-African solidarity while simultaneously asserting the agency of black South African young people growing up in the townships to produce cultural products and forms which will shape the Afrodiaspora.

In this chapter I have attempted to demonstrate that rather than seeing consumption and the township as separate components of the sensory experience that is amapiano's aesthetic, it is the balance between these forces, of agency and incarceration, of mobility and limitation, of consumption and poverty that lies at the centre of amapiano's aesthetic.

Like the many other ideas in this thesis, this is not new and can be traced back to earlier forms of cultural practices associated with the township, notably kwaito. Amapiano originates from the township, but also represents it on a wider stage and re-authenticates itself through it. Phrases which would otherwise be glossed over as simply fun and catchy carry deep and historical meanings, as have been seen in “ase trap tse ke pina tsa ko kasi” and “tsiki tsiki yoh”. This chapter has illustrated how amapiano practitioners are aware of these things, with Focalistic confirming them in interviews throughout. “Ase trap tse ke pina tsa ko kasi” is an assertion that township practitioners are actively composing Africa’s future.

"Amapiano is the Future": Concluding Thoughts

This chapter is titled after a common phrase used by practitioners. Throughout social media and amongst fans this popular maxim is used in a similar way to its spatial cousin "amapiano to the world", as it creates pride in the music's potential to shape the future. I would argue that practitioners are once again asserting their agency in wider musical spaces, on local and global levels. This phrase echoes notions of aesthetics as a way to hope, imagine and aestheticise the future. I would like to speak the phrase into academia as I believe this work has wider implications than our understanding of amapiano. I believe that the study of popular musics with such rich local meaning, specifically studied while they enjoy mainstream success, must be a vital component of future ethnomusicology if the field wishes to impact wider academic conversations and, more importantly, its actual environment.[66]

In this section I wish to examine this phrase. I use the phrase to recapitulate the thesis. Notions of past, present and future are important to our understanding of kwaito's legacy. If kwaito is a part of amapiano's past, then amapiano represents kwaito's future. Thus, both share a future. The first chapter addressed how kwaito not only shares a history with amapiano but can be used as a lens to study the music which emerged in a very similar way.

Amapiano represents a future sound (see for example Blake, 2021), and reminds the ethnomusicologist of the importance of musical analysis in the study of forms with closely associated music and cultural practices. I then turn to Jacques Attali's assertion that "music is prophecy" and that it is the "herald of the future" (Attali, 1985: 11), arguing that this is due to music's powerful ability to hope for, imagine and aestheticise a better future. "Amapiano is the future" also implies a future for its young practitioners, for its aesthetic formation, and is often used to reinforce such binding. The phrase is an assertion of local and global agency. Maphorisa's claim that amapiano *will be* a household name globally speaks to a growing and therefore future agency for mostly township aesthetic forms in wider Afrodiasporic spaces.

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[66] It is certainly true that ethnomusicologists have studied a wide variety of popular musics. However, these usually occur several years after the musical forms have begun to fade from the public view. I wish to promote a form of popular music study which is as dynamic as the music it studies.

The next heading posits amapiano as the future of research. This has two points. The first is the research that I hope will be inspired by my contributions thus far. I believe that further research on this music will be highly generative in a plethora of categories, including gender equality, racism, Pan-Africanism, youth development, eradicating poverty, amongst many others which were beyond the scope of this thesis. In this sense I see amapiano as future research. Secondly, amapiano is a very new form, when compared to the typical subject of ethnomusicology. This has presented new challenges, and many more exciting and interesting possibilities for future research impact. Here I see amapiano as the future of research.

Amapiano and the Future:

Amapiano is often associated with notions of the future, with article titles like *How South Africa's Sha Sha is Bringing Amapiano Music Into the Future* (Neophytou, 2021), emphasizing its future over its disputed past (Mohlomi, 2019b) and regular declarations of its staying power and immortality (Papercutt TV, 2019; Neophytou, 2021). The title of this chapter further demonstrates this. In a recent conversation with a fellow student from high school, upon hearing that I was doing my masters research on amapiano, he exclaimed "amapiano is the future!".

Given the context in which the phrase is used, it represents an excitement for the growth in popularity of the music, as well as declaring that the musical form is here to stay, countering critiques that it will only be a short-lived fad. While this may seem simple enough, the truths that lie underneath the surface are far reaching. For this section I will focus on how this phrase recapitulates the thesis thus far, beginning with a discussion on Attali's musical prophecy.

Music as a Herald for Society:

In his book *Noise: The Political Economy of Music*, Jacques Attali posits that music is prophetic (Attali, 1985). He argues that a society's future political organisation is embedded in its contemporary music and in this sense, it is a "herald of times to come" (Ibid., 4). In his words "the political organization of the twentieth century is rooted in the political thought of the nineteenth, the latter is almost entirely present in embryonic form in the music of the

eighteenth century" (Ibid.). He argues that music is "ahead of the rest of society because it explores, much faster that material reality can, the entire range of possibilities in a given code" (Ibid., 11).

In light of this, perhaps there is more to the yanos' assertion that amapiano is the future. It could be read as a statement that the future is already here, all one needs to do is listen to it. This is reflected in Martina Viljoen's statement that "kwaito musicians have not merely been passively expressing street culture but actively composing it" (Viljoen, 2008: 59). Amapiano makers and consumers are creating and composing the future, thus reflecting earlier ideas of aestheticizing freedom. Amapiano is the future because it imagines, designs and constructs the future. This is an important lesson about youth music in general, but even more so when you consider the power it has for marginalised groups. Thus, I join Attali and fans of the music in saying that amapiano is the future.

Kwaito as history:

The notion of the future appears throughout the kwaito literature (see for example throughout Peterson, 2003; Coplan, 2005; Steingo, 2008b, 2016; Viljoen, 2008; Ndabeni, 2018; Livermon, 2020), as well as kwaito itself (exemplified by its association with the end of apartheid and hope for the post-apartheid future). If amapiano is a post-kwaito musical and cultural form, then it can be seen as an example of kwaito's future trajectories.

However, the study of kwaito's history reveals an important consideration in the approach to historicising contemporary musical forms. Specifically, it illustrates that such forms usually emerge from the collective effort of individuals. Therefore, both the agency of individuals and the community nature of their emergence are important. The multiplicity which emerged from the sheer number of agents involved in both histories reflects new complications to historicising contemporary forms and can in turn be used to study the history of similar popular musical and cultural forms, representing a future for historiography.

The Sound Characteristics of Amapiano:

The second chapter involved a comprehensive description of the aural aesthetic that is described as amapiano. I did this to demonstrate the value of the study of popular music in

the study of popular music (McClary 1994: 38, cited in Steingo, 2008b), that is the benefit of musical analysis in popular ethnomusicological studies. Thus, I co-opt the phrase "amapiano is the future" as a call to ethnomusicologists doing this kind of study to pay careful attention to the value of musical analysis. If we believe that music is not autonomous and emerges from the cultural practices of humans, then we cannot study only that cultural practice apart from its music.

Aesthetics and Formations:

"Amapiano is the future", then is an assertion of the music's agency to mould the future. While practitioners imagine, or better yet aestheticise, freedom for themselves, they do so in a future tense. Fantasy, aesthetics and conviviality are all matters of becoming, just like the freedom they envision (Livermon, 2020: 52). The enacting of such freedom through consumption practices and partying take place in the present, but only provide temporary freedoms, for as long as they manage to forget about their circumstances. I have already suggested that "amapiano is a lifestyle" represents both a present and future way of being. In this sense amapiano is the invention of the future.

If amapiano is the future, then its practitioners are part of, but also actively composing that future. This reflects Livermon's point on Afrodiasporic space, that those constructed and represented as indigenous are equal parts of such a diasporic space (Livermon, 2020: 30). The phrase resists the tendency to place Africa in the past. Not only is Africa an active member of the present, but it is actively composing the future. It is uttered within the community to strengthen its ties as a call to stand firm in the face of criticism, and to those outside of the community to confirm that the aesthetic and its formation is here to stay.

Amapiano to the World:

Finally, this future is a spatial one. Pan-Africanism and Afrodiasporic space run as important themes throughout amapiano, through fashion, collaborations, influence, global media, amongst others. Amapiano is envisioned as a local future, such as in the form of better lived conditions for its local practitioners, a local voice for youth, and a promotion of the township. However, it is also a global future. Maphorisa's assertion that "Amapiano will be a household name in its own right" (Maphorisa in Townsend, 2022) positions yanos as integral to the shaping of global Afrodiasporic musical culture. I reiterate the idea that this rejects

suggestions of Africa as the past and replaces them with Africa as not only being part of the future, but that Africa "is the future".

Multiple Futures:

While the original intention of the phrase is discussed above, I hope to now co-opt the notion of "amapiano is the future" and use it to discuss two further contributions I hope that this work will make. Firstly, it was surprising to me how quickly I ran out of words for this thesis, with so much left unsaid about this musical and cultural form. There are several areas I hoped to address that were beyond the scope of this project. I wish to discuss these here in the hopes that they might inspire future research.

Perhaps my biggest regret regarding this thesis is the absence of a discourse on gender. A vital consideration of the kwaito literature, the landscape of gender in post-kwaito seems to have shifted rather dramatically from the earlier form. Much was written about both the kwaito masculine and feminine. Each receive separate chapters in Xavier Livermon's and Esinako Ndabeni's books (Ndabeni, 2018; Livermon, 2020), and various other publications (notably Impey, 2001; Peterson, 2003). I also briefly examined gender in my article (Eaby-Lomas, 2021). One important difference with amapiano is that women have high levels of representation in all forms, as singers, dancers, DJs, producers, and influencers. This can be compared to kwaito lacking women producers and even vocalists beyond the choruses. However, the representation of women is still a worthwhile investigation as they navigate self-representation and forces of misogyny. Amapiano DJ Uncle Waffles is most often described by her physical appearance ("she has the perfect body, skin" ("Uncle Waffles slammed for being beautiful without talent.", 2021)), and was subjected to repeat slander from internet personality Slik Talk, who stated "this girl is the worst, highest paid DJ", that "she is a pretty girl with zero talent – not as pretty as she was when she was 19" and "she can dance, I'll give her that… she has a nice stomach" ("This Is the Worst Highest Paid DJ", 2021). Amapiano gives space to perform gender differently. Thus, an examination of gender in amapiano, perhaps in the form of a comparison with kwaito, is necessary.

I believe that research into youth forms such as this one will provide solutions to youth unemployment and development, as well as poverty alleviation. By understanding the tools that post-kwaito youth forms use to create positive futures, social workers and lawmakers

can incorporate such tools for change. An example of this for kwaito can be found in Mark Abrahams's work *Accountability, autonomy, and authenticity* which promotes community engagement through cultural forms such as kwaito for the development of NGOs (Abrahams, 2008). I hope that similar projects can be undertaken using amapiano.

I further posit the potential of amapiano research to improving education in South Africa. A project like the HipHopEd movement ("HipHopEd | Facilitating Innovative Educational Programming", n.d.), where hip hop music is used to teach well beyond the confines of standard music education, including STEM, English, counselling, amongst others, could prove highly effective in promoting education throughout South Africa, but especially in the townships. In this way, perhaps amapiano is the future of education.

Other future amapiano research could involve a study of the role of technology for both recording and dissemination, the continued inequalities in the recording industry (Barnes, 2020), a linguistic study on the creative use of language, an ethnochoreological study, an investigation into the concerns of copyright law, and the role that the music plays in politics (for example EFF leader Julius Malema's DJ performance at a political rally).

Second, I would assert that the research above forms part of a newer form of ethnomusicology and I hope that it will contribute to the direction that this new research takes. In this sense I hope that amapiano will represent the future of research. By this I am referring to the study of a contemporary music with both local and global meaning. Amapiano is roughly a decade old, with its rush into the mainstream being very recent (the last four years or so). At the beginning of the project, I was unsure how to approach studying a music that was developing as I was writing about it. Xavier Livermon's advice on this was to focus on a set of circumstances. One way in which I did this was to read the kwaito literature and see what this post-kwaito form was doing that kwaito had done some 30 years earlier. Through this, my thesis emerged.

I hope that this can serve as a model for future researchers hoping to study such forms, especially given that the study of these forms has such immediate value and meaning beyond simply archiving. I hope that the above will contribute to the shape of future research.

Final Thoughts

Amapiano continues to grow. A musical and cultural form which emerged from the harsh socio-economic climate of South Africa's townships has asserted itself strongly as a force to be reckoned with in the country and in the world. At the most local level, Azile has just released his latest private school EP, *The Come Up*[67]. Titled after his dream of fame, it is a musical imagining of the future. Songs like *Hustle Prayers* and *Imithandazo* offer a prayer for that future, while *African Pride* celebrates the Afrodiaspora. His remix of South African singer Lira's *Feel Good* stands in a long line of remixes of the popular song, pointing to a rich history of South African electronically produced dance music and club culture. The EP ends with *021SGIJA (feat. Steazy)*, an instrumental intended purely for aesthetic pleasure. The EP encapsulates a longer history, a particular aural arrangement, an aestheticizing of future freedom, collaboration over competition, aims to dominate in the local and the global, and demonstrates the sheer potential of township musicians. With a part two releasing soon, *The Come Up* presents a hopeful future for Blackish SA, for amapiano and for Africa. Amapiano is most certainly the future.

[67] https://fanlink.to/BlackishSATheComeUp

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