Athens Journal of Humanities & Arts - Volume 12, Issue 2, April 2025 – Pages 147-170

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

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The phrase "amapiano to the world" is often used by practitioners to refer to the power of the musical form to travel across national boundaries and its potential to become a global phenomenon like hip hop or house music. Using Xavier Livermon's conception of Afrodiasporic space which argues that Africa is a "constitutive and continuous site of diaspora" and that those constructed and represented as indigenous are equal parts of such a diasporic space[1], as well as Gavin Steingo's "point-to-point" connectivity rather than the often represented "frictionless musical flow" [2], I examine amapiano's position in the world, noting how local music scenes are connected through global point-to-point networks[3]. I discuss this in four sections titled; "Taking up Afrodiasporic Space: Kwaito in the world", "Whatsapp Groups: Music and Noise", "Amapiano from the World: Afrodiasporic Influences and Intertextuality in Banyana" and "Amapiano in the World: Constructing Local Meaning". The first outlines notions of local and global in the kwaito literature. The second examines the use of digital spaces in the dissemination of amapiano, specifically Whatsapp group chats, and criticizes the notion of "frictionless musical flow" by highlighting the role of spam in obtruding the musical message. The third section examines the trajectory of Columbian singer Totó La Momposina's El Pescador and Curura through various localizations of meaning in European dance spaces into DJ Maphorisa and Tyler ICU's song Banyana. The final section examines spaces outside of South Africa's appropriation of amapiano in the AMAFest festival hosted annually in the UK, the Nigerian form "Afropiano" and American hip hop and R&B stars use of the genre. Amapiano represents a local youth form which offers a "creative resistance to the forces of globalization"[4], while simultaneously using such forms to disseminate music, reworking them to create local meaning and playing an active role in the construction of new forms in Afrodiasporic space.

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1. Xavier Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies: Remastering Space and Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid South Africa* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2020), 30.

2. Gavin Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise: Music and the aesthetics of freedom in South Africa* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2016), 121; 138.

3. Gibson Boloka, "Cultural Studies and the Transformation of the Music Industry: Some Reflections on Kwaito," in *Shifting Selves: Post-Apartheid Essays on Mass Media, Culture and Identity*, eds. Herman Wasserman, Sean Jacobs (Cape Town: Kwela Books, 2003), 97-107.

4. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 17.

https://doi.org/10.30958/ajha.12-2-2 doi=10.30958/ajha.12-2-2

Introduction

"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

"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 globalization, these youth use such forces to disseminate their music, create local meaning and shape globalizing spaces using their own self-definition.

The above quote is taken from DJ Maphorisa[5], 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 connections 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 localized 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/cultural space. In this discourse on the expansion of the genre 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 also reveals their nature which are often characterized by interactions between isolated points rather than global flows. They are also seldom frictionless and contain various forms of misrecognition and noise. I also examine the localization 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[6] and Gavin Steingo's point-to-point critique of "frictionless musical flows"[7]. 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,

5. Maphorisa in Megan Townsend, "Amapiano hasn't even reached its full potential", *Mixmag*, June 16, 2022.

6. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*.

7. Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise.*

on the other hand, critiques notions of musical flow for their implication that music flows unhindered. He also observes that contact seldom resembles 'flow' in the sense that contacts are usually made between isolated individuals.

To begin, I will introduce the music form of amapiano, how it sounds, the context in which it emerged and its relationship with the earlier music form kwaito. This study forms part of my master's thesis[8], which examines amapiano as a "post-kwaito" phenomenon. The next section discusses how the local and global were understood and constructed in the kwaito literature. While notions of local and global in kwaito music are a helpful starting point for this discussion, amapiano functions differently in these spaces, well exemplified in the notion "amapiano to the world", which implies an intention to reach the world. Second, I examine the role of WhatsApp groups in disseminating the musical form across space, while also paying attention to "noise" (spam) in these spaces. The long history of influence which resulted in DJ Maphorisa and Tyler ICU's song *Banyana*[9] is the subject of the third section as it demonstrates the Afrodiasporic, point-to-point nature of amapiano's contacts with the world. Finally, I investigate the appropriation of amapiano in locales outside of South Africa through the AMA Fest festival in the UK, Afropiano in West Africa and American hip hop and R&B references to the form.

Amapiano and/as Post-Kwaito

Amapiano is an electronically produced dance music which emerged from South African townships around 2012 and has since grown to become the most consumed music in the country at present. It forms part of a long history of black township music, from early appropriations of jazz to the adaptations of bubblegum pop in the 1980s, to the post-apartheid forms of kwaito and gqom. With influences from several of these musics, as well as new international influences such as deep house, the music plays at around 112 beats per minute, is produced on computers with live instruments being rare, and features a variety of vocalizations including singing, chanting, rapping and wordless improvisations. Literally translating to "the pianos", amapiano is proud of its relationship with underserved township locales while simultaneously celebrating new forms of black consumptive freedom, and wider forms of Afrodiasporic connections. Easily identifiable due to its characteristic shaker which lies at the center of its percussive introduction which

8. Titled *Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: Amapiano in Langa township and the World*, my thesis examines the history, aural arrangement, the role of sensory experience in imagining/constructing future freedom and we-formations, amapiano in the world, and amapiano's representation of the township. Available upon request (EBYDIO001@myuct.ac.za).

9. DJ Maphorisa and Tyler ICU, "Banyana," 2021, Track 1 on *Banyana*, NEW MONEY GANG, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39xp8P40eyY

builds through the addition of sonic elements until its peak where its unique bass instrument, the log drum, features prominently. Examples of this sound can be heard in Focalistic's *Ke Star*[10], Young Stunna's *Adiwele*[11] and Sha Sha and Kamo Mphela's *iPiano*[12].

South African townships are the result of the racial segregationist policies apartheid. The system of institutionalized separation of ethnicities introduced by the National Party in 1948 was enacted under the guise of protecting cultural differences, and specifically ensuring the 'purity' of white, Afrikaner (Afrikaans-speaking) nationalism and culture. Ethnicities (or more accurately linguistic groups) were further divided to ensure that the black majority could not unite in the fight against the system. This was usually done through forced removals into Bantustans or "homelands", where people groups who shared language (such as the "Xhosas" or the "Zulus") were grouped. However, these were often rural and far away from the larger cities which required the exploitation of a black labour force, which resulted in the creation of townships. Framed as providing an opportunity for "separate but equal development", the townships were instead employed to limit black movement in urban spaces and to provide unlimited labour to the capitalist machine. They are characterized by harsh socio-economic conditions, including unemployment, poor access to services, limited mobility, overcrowding and poor levels of education. They are still almost exclusively populated by black populations (including the category of coloured people, an apartheid-instituted racial grouping based on mixed ethnicity).

Several musics have originated in township spaces, notably for this paper being kwaito in the latter part of the 1980s and became immensely popular by the turn of the century, following the first democratic elections in 1994. These elections were the first time that the black majority of the country were granted the right to vote and saw the election of the first black president of the country, Nelson Mandela. This moment was characterized by a hopefulness for a brighter, freer and more equal future for the country. However, the clear disparities between racial groups that were instituted under the regime are still obvious today, almost 30 years later.

I have argued elsewhere that kwaito shaped the landscape for musical and cultural forms which followed[13]. I see forms such as amapiano and gqom as post-kwaito, as they emerge as the result of kwaito (and many other converging influences), take the shape of kwaito, but also respond to and change the form, creating something that is new and independent of the older music. Not only do amapiano and kwaito share a common township history and characteristics, but

10. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=PSVEoHVhLUI.

11. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=7PSyVSfMWHQ.

12. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dFVgBsjWgPk.

13. Dion Malcolm Eaby-Lomas, "Historicising gqom as a post-kwaito phenomenon," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 18, no. 1 (December 2021).

many of the issues that have been raised in the literature on kwaito remain relevant to discourse on amapiano.

Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom

This work is the fifth chapter of my masters thesis titled *"Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: Amapiano in Langa Township and the World"* (available on request). The work examines amapiano as a form of sensory experiences and how these allow youth to navigate the meanings of 'freedom' in a contemporary South Africa. Currently no academic literature exists on amapiano, and so I chose to begin my study by using kwaito's literature as a lens through which to study amapiano. Kwaito marked a particularly important point in the study of popular South African musics as it correlated with the significant history of the official end of apartheid. Kwaito, then, became a useful tool to examine the shifting experiences of South Africa's black township youth. While I discuss many of their common themes in my thesis, this chapter will examine the relationship between the local and the global and various layers in between.

Besides a thorough reading of the kwaito literature, my work is also informed by ethnographic engagement in Langa township including making music with local musicians and interviews; in-depth analysis of the music and its associated media (for example, music videos); and engaging with newspaper articles, social media posts, performances, interviews, documentaries, amongst others.

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?[14]

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[15]. However, he also confirms the international influences of American and European music[16]. 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"[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"[18]. Thus, the conversation also forms part of popular discourse surrounding kwaito. Take for example kwaito artist Zola 7's *Ghetto Fabulous*[19] which praises local township spaces or "Ase Mo States" (this is not the States) by kwaito group Brothers of Peace which criticizes South African hip hop artists for appropriating American forms[20]. 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[21].

Mhlambi (rightly) criticizes 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[22]. Xavier Livermon highlights earlier conversations about the local and global in kwaito literature in the introduction to his book *Kwaito Bodies: Remastering Space and Subjectivity in Post-Apartheid South Africa*[23]. Here he mentions an earlier "vindication" of kwaito, which emphasizes "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[24]. Livermon also points to a shift in scholarship which is "premised on revealing the multiple

14. Thokozani Mhlambi, "'Kwaitofabulous': The study of a South African urban genre," *Journal of the Musical Arts in Africa* 1, no. 1 (2004): 116.

15. Ibid., 125.

16. Ibid.

17. Gavin Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," *African Music* 8, no. 2 (2008): 17.

18. Pan (2000): 74, cited in Sharlene Swartz, "Is Kwaito South African Hip-hop? Why the Answer Matters and Who it Matters To," *The World of Music* 50, no 2 (2008).

19. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dcn3sgGlr-8.

20. Sabelo Mkhabela, "Hip-Hop & Kwaito's Long Love-Hate Relationship," *OkayAfrica*, April 20, 2017, https://www.okayafrica.com/south-african-hip-hop-kwaito-long-love-hate-relationship/

21. Ibid.

22. Mhlambi, "Kwaitofabulous", 117.

23. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 17.

24. Ibid.

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.[25] 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".[26]

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, fashion and dances revealed connections to wider, circulating forms of black styles and performance[27]. 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".[28] 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".[29]

How can we analyze 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"[30]. Rather than interpreting the global aspect of kwaito as the unfortunate result of Westernization or globalization, the author insists that this form of South African youth culture forms part of a wider, complex interplay of cross fertilizations[31]. Two important contributions of Afrodiasporic space[32], 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[33]. The latter

25. Ibid.

26. Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito", 80.

27. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 4.

28. Ibid., 17.

29. Boloka, "Cultural Studies," 97.

30. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 29.

31. Ibid.

32. 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).

33. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 30.

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.[34] 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.

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[35]. On the other hand, Steingo argues against a "frictionless musical flow"[36]. Using James Ferguson's work on finance[37], Steingo argues that notions of flow and scape fail to take into account the friction of physical and technological mobility[38] 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 circuit's scalar mappings".[39] He also notes that forms of offline distribution travel differently, in a "slowly expanding web".[40]

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. Rather than unpacking the local meanings of the form, 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 chapter) to demonstrate the circulation of Afrodiasporic youth cultures, specifically how amapiano has positioned itself within these contacts as a creative and

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid., 31

36. Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, 121.

37. James Ferguson (2006): 38, cited in Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," 138.

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

39. James Ferguson (2006): 42, cited in Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," 139.

40. Steingo, "Historicizing Kwaito," 139.

constitutive force. I posit that the genre's practitioners, similarly to those of kwaito although perhaps more outspokenly, have employed a "form of creative resistance to the forces of globalization"[41], while simultaneously using such forces to disseminate their music, reworking them to create local meaning, playing an 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 locals through various forms of communication, many of which have and continue to shape amapiano.

Under the headings which follow I will discuss various examples of contacts between amapiano produced and consumed in various locales in South Africa and the world in order 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 characterized 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 localized 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[42] and Steingo[43] 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, etc.) from

41. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 17.
42. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 118.
43. Steingo, *Kwaito's Promise*, 146.

cellphone to cellphone 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 characterized 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"[44]. 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 to find that a group dedicated to amapiano was now titled "Dee Mand Mack mixtapes" and accepted a music genre called "nostalgic". I was also 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 also 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 gives potential for intercontinental contact, the majority 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 monitoring the responses. I kept this informal as not to stand out in the group, but also 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. On the second point, most messages on these groups consist of general requests to send

44. Jacques Attali, *Noise: The Political Economy of Music* (University of Minnesota Press, 1985), 26.

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[45]) 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 to browse the internet. 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 cellphone 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, 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 though 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.

45. 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.).

Amapiano from the World: Afrodiasporic Influences and Intertextuality in "Banyana"

DJ Maporisa and Tyler ICU's song *Banyana*[46] 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 re-works the same material for its local and 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[47]. 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.[48] 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.[49]

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[50]. The song was then released alongside her own song *Curura*[51] 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.[52] 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 and notably in Europe, where the next important step of the trajectory toward *Banyana* takes place. *La Mezcla*[53] 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

46. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39xp8P40eyY.

47. "El Pescador," *Totó La Momposina Biography* (n.d.), https://www.totolamomposina.com/el-pescador/

48. Ibid.

49. "Biography," *Totó La Momposina Official Site* (n.d.), https://www.totolamomposina.com/about/.

50. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3wN5YcDTx0Y.

51. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tr6HhSgY9Es.

52. Ibid.

53. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=_Y7D8eUrjMc.

product. The song sampled the two aforementioned songs by Totó, *El Pescador* and *Curura*. On Cleis's remix, the Spanish vocals on *El Pescador* are sampled over the flute part of *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*[54], 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)*[55] from 2010. This title points to the intention behind the remix, to recontextualize 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 harmonize 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. The majority of 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. Soul Candi began as a record store in Johannesburg with the intention of finding the best house music for South African DJs.[56] [57] 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*[58] which makes use of Webster's chord progression

54. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HGA4RRLNxck.
55. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=nDEZU8tf0Cs.
56. Cebolenkosi Zuma, personal communication, August 31, 2022.
57. "Our History," *Soul Candi*, retrieved September 5, 2022, https://soulcandi.co.za/.
58. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=fIRXntOQlYw.

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*[59]. 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. It is also more prominent in the mix. The next reference 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 recontextualize 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 center.

Banyana does not directly sample any earlier material as Cleis and Webster do. Instead, it simply uses the melodies on new instruments and with new vocals and words. DJ Melzi's *La Melza*[60] 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*[61], 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 categorized as Afrodiasporic. The melodies themselves can be described as Afrodiasporic as they

59. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=39xp8P40eyY.

60. 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.

61. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=BbfpDiPWiGg.

emerged through contact between indigenous people groups and African slaves, with Totó La Momposina positioning 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[62]. 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 to distant 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 also 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 globalization 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 localizations. That said, the amapiano practitioners have still re-localized 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 also not as smooth and fluid as the above description makes it seem. Livermon notes the presence of misrecognition in Afrodiasporic movements[63]. Scrolling through the YouTube comments by a majority South African audience of Charles Webster's mix reveals that most fans would 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*, thus functioning as local cultural products which have generated local meaning.

62. Livermon, *Kwaito Bodies*, 30.
63. Ibid., 32.

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"[64], I will examine examples of amapiano's localizations 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

3 September 2022 marks the date for the second annual "AMA Fest". This festival, dedicated to amapiano, hosts a majority of 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 also 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 also perform, have created 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", aiming 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"[65]. The event will also includ 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"[66]. Here, it becomes clear that amapiano is also functioning in a broader, Afrodiasporic space. 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 local. In this sense, Boloka is right. Local culture moves

64. Boloka, "Cultural Studies," 97.

65. "About us," *AMA FEST 2022*, n.d., retrieved September 1, 2022, https://www.Amafestival.co.uk/about-us.

66. "AMA Fest Ticket Sales," *Dice*, n.d., retrieved September 1, 2022, https://dice.fm/event/5yp2l-ama-fest-2022-amafest2022-3rd-sep-south-of-england-showground-haywards-heath-tickets.

through the global to reach new locals. 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[67]. 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[68]. Valee Music describes her first exposure to amapiano through Scorpion King's 2020 song "Emcimbini".[69] 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.[70]

Here, Valee Music points to the various localized 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 also 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 electronic, youth-orientated music in the form of grime and lofi-minimalism, in a similar fashion to gqom using home computers with cracked (illegally downloaded) software[71]. 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[72]. DJ

67. Lee Nxumalo, "How Amapiano made its way across Africa and to the UK – Bubblegum Club," *Bubblegum Club – A Cultural Organisation Working across All Platforms and Mediums*, May 27, 2021, https://www.okayafrica.com/south-african-hip-hop-kwaito-long-love-hate-relationship/.

68. Ibid.

69. Valee Music, quoted in Ibid.

70. Ibid.

71. Marcus Barnes, "'It Speaks to an ancient history,': Why South Africa has the world's most exciting dance music," *The Guardian*, December 21, 2020, https://www.theguardian.com/music/2020/dec/21/south-africa-dance-music-afrohouse-gqom-amapiano.

72. Ibid.

Scratcha DVA also combined gqom and UK Funky, to create a "UK gqom"[73]. 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"[74], 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.

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 localized 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 genre is often cited as the most popular music form in Africa[75]. 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 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*[76] which use a synthesized 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*[77] 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 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

73. Ibid.

74. Ibid.

75. Jairus, "Top 10 Biggest Afrobeats Artist in the World," *School Drillers*, February 21, 2022, https://www.schooldrillers.com/biggest-afrobeats-artist/.

76. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=6xWd-SpMo0Y.

77. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bLF90M96m2Q.

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, 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 (and national) function as discussed in the chapter 3 and 4 of my thesis, they also 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 rumored to have been inspired by, or written for, amapiano artist DJ Uncle Waffles[78]. Rolling Stones author Mosi Reeves claims that the album "mines deep

78. Privie Kandi, "'Uncle Waffles Inspired Drake's New Album': Mzansi Reacts to Drake's 7th Studio Album, 'Honestly, Nevermind'," *Briefly*, June 17, 2022, https:// briefly.co.za/entertainment/music/129228-uncle-waffles-trends-after-amapiano-song-drakes-album-honestly-nevermind-he-is-trying-impress/.

house styles like amapiano and gqom".[79] A good example of this is the break at 0:48 of *Currents*[80] 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 genre), 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 (Yamnkela Kope), a producer in Langa who noted how Afropiano was more accessible to a wider audience because of its familiarity to Afrobeats, and thus I would suggest that the Nigerian sound may have been better suited to the collaboration.[81] However, this may also 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 also more likely pre-existing contacts between the older and more widely disseminated form and American hip hop and R&B artists. 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 of Bridges Academy expressed regret that others were profiting from the South African sound often without local practitioners being sufficiently remunerated[82]. 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

79. Mosi Reeves, "Drake's 'Sticky' Offers a Comforting Rap Respite on His Unexpected Dance Left Turn," *Rolling Stone*, June 17, 2022, https://www.rollingstone.com /music/music-features/drake-sticky-song-review-1369892/.

80. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1puG2H1QOBA.

81. Yamnkela Kope, personal communication, July 21, 2022.

82. Yamkela, personal communication, December 2, 2021.

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 Manxiwa (DJ Blackish) from Langa proudly shared DJ Maphorisa's earlier assertion that amapiano would become a widely recognized global genre.

The extent of amapiano's travels also seem to 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.[83]

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, etc.) 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 AMA Fest. 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 also demonstrate just how active the Afrodiasporic space is, with media travelling at disorientating rates across long distances.

83. Eaby-Lomas, Historicizing Gqom, 106.

Acknowledgments

This work is based on the research supported wholly by the National Research Foundation of South Africa (grant reference number MND200625536796) for my masters thesis (*Kwaito's Legacy of Aestheticizing Freedom: Amapiano in Langa Township and the World*) the support of whom I am thoroughly grateful for. I would also like to thank my supervisor, A/Prof. Sylvia Bruinders, whose help and expertise are invaluable. Thank you to Bridges for Music Academy for their aid regarding my fieldwork, especially head of operations and founding member Thulani Headman (DJ Fosta). A big thank you to the interlocutors and friends that I have had the pleasure of working with there, especially Azile Manxiwa (DJ Blackish) and Yamnkela Kope (Antii). Finally, a special thank you to the support of my parents, family and my wife Danielle, who has had to listen to the ideas above more often than anyone else and will still make time to hear it again.

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