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# The Nexus of Kwaito and Gender-Based Violence in South Africa: An Intersectional Analysis

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**Madimabe G Mapaya**

*University of Venda*

*\*Corresponding Email: Geoff.Mapaya@univen.ac.za*

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**Thulani G Zulu**

*University of Venda*

*Thulani.Zulu@univen.ac.za*

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## Abstract

Kwaito, a musical genre that emerged in South Africa during the 1990s, has played a crucial role in reflecting the aspirations, struggles, and identities of urban youth in post-apartheid South Africa. However, concerns have been raised about its potential correlation with the rise of gender-based violence (GBV). The genre's association with the gangster image and its overt glorification of machoism suggest that *kwaito* may have exacerbated GBV. Despite this seemingly compelling position, there are counter-narratives to consider. Is Kwaito vilified for promoting self-agency among black South African youth? Or is *kwaito* being unfairly targeted for highlighting deep-rooted societal issues? To examine these and other factors, this paper, the product of an empirical study that employed a mixture of visual content, gender-based violence, and critical discourse theories for analysis, aims to make sense of *kwaito's* imagery, lyrical content, cultural context, and social impact. While *kwaito* is seen to be influenced by Hip-Hop and *is'pantsula* lifestyles and cultures, both of which have a strong connection with gangsterism, it is important to

acknowledge the counter-narrative put forward by key figures within the *kwaito* music industry. This perspective too deserves to be recognised and accepted.

**Keywords:** *Kwaito, Gender-Based Violence, Bubble-Gum Music, Is'pantsula, Music Videos, Zola Township*

## Introduction

Kwaito is a cultural representation of the young people's perception of South Africa's transition from apartheid to democracy. It originated from township disco, commonly referred to as "bubble-gum music" (Steingo, 2008). Unlike the bubble-gum music, which was primarily owned and promoted by corporate recording companies, *kwaito* emerged as a self-actualisation phenomenon that celebrated self-agency, township lifestyle, and projected black youth affluence through various media channels. Influenced by the pantsula dance trend of the 1990s, *kwaito* is characterised by a dominant "singing" bass line, disco-inspired offbeat high-hats, and a steady four-four kick drum rhythm. Although dance remains the core element of *kwaito*, lyrical content takes a backseat, with the rhythmic grooves becoming more prominent. Initially, *kwaito* "chants" resembled nursery rhymes (Swartz, 2008), but later, with the emergence of model C schooled proponents, *kwaito* featured definable verses and choruses inspired largely by American hip-hop and rap music. Deeply ingrained in South African culture, *kwaito* blends its philosophy with American Hip-hop to define urban hustle.

The township of Zola in Soweto has been historically known as a haven for '*tsotsis*' (South African township thugs), and it is from here that many artists have emerged. While some associate *kwaito* with *ub'tsotsi* (thuggerism), others view it as a transformative force that redirects potential criminals towards more esteemed and socially acceptable music careers (Peterson, 2003). The latter perspective highlights *kwaito*'s redemptive power. However, concerns have been raised about the interactions between male and female artists, as well as the potential for violence inflicted by the lyrics, imagery, and videos associated with the music.

To fully comprehend the lifestyle of *kwaito* musicians, one must initially investigate *is'pantsula*, a subculture characterised by its street-smart fashion and distinctive dance style, which frequently evokes

connotations of *ubutsotsi*. Hence, the term "*ipantsula*" pertains to a young man who embodies this lifestyle, while "*umshoza*" serves as the female equivalent (Makukule, 2008). *Abomshoza*, the plural of *umshoza*, are often the girlfriends of *amapantsula*. They are members of the group and are frequently subjected to physical violence at the hands of their boyfriends. Notably, this persistent physical abuse is deemed by *abomshoza* as a demonstration of affection and care – a phenomenon that spreads beyond the border of South African townships (Beske, 2012; Sjödin, 2019). In their ownright, *abomshoza* can exhibit aggression and danger outside of the group, defying societal norms on female behavior and refusing to be victims of any situation (Gqola, 2000). The term "*amapantsula*" encompasses both *ipantsula* and *umshoza* and they engage in activities such as thuggery and partying. While some may abstain from criminal activities, *abomshoza* generally participate in crimes such as shoplifting, concealing stolen goods or providing cover for their delinquent boyfriends when they are being pursued by the police (Goeller, 2019).

Kwaito culture is widely believed to have evolved from *is'pantsula*, and it incorporates elements of American Hip-Hop culture. Both hip-hop and *is'pantsula* have been criticized for their generally degrading portrayal of women in their imagery. According to Ochola (2016), the lyrics in hip-hop have grown increasingly explicit in their references to drugs, sex, and violence. Women are often the targets of this derogatory bigotry. Similarly, controversies surround kwaito, where pornographic portrayals of women in music videos have become a standard form of representation (Blose, 2012). Despite such studies confirming the complicity of kwaito in the portrayal, treatment, and abuse of women, it is important to allow those within the kwaito music genre to express their views on the matter. Only when all these views are taken into account can we begin to theorize about the relationship between Kwaito and GBV.

## **Methodology**

This paper is grounded in a study that utilised a qualitative research methodology characterised by Nassaji (2020) as a naturalistic inquiry dealing with non-numerical data, to probe the connection between *Kwaito* and the upsurge in assaults on women in South Africa. The case study research design rested on a blend of visual content, gender-based

violence, and critical discourse theories for examination. This combination was selected due to its focus on the contextual and interpretive dimensions of research (Swedberg, 2020). This approach enabled comprehension of the underlying processes and developmental patterns. *Kwaito*, as a music genre, serves as an entry point into issues like fashion, gender, and violence. Intersectional music analysis examines the interactions of identity factors such as gender, race, and class within musical contexts, thus extending to genres like metal and *kwaito*, enriching our understanding of these styles through social and cultural identities (Burns, 2020). There were several ethical considerations that needed to be addressed. It was expected that artists, as well as their managers, would be diligent in preserving the positive image of *kwaito* artists, and this expectation was fulfilled. The research focused solely on artists whose legal matters had been settled and were accessible to the public.

### **Presentation of Selected Case Studies**

In the following segment, we provide primary data through four case studies, focusing on the background of specific *kwaito* artists, their lyrical content in relation to women, and the portrayal of women in their *kwaito* music videos.

#### **A concise overview of Zola 7 persona**

Bonginkosi Dlamini, who is better known as Zola 7, is a highly regarded artist in the *kwaito* genre. Born on April 24, 1977, in Zola, a township within Soweto, he has made a significant national impact with an impressive artistic portfolio, showcasing his talents as a musician, actor, television host, and community builder. Having been raised by a single mother, Zola 7 learned to survive by adapting to *ubotsotsi*. His role as an actor in the *Yizo Yizo 3* television drama brought him even more recognition, which subsequently spilled over into his music career (Ndlovu & Smith, 2011).

Zola 7's formative years were shaped by a socio-cultural context that had a profound impact on his artistic trajectory and worldview. His musical repertoire includes notable albums such as 'Umdlwembe' (2000) and

'Khokhovula' (2002), as well as acclaimed releases like 'Bhambatha' (2004), 'Impepho' (2009), 'Uyenzi' (2011), and 'Itathakuza' (2014). Each of these releases has made a lasting impression on South Africa's cultural landscape, garnering significant recognition.

Zola 7's work is a testament to his keen awareness of his surroundings. He utilises his success and platform to promote spiritual sensibility and redefine youth agency, steering it in a positive direction (Burger, 2012). In his personal life, Zola 7 has experienced challenges and setbacks, particularly with regards to drug addiction. Despite this, he continues to elicit sympathy from his fans who hope for his eventual resurgence.

When Zola 7 first entered the music industry, he was a young man from a township who demonstrated an exceptional ability to analyse and interpret his circumstances. His reflections on each phase of his life enabled him to embody both the *tsotsi* and the spiritually aware community activist who chewed matchsticks. Despite his elevated profile, he refrained from engaging in political activities, opting instead to use his platform to assist others. However, like many celebrities, the attention he received had negative consequences for his family environment.

## Song: Mdlwembe

### Lyrics

*Yewena!*

*Ungazongihlanyisa wena*

*Ungazongihlanyisa kanu uyabona*

*Kusuthi kumele wenz' into yakho!*

*Ngizakuphula ikhanda lora*

*Ngikushaya inhlalo baba*

*Phuu! guluva ngiyakukhalela*

*Bhade lami, wena ukhomba mina?*

*Bhade lami uzongihlanyisa*

*Kuyofa inzizwa kuyosala abafelokazi*

TKZ

*Ekasathani ekhosombeni ngithi khala mdlwembe*

*Ekasathani emakhoneni ngithi khala guluva*

*Uyangizwa bhade lami ublale wazi yamadoda ayipheli*

*Uyangizwa bhade lami blale wazi yamadoda ayipheli*

*Ekasathani ekhosombeni ngithi khala mdlwembe*

*Ekasathani emakhoneni ngithi khala guluva*

*Bhade lami ukhomba mina?*

*Ublale wazi yamadoda ayipheli*

*Bhade lami ukhomba mina?*

### Translation

Hey you!

Don't drive me mad

Don't drive me crazy, guy

Go ahead and do what you want to do!

I will smash your head

I will bang your head

Phuu! gangster I spit on you

You my friend, are you poking me?

My friend you will drive me crazy

A men will die, and widows will remain

At devil's place I say cries a stray doggie

At devil's place I say cries a gangster

You hear me my friend know than men's  
fight never ends

You hear me my friend know than men's  
fight never ends

At devil's place I say cries a stray doggie

At devil's place I say cries a gangster

You my friend, are you poking me?

Always remember men's fight never end

You my friend, are you poking me?

### *Lyrical analysis*

In this song, Zola 7 responds to a provocation from a fellow *tsotsi*. The language he uses reveals his immersion in the *tsotsi* world of aggression, present and perceived danger. For instance, he refers to the interlocutor as *bhade lami*, which may sarcastically mean "my friend," and also categorises the interlocutor as a *guluva* (gangster). He invites the provocateur to make good on their threat. He then cautions the provocateur that with their provoking, they are making him angry. He reminds them that men's fights are endless, and when they begin, it's a hellish experience, where crying stray dogs are cast out. By characterising the challenger as a stray puppy, the song casts Zola 7's violent demeanor. This strongly suggests that kwaito artists are imitating their American hip-hop counterparts, where the music primarily reflects gangsterism.

It is interesting to note that the *mdlwembe* song was used in Gavin Hood's movie *Tsotsi*. The movie is about a gangster who, in the process of hijacking a car, kills the woman driver and speeds off. As he drives the hijacked car, he realises that there was a bubbly infant in the back seat. Not knowing what to do, he involves his girlfriend in taking care of the baby. This process forces him to confront his own troubled past. Slowly, his perspective on life changes, marking the beginning of a process of self-reawakening and rediscovery.

### *Imagery analysis*

Zola 7's musical persona is intimately intertwined with the character he played in the Yozo Yizo 3 drama series and the music he provided for Gavin Hood's film "Tsotsi". The movie features a variety of musical arrangements to evoke a range of emotions. While many of these arrangements are orchestral in nature, *mdlwembe* stands out for its agitated feel and rhythmic turbulence. Notably, the actual *mdlwembe* music video includes a brief visual reference to the movie, but quickly transitions to showcase pantsula-inspired dance routines. Although the video captures the visual essence of a squatter camp in a typical township, there is no depiction of ubotsotsi. At 0.27 seconds into the video, Zola 7 makes use of the gunshot hand signal. This song portrays kwaito music as a form of violent gangster expression. The question arises: do those who dance to

it understand the message being conveyed? Additionally, are they motivated to join in this violent gangster activity solely based on the catchy bass and drum patterns?

### A concise overview of Mandoza's persona

Mandoza, who was born Mduduzi Edmund Tshabalala, was a prominent figure in the kwaito genre. He emerged as a member of a group called Chiskop in the late 1990s and later became a solo artist, becoming a central figure in the genre. Mandoza's music played a pivotal role in popularising kwaito in South Africa and globally. His repertoire of albums, including "Nkalakatha" (2000), which is recognised as one of the most influential kwaito albums in history, contributed to his rise to stardom. Characterised by its contagiously pulsating beats, memorable hooks, and lyrics that addressed societal challenges confronted by the urban youth of South Africa, Mandoza's music carved an indelible niche. He was known for his charismatic stage presence and strongman *tsotsi* image, which enabled him to forge connections with audiences, especially in township communities. Unlike some other kwaito artists, he did not rely on exploiting the female body to boost sales. His song "I'm Sorry" sheds light on the life of kwaito artists, and in this video, Mandoza put the *tsotsi* image in abeyance. Tragically, Mandoza succumbed to brain cancer in 2016 at the age of 38, leaving a lasting image of township musical excellence.

### Song: Sgelekeqe

#### Lyrics

*Kusazoshuba, bese masezi kushubele ungithi  
angikutsbelanga  
Ungenzi ngathi awazi, uyazi ukuthi ubani ophethe*

*Fede tsotsi mina ngiyi'sgelekeqe, non di las focus*

*I'm focus I'm super focus  
Lana kulele kunye, ngabekubili ngabe kuyavusana le  
phuphuku lezi aniwazi umthetho*

*Anaz ukusuka nesisiqalo nesiphetho*

*Kuseza okuningi, okwamnye anginawo amaningi*

#### Translation

It is still going to be bad, and don't say I  
didn't inform you  
Don't pretend as if you don't know who's in  
control here

Anyway *tsotsi*, I'm a thug, now a more  
focused thug  
I'm focused, I'm super focused  
You are stupid, if only you knew you'll wake  
up.

You don't know whose Alpha and Omega

A lot is coming, for now, I don't have a lot to  
say



*Ngoba nani nibanengi niba ningi nibuza okuningi*

That's because you many ask a lot

These lyrics portray Mandoza as a physically robust, potentially violent, and emotionally resilient *sgelekeqe* (a thug). Similar to most kwaito music, Mandoza's lyrics demand some level of interpretation from the audience. There was nothing comedic about his portrayal or music videos - he consistently projected an image of a serious and unyielding individual. It is possible that the "I am sorry" video may be the only instance where Mandoza sings without being preoccupied with his macho image.

### **A concise overview of Pitch Black Afro's persona**

Thulani Ngcobo, also known as Pitch Black Afro, was born in 1979 in Orlando, Soweto, Gauteng, South Africa. He grew up in a small house with a large family. Due to a lack of funds for further education, Pitch Black Afro could not pursue post-matric studies. Instead, he joined the Young Men's Christian Association (YMCA), a Christian youth development organisation meant to guide youth away from the streets. Pitch Black Afro aspired to become a *kwaito* artist and had a particular fondness for the music of American MCs like Redman. However, facing life's challenges and with little hope of breaking into the music industry, he turned to alcohol. He met fellow aspiring artist Catherine Modisane from Soweto, and the two later got married.

Pitch Black Afro relocated from Soweto to Hillbrow, Johannesburg's inner city, hoping to get closer to opportunities. He resided in what DJ Cleo, a chart-topping South African DJ described as a tiny room. DJ Cleo took him under his wing and began working on his music. In 2004, Pitch Black Afro released an album titled "*Styling Gel*," which featured the hit song "*Mantofontofo*." The album propelled him to stardom. "*Styling Gel*" was followed by "*Split Endz*" in 2006 and "*Nya Nya*" in 2008. From airplay and public appearances, one would assume that he was making a lot of money. A retired record company executive Sechele (personal communication, September 26, 2023), advises, being on the television screen and on the radio does not necessarily equate to making money. This reality is one major factor that is driving musicians towards self-destruction.

Very few recording musicians can sustain public interest beyond the third album. As his popularity waned, Pitch Black's problems compounded, and he turned to heavy drinking. In 2005, he set fire to a

hotel room in Botswana, and in another incident, he had a confrontation with security guards, which led to his arrest. In 2006, he assaulted one of his fans and smashed a retail store window at a mall. As his situation deteriorated, he moved back to his mother's house and eventually lost performance bookings due to his attitude. Drinking and pressure affected his family, which became violent. He was later arrested for the murder of his wife.

### Song: Mantofotofo

#### Lyrics

*Tofotofo*

*Tofotofo*

*Tofotofo*

*Tofotofo*

*Ngifuna icherry emantofotofo*

*Enama lips antofotofo*

*Enomzimba ontofotofo*

*Ngifun'ikari entofotofo*

*Ngifuna idladl' elitofotofo*

*Yonke'int'ibe ntofotofo*

*Nempilo etofotofo*

#### Translation

Tofotofo

Tofotofo

Tofotofo

Tofotofo

I was a soft/spongy girlfriend

She should have soft lips

She should have a soft body

I want a nice car

I want a lovely house

Everything should be nice

Even a nice life

Hailing from Olando in Soweto, Pitch Black Afro's music has a streak of aspiration to move out of poverty and to craft a better life for himself. In this song, '*mtofotofo*', Pitch Black Afro declares his aspiration for nice things, starting with a beautiful girlfriend with beautiful lips and body. He wants a nice car and a lovely house. He wishes to have everything excellent and beautiful. He wants a nice life. Interestingly, he is detailed in describing his aspirant girlfriend's features but does not elaborate when it comes to other objects.

The term "*mtofotofo*" loosely describes something soft, and that feels good when handled. It may also mean *nice* or *beautiful* in general. In the video, Pitch Black symbolically rises from a grave, with half-naked girls dancing behind him. The grave could symbolise his difficult past. Few seconds into the video, Pitch Black Afro is surrounded by girls in shorts and bikini and is in a buss travelling. The party mood is evidently present. The appearance of the half-naked and appealing girls matches the lyrics by Pitch Black where he utters, "*ngifuna ucheri omtofotofo*" (I want a girlfriend with a beautiful body), "*onamahips antofotofo*" (with soft hips), "*namabele antofotofo*" (and beautiful breasts). Like other videos in this

discussion, this shows a party setup where men dance with women and hold them closer by their waists. Again, males are fully dressed in the video, while women are half-naked (Mtengwa, 2019). When Pitch Black takes his turn rapping in the video, he can be seen sitting between a girl's legs while holding her by the waist. As it is a normal situation, the girls do not utter a single word in the video. This gives the impression that such girls are objects for marketing the video (Haupt, 2005).

### **A concise overview of Dr Mageu's persona**

Ignatius Ntshebele, known as Dr. Mageu, was a notable South African *kwaito* artist whose township youth demeanor was profound. He was loud aggressive and always disparaging girls who attended model C schools (Ndabeni & Mthembu, 2018). His moniker, blending academic achievement with a humble maize beverage associated with the underprivileged in black South African society, exemplified his humour and relatability. Rooted in his upbringing, his 'thuggish' image endeared him to the youth, especially upon his integration into TKZee in 1999, releasing the thematic "Gazz" album. "Otlafella kae" garnered further fame, targeting TKZee's detractors. Dr. Mageu's voice, bold and provocative, solidified his imposing presence. Collaborating with Brother of Peace, "Egoli" drew from a personal robbery, emphasising resourcefulness amid adversity and cautioning against reckless spending on alcohol. "*Izinja nemigodoyi*" explored authenticity versus pretence, resonating profoundly with his audience. Notably, amidst triumphs like "Fiasco," his authenticity remained resolute. Tragically, his life was cut short in 2008 while serving a prison sentence for rape.

Dr Mageu does not have a music video of his own. His music appears in mp3 format, with only the CD cover providing still images. In his appearance in the TKZee 'Fiasco' song video, Dr Mageu is differently presented as an unrefined misfit. While other TKZee members appear decently dressed and mentioning Jehovah, the beach party is using half Naked women to accentuate opulence of the group. Other TKZee members are decently, with Kabelo wearing a tie. The song's general theme is that of gratitude as the group thanks to God for their successes. Dr. Mageu goes against the script, using unsavoury and denigrating language towards women who are dancing around men. Dr Mageu shouts;

*Shake isbunu sakho, umzimba wakho, konke okwakho....*  
Shake your butt, your body, and everything you have...

It is unpalatable for one to refer to a woman's body parts in the manner Dr. Mageu does. This clearly shows how little he regards women; and that the entire TKZee sanctioned such a scene in their video, makes them complicit in this scant regard for the dignity of women.

## Discussion

A musician's career typically progresses through three distinct phases: the thrilling climb to fame, the peak of recognition, and the post-fame reality check. The artist's ability to navigate these stages depends on various factors. In this context, we argue that the artist's family, social, and cultural backgrounds are critical for the maintaining success. These factors form the foundation for the artist's overall preparedness and the tools they possess to deal with the inevitable ups and downs of the music industry.

### Pre-fame phase

Sloboda (1991) asserts that a person's upbringing and family environment influence their capacity to attain expected achievements across various occupations and fields. The intricate play of family and cultural factors profoundly shapes the individual's behavioural tendencies (Howe & Sloboda, 1991). Thus, families and cultures act as crucibles of values, beliefs and social norms that shape an individual's work ethic, aspirations, and aptitude towards life. So, *kwaito* artists must first be understood from this foundational perspective. Notably, pioneers of *kwaito* music belong to a generation that directly experienced the struggle against apartheid or lived through the oppressive apartheid era, imbibing the dreaded Bantu Education. Their music, therefore, reflects the societal context in which they grew up. Author Mafokate's '[d]on't call me kaffir' is one such contextually reflective song. Coming from Zola township, *kwaito* artists grow in the survival of the fittest environment. Being streetwise is a mark of belonging.

In addition to this experience, a significant political and cultural shift occurred in the post-1994 era when *kwaito* artists with backgrounds in township or *tsotsi* lifestyles began encountering peers who attend

previously whites-only schools, famously categorised as model C (Chisholm, 2005; Maile, 2004). It was no fluke that the inception of Yfm, while still giving kwaito the prominence it enjoyed, significantly injected the hip-hop linguistic focus (Pietilä, 2013). Pitch Black Afro and Zola 7 would fall in this category even though their kind of rap is delivered in township Zulu. This nexus expanded *kwaito* music's appeal, bridging diverse backgrounds and experiences. So, to understand a typical *kwaito* artist's social disposition, one must have insight into their upbringing within familial and socio-political environments. Being cognisant of the historical timeline could explain many things we see happening to *kwaito* artists.

### **The stardom crest**

According to Sechele (personal communication, September 26, 2023), recording companies scout for 'talent' and typically offer them a three-year contract renewable with a modest royalty percentage of 6 up to 12 percent, depending on the profile and the potential of the artist. During this period, the artist must release three albums annually, and hopefully break even insofar as the costs are concerned. Shortly after the signing ceremony, the company's marketing machinery kicks in with the explicit mandate to generate excitement around the album (Chertkow & Feehan, 2014). As an integral part of the marketing strategy, the artist is meticulously curated and presented to the public as an epitome of refinement and affluence. The artist must embody a musical trajectory that resonates with those harbouring ambitions of prosperity (Hutchison et al., 2012; Weissman, 2015). Transitioning from striving for recognition, to securing a recording contract and eventually mingling with people once only read about in newspapers and local magazines, happens too abruptly for many. Achieving all these bestows upon the *kwaito* artist, what Louis Renza (2017:55) regards as the coveted media-fashioned trifecta of "fame, fortune, and sex".

Signing with a record company signifies a moment of transformative significance. At this juncture, the freshly signed artist may potentially find themselves inundated with offers from various quarters. In accordance with standard industry practice, the record company advances substantial sums of money against future royalties, with the expectation of recouping it once the artist enters high rotation in sales and airplay (Frenneaux, 2023). Most artists use the money to procure houses or apartments and

almost without fail, purchase a vehicle; all in the top end of their earning bracket. For the first time in their life, an artist wakes up to a life of a celebrity, attracting new advisers and privileges that were previously unimaginable. Suddenly, they are constantly hosting or being invited to parties. Spending money, drinks, and drugs become normalised. Stunning and trendy girls are now accessible and willing to offer drugs and sex (Harrison & Hughes, 2017). As Sechele narrates, all manner of relationships is formed in this false secure environment. Before they know it, the artist is entangled in undesirable encounters, sometimes engaging in sex with underage girls; or doing drugs, often under pressure of trying to fit in.

### Drug and substance use

The music industry is rumoured to be infested with drug pushers and dealers who are ready to pounce, especially on rookie artists. Firstly, many talented artists are introverts but must be switched on to face audiences.

Nedelcut, Leucuta, and Dumitrascu, (2018) acknowledge that music performance is linked to higher levels of anxiety than the general population, and music students experience greater anxiety than trained musicians. The unwritten rule is that for one to muster the courage and enhance stage performances, they need a drug of some kind. Secondly, at the height of their career, most artists face a gruelling schedule of performances and other promotional tours. To cope, most artists resort to drugs. Thirdly, for a young artist who has just joined a record stable, they have little to no choice but to join and emulate what their peers or idols are already doing. The chairperson of World Changers Candidates, Lucas Mahlakgane (personal communication, September 26, 2023), highlights the pressure individuals endure to be part of a group or the music industry. He contends, what occurs within the music industry is not an isolated phenomenon. In cases where talent and financial influence play crucial roles in career management, the talented individual may occasionally prove challenging to manage (Woody, 2019). This continues until they come to understand that all endeavours are aimed at safeguarding them from harm, including the potential risks associated with substance abuse. Unfortunately, many do not realise this point until it is too late.

The working environment of musicians is also a place where alcohol is readily available. Often, these are also avenues where drug dealers push sales of their merchandise (Harrison & Hughes, 2017). In sum, taking drugs starts as an innocent experiment, until it is normalised. Beyond a certain point, it becomes an addiction without which the artist cannot honour their commitments, let alone mount a respectable music performance. The reality is very few artists have been taught about the dangers of using drugs. Even when their situation deteriorates into serious mental health issues, they remain oblivious to the fact.

#### Sexual relationship challenges

With fame comes a sudden influx of attention and adoration from fans. Not all of this is well-meaning. While some see the new artist as a potential life partner, others view them as potential drug-consuming clients (Griffin, 1991). This kind of attention makes it hard to know who to trust. Most artists speak about an unabating loneliness even in the presence of friends and colleagues (Griffith, 2022). In cases where the new artist had a blossoming love relationship, the sudden attention from glamorous girls has the power to defocus the artist and destroy the relationship.

As much as maintaining current relationships is challenging, so is the prospect of finding new love. Too many girls are available, but their motives are hidden. So, the lack of trust in those ones is constantly working with adds to the stress levels, which eventually lead to carefree sexual engagements. A star musician will always find it hard to maintain a private life. With so many people paying attention, and with the advancement of social media, privacy becomes a pricey commodity. One must isolate themselves and maintain safe spaces where they can be their old self.

This is just a summary of the challenges that face a newly rising artist. At the beginning of their careers, most artists do not have time to pause and wonder how to take control of their lives. It is only when fame and when the income takes a dive that artists start accusing all and sundry for their career recklessness. Sechele confirms that these challenges coincide with the decline of the artist's popularity and, by extension, revenue.

### **The post-fame stress**

As the adage goes, all good things eventually reach their conclusion. This notion holds particularly significant implications for South African

artists, as their contractual arrangements with record companies play a pivotal role in shaping and sustaining the artist's creative evolution and professional path. This impact extends beyond their artistic output, influencing their financial stability and artistic autonomy. Often, an artist's prominence is contingent on support from the recording company. Outside of this contractual obligation, most artists struggle to maintain their profile and may consequently dwindle into obscurity.

To remain relevant, some artists either establish their own labels or sign with independent record labels, hoping for better compensation and overall treatment. The reality is that once musical freshness is expended, catching the next wave becomes nearly impossible as it seldom arrives. These endeavours can be seen as the final efforts of a fading era. Meanwhile, newer genres, media personnel, platforms, and artists emerge, sealing the fate of any potential artistic rebirth.

### **Financial challenges**

The life of a *kwaito* star is reflected in their relationship with money, how they deal with drugs, and how they handle sexual advances and relationships. Financial challenges for a young artist who has just signed their first record deal can vary depending on the nature of the contract. The South African experience is that all too often, artists hardly consider these aspects that would impact their finances and general career prospects. In the euphoria of securing a record deal, they, against better judgement, sign without thorough consultation and engagement with a resource person such as a music industry lawyer.

After signing the contract, the record company is likely to make an advance payment option available for them to finance their new expensive lifestyle. The advance is often used to move out of the township into an upmarket apartment or house. Coupled with the acquisition of a place of abode, the artist would buy an expensive car. Both the car and the house should reflect their newly found wealth. That these allowances are taken against future royalties is a pointless appreciated by rookie artists. The danger of this arrangement is that if, at the end of the contract, the artist has not generated enough revenue through royalties to settle the expended advance funds, they end up owing the record company. Also, most young artists do not take the involvement of the financial planner seriously until it is too late.



Perhaps conspicuous in the matter of tax. Without a financial adviser, many South African artists have proceeded with financial transactions oblivious to the obligation to pay tax. Most have thus found themselves owing the taxman and have had to pay under uncomfortable circumstances. At this point, they no longer have the size of income that can settle outstanding tax obligations.

### **Connection between *kwaito* music with the spate of gender-based violence**

Certain kwaito performers may employ derogatory lyrics towards women or utilize women's bodies in a misogynistic manner within their music videos, however, there is no apparent association between kwaito music and gender-based violence (GBV). Additionally, the fact that the three sampled artists possess isiZulu surnames does not suggest that they are inclined towards committing GBV. Furthermore, as kwaito originates from Soweto, especially Zola, it would be anticipated that a connection between kwaito and GBV would reflect higher incidents of GBV in the township on a national scale.

Are women bothered by their depiction in *kwaito* music videos? Committing a kwaito musician to an academic interview is typically a challenging endeavour. According to Cooper and Wills (1989), this difficulty arises due to factors such as performance anxiety, work-related stress, and concerns regarding career development. Moreover, the scarcity of female artists who fit the label further exacerbates the issue. Unfortunately, most of the individuals who appear in videos are groupies who are content with being extras in a video shoot (Fitts, 2008). Although women are cognisant of the derogatory lyrical content and how their bodies are exploited to market the music through videos, they seem to be indifferent to this issue.

Nevertheless, the perception of women in the South African music genre of Kwaito is dual in nature, contingent upon their position within the music. Blose (2012) and Onanuga (2017) argue that women in Kwaito are often objectified and depicted in a misogynistic manner. For example, in the TKZEE video, women such as Dr. Mageu are shown wearing bikinis. At the same time, the male members of the group are dressed in stylish attire, and Dr's instruction to "shake your butt" is overtly sexualised. Conversely, Impey (2001; 2012) suggests that women can be empowered within Kwaito, serving as the genre's leading artists.

Artists such as Lebo Mathosa, Thandiswa Maswai, Nhlanhla Nciza, and Mshoza exemplify empowered women as industry leaders. Additionally, some studies indicate that young Black women use popular culture to negotiate their social existence and express independence and agency (Emerson, 2002).

### Violence against women in the *kwaito* music space

Before we delve into the issue of violence against women within the *kwaito* music spaces, it is crucial to acknowledge that *kwaito* artists are, first and foremost, adults who grew up within families and communities in black South Africa. To comprehend violence within black South African communities, it is also imperative to recognise that apartheid inflicted sustained violence against black people, with males often bearing the brunt. Brutalised men would find solace in drinking. Once drunk, they will, in turn, subject their spouses and children to domestic violence, as they want to affirm their battered masculinity. As oppressed people, black men have learnt to live with violence (Peterson, 2003), thus normalising it. This dynamic has been common until the dawn of democracy, where individual rights were confirmed by the new constitution.

Depending on their family backgrounds and communal environments, individuals carry this burden wherever they go. A registered counsellor, Khuliso Muthivhi (K. Muthivhi, personal communication, September 22, 2023), contends that in most homesteads, violence is normalised. If children grow up witnessing their father violently abusing their mother and others, such behaviour becomes normalised for them. When they encounter challenges in the future, resorting to violence is their normal response. In *tsotsi* relationships, violence and danger are omnipresent. Girlfriends of these *tsotsis* adapt to the perilous lifestyle that defines their partners. In extreme cases, they may normalise violence to an extent if their men do not beat them up, it signifies a lack of love or that something is amiss on that eventless day.

As alluded to earlier, *kwaito* artists come from families and communities, and their realities are expressively informed by those environments. But is the propensity for violence heightened in the *kwaito* spaces? As delimitation, this research did not go as far as probing the family backgrounds of the artists of interest. For this reason, the family factor is conveniently omitted. Instead, the environment, as represented

by the locale, forms a point of departure. In equal terms, the environment also encompasses the community of *kwaito* artists affectionally referred to as the *kwaito* nation (Pietilä, 2013; Rapoo, 2013).

When black people were violently removed from Sophiatown and dumped into what is today known as Soweto, the *tsotsis* also relocated. Zola is a township in Soweto, notorious for overt streetwise and *tsotsi* lifestyle (Rapule, 2005). So prevalent is the *tsotsi* lifestyle in Zola to an extent that by domiciling there, presents any aspirant *kwaito* artists a stage to be heard. A strong contingent of *kwaito* artists rallied behind the hustling and *tsotsi* nature of this location to prop up their relevance in the *kwaito* music genre.

*Is'pantsula*, the black youth lifestyle of the 1980s represents the re-emergence of the 1950s gangsterism. As a type of gangster existential condition, *is'pantsula* is inherently violent. It follows then that its soundtrack, *kwaito*, must reflect gangsterism. Tanja Bosch (2006) submits that *kwaito* frequently romanticises violence, even within the music industry. So, given the communal lifestyle that gave rise to *kwaito*, it is fathomable that some form of gender violence do shadow *kwaito* artists. This is also evident in the conception of lyrics and the *kwaito*-like vocal delivery styles of artists such as Mendoza, Mapaputsi and Dr Mageu; rough and forceful. Afterall, to purge the gangster image from *kwaito* will be tantamount to emasculating the genre.

### **Can *kwaito* serve the agenda of eradication GBV?**

The answer is no. Firstly, *kwaito* is what it is because of the machoism involved. It will be un-*kwaito*-like to focus on societal issues away from the gangsterism framework. As Kabelo Mabalané's hit song '*Pantsula 4 Life*' suggest, it will be difficult for *lepanstula* to focus elsewhere other than the gangster competitive rage-like deliveries. Few *kwaito* artists managed to get out of the mould. Zola, for instance, released compassionate songs such as '*Don't Cry*', '*Don't believe a word they say*', '*Somlinda ngengoma*'. Secondly, the *kwaito* era is well and truly passed. As such it can no longer be a viable option to campaign against women abuse. The Gen Z, youth born in the between year 1996-2012, do not relate with *kwaito* and yet they are bearing the brant of GBV. Thirdly, it being a genre rooted in Zola makes it unsustainable in other areas. Its development is thus arrested and condemned into the Zola-Soweto proverbial imprisonment. Only Durban has provided a counterbalance to Zola originated *kwaito*

thrust. Otherwise, the trendy youth musical taste is moving from province to province. After the kwaito era, the North-West province emerged as the national music flavour through what they termed *mostvako*, hip-hop based on vernacular lyrical prowess.

## Conclusion

The fact that kwaito music has captivated the imaginations of black youth in South Africa and that the driving force behind it has been *is'pantsula* is a point well explored in academic literature and has become a well-known urban legend. It is widely accepted that machoism and bullying are the defining characteristics of *is'pantsula*, and by extension kwaito. However, there is no conclusive evidence that links kwaito to GBV. Furthermore, by examining the narratives and experiences of kwaito musicians, we gain a deep understanding of the various stages they go through on their journey to fame. These stages reveal a universal story of ambition, triumph, and the enduring legacy of musical artistry that feeds from the gangster and misogynist enigma. It is also plausible that because of the limelight, the purported connection between kwaito and GBV is, in fact, omnipresent in societies.

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