

# Townships and Kwaito culture

## 1 Townships aren't what they used to be

Before you start: Make a list of the things you know about South African townships.

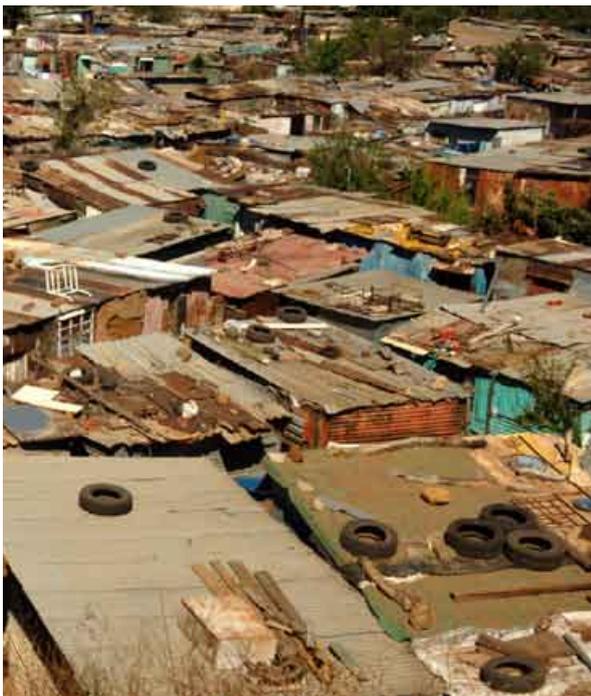
Kwaito music developed in the late 1990s in Johannesburg. It is a uniquely South African music that can be described as a mixture of disco, hip-hop, R&B, traditional African percussion, and a special African feeling for rhythm.

Ever since then, it has become *the* township music that very few teenagers don't identify with. The name comes from the Afrikaans word *kwaai* meaning 'angry' and which in South African slang now means 'cool'. People from South Africa speak of the teenagers' 'Kwaito culture'. But that is difficult to nail down: It is a culture about being yourself, about peace and love, but also about protest.

Before Nelson Mandela became the first black president of South Africa in 1994, the townships were created for non-whites by the white Apartheid government. Townships were built on the edges of the cities. Whoever lived there was poor. There was a terrible amount of crime. Black schools there were "sites of despair and demoralization", as the pro-ANC newspaper *New Nation* wrote in 1991. In the 1990s and well after 2000, South Africa went through a youth crisis (more than 50 % of the population are under 20). The youth crisis is not over, as

massive township protest demonstrations since April 2009 have shown – especially the large protest demonstrations of July and October 2009. The township crowds demanded improved sanitation, electricity, and better housing in the townships. Due to corruption and the economic crisis of 2008/2009, President Jacob Zuma is having a hard time fulfilling his promise to change the lives of all South Africans for the better.

But things are changing. Most township homes have electricity now. Millionaires live in some parts of the townships. The website *www.SowetoRocks.com* writes that "... yesterday Soweto was a township. Today Soweto has so much to offer including malls, clubs, restaurants, businesses, stadiums, B&Bs, hospitals, libraries, museums, picnic parks and more. Damn, we even have a huge Golf Country Club!" The founder of *www.SowetoRocks.com*, Lebo Motshegoa, says: "Soweto is not a township." Indeed, it looks as though Soweto is becoming a regular suburb where people *want* to live, and where many rich and middle class people in fact do live now. The townships are already major tourist attractions.



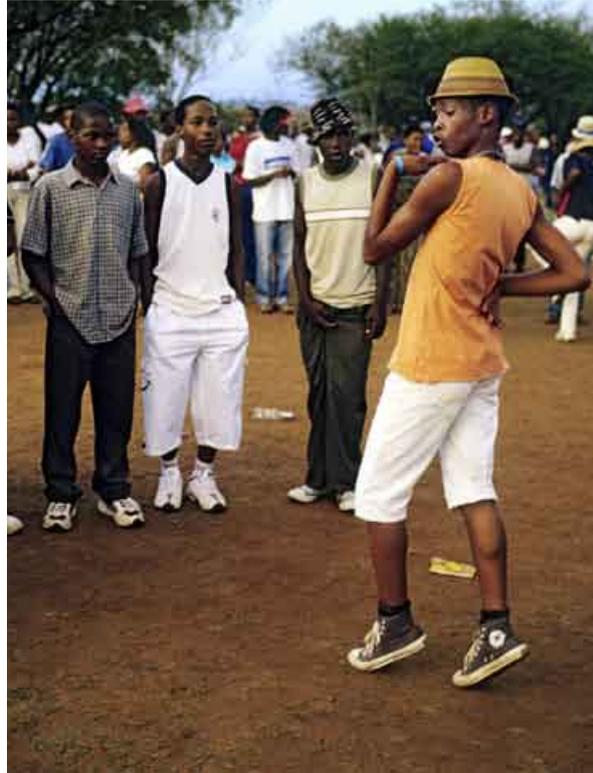
Soweto then ...



... and now

An exciting Kwaito culture has gradually developed. It is so dynamic that it is hard to find a way of describing it. South African township teenagers are perhaps even more different from each other than teenagers in other countries. This proves how dynamic Kwaito culture is. In the townships you will find the following:

- **'Mommy's babies'** are teenagers, both boys and girls, go to school, are good students, do not drink or use drugs, and stay off the streets. They are the least 'Kwaito' of all the sub-groups.
- **'Right ones'** are part of Kwaito culture but reject the 'wrong' sides of it. They go to school, too, and want a good future with a job, house and car. They aren't as 'uncool' as the Mommy's babies. Some of them drink and experiment with drugs, but in the end often decide that education is the best guarantee for a good future.
- **'Kasi boys and girls'** are in and out of school and can sometimes commit small crimes such as stealing mobiles. They usually drink, and some girls become pregnant as part of a 'fashion'. They often try to reform their ways. Whether they are successful or not is another story.
- **'Skollies'** or **'gangsters'** are almost always out of school and rule the streets at night. Some are members of gangs and many sell drugs, hijack cars, and break into houses. They usually drink and take drugs.



Kwaito dancing in the Meadlowlands section of Soweto

Most teenagers in the old townships showed special respect for their hard-working mothers. Their example is a model for the current generation of township teenagers to stay out of trouble, and to become 'right ones'. Despite the high crime rates in townships, more and more teenagers are trying to become – or to stay – right ones.

## 2 Second thoughts

a) Add to your list from exercise 1: What do you know about South African townships now?

b) Why do you think South African township teenagers have so many different lifestyles?

a) Not only poor people live in townships now. Rich people live there, too. Townships like Soweto offer clubs, restaurants, museums, libraries etc. There are many different kinds of lifestyles among young people there. Townships have also become major tourist attractions.

b) South African society today and especially Kwaito culture are very dynamic. Kwaito means different things to different people, and so teenagers have many different lifestyles to choose from. Also, poverty is still a major problem in South Africa, and that is the reason for Kasi boys and girls and for Skollies.

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Lösungsvorschläge