



Towards a Utilitarian African Musicology

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Abstract

This article argues for the restructuring of African musicology based on utilitarian principles, prioritising the material well-being of indigenous practitioners. Moving beyond ethnomusicological frameworks and decolonial theory, it explores how current academic approaches perpetuate practitioners' impoverishment while cultural wealth remains unconverted to economic prosperity. The argument proceeds by examining African musicology's utilitarian potential to generate economic value, the emancipatory promise of transforming practitioners from informants to empowered authorities, and the need for new frameworks to understand contemporary African musical innovation. Drawing on existing scholarship, this article demonstrates system failures by analysing research from Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa while identifying transformation possibilities. Examining traditional economic models, digital platform challenges, and contemporary genres establishes a framework for African musicology serving African communities rather than external institutions. The goal is a practical transformation that enables cultural practitioners to achieve economic security and professional recognition comparable to other skilled professionals.

Introduction

Gabriel Thuku Kimani, in several consultative debates, identifies three tyrants responsible for Africa's current state: the military honcho, the politician, and the scholar. This characterisation, which we have developed further in collaborative work (Kimani & Mapaya, 2025), haunts us in African musicology, as it suggests our direct complicity in the continent's ongoing challenges. These three figures, entrusted with liberating Africa from colonial vestiges, instead became impostors who perpetuated tyranny and colonial mentalities. According to this framework, they arrogated power over African people while failing in their fundamental mission of liberation. Contemporary scholars such as Ayorinde (2018) echo this concern, arguing that music scholarship must serve "social, cultural and economic development in Africa" rather than perpetuating academic extractivism. Despite decades of research, the persistence of practitioner poverty confirms the indictment of academic complicity. We must therefore confront our role as the third tyrant and transform our scholarship from extraction to empowerment.

African musicology has not meaningfully transformed the continent. This failure manifests as a disconnect between research outputs and the persistent poverty of musical practitioners (Yende, 2024). While scholars publish prolifically in journals, the master drummers and praise singers they study struggle to survive. Mugovhani and Nawa (2019) document the socio-economic challenges facing indigenous musicians in South Africa through their case study of Venda-based musician Vho-Ntshengedzeni Mamphodo, revealing how celebrated traditional musicians face exploitation and poverty that becomes apparent after death. Wanyama (2006) characterises African music education as an "unexploited goldmine," highlighting the gap between potential and reality. This contradiction, the



cultural wealth alongside practitioner poverty, represents an academic failure and moral crisis that demands a revolutionary response.

This article proposes a utilitarian African musicology that transforms cultural resources into economic wealth. Such a musicology moves beyond Western-serving scholarship to create tangible benefits for African communities. The argument proceeds through three interconnected dimensions: the utilitarian potential to generate wealth from musical knowledge, the emancipatory promise to uplift practitioners from poverty, and the capacity to frame and monetise contemporary genres. This transformation requires rejecting both ethnomusicological frameworks that exoticise African music and decolonial theories that perpetuate the victimhood of Africans. At the African Art Music Symposium at Mountain Top University, organised by Oladele Ayorinde, I challenged my colleagues to consider their contribution to this transformation. Some scholars have already demonstrated their commitment to these principles through direct financial support for composers, suggesting broader institutional possibilities. This article elaborates on this challenge within a comprehensive framework of systematic change.

Method

This study employs a critical theoretical analysis using Mill's (1861) utilitarian principle of the greatest good, adapted to prioritise African musical practitioners' material well-being over academic recognition. This research synthesises ethnomusicological studies, decolonial theory, and economic analyses of cultural practice, focusing on Nigeria, Kenya, and South Africa as case studies. Through discourse analysis, this study examines how these frameworks position African practitioners within academic and economic systems, identifying extraction patterns rather than empowerment. The analysis draws on Mugovhani and Nawa's documentation of socio-economic challenges facing Venda musicians, Ayorinde's research on music and social transformation, and examines contemporary genres including Afrobeats, Amapiano, and Gengetone through aesthetic and economic lenses to understand how innovation challenges the academic frameworks. The methodology combines theoretical insights and case findings to develop a utilitarian African musicology framework, establishing transformation metrics and institutional change pathways while acknowledging limitations, including the reliance on predominantly English-language academic sources rather than original fieldwork in indigenous languages. Paperpal AI was used to edit the initial language

Discussion

Beyond Ethnomusicology and Decolonial Obsession

Ethnomusicology fundamentally misrepresents African music through an exotic gaze. This discipline, emerging from colonial encounters, positions African music as "ethnic" curiosity while European music remains unmarked as simply "music." Contemporary scholarship confirms that ethnomusicology's reliance on European knowledge systems has historically obscured the complexities of other musical traditions (Kidula, 2006). Agawu (2014) demonstrates how this framework reduces sophisticated African musical systems to objects of study rather than recognising them as complex philosophical and economic systems. The consequences extend beyond academic categorisation to material reality: practitioners become "informants" providing data while researchers become "experts" building careers (Kidula, 2006). This perverse inversion ensures that those who create and maintain musical traditions remain impoverished, while those who study them achieve professional success. Even progressive attempts like Omojola's (2009) "creative ethnomusicology" remain trapped within Western institutional validation. Some scholars attempt to break free through direct action, commissioning works, paying composers, and building repertoire; however, these efforts occur within institutions still structured by colonial hierarchies. Thus, the ethnomusicological project perpetuates colonial extraction under the guise of cultural preservation.



Despite its liberatory rhetoric, decolonial theory has become what I term a "pacifier" that disables African agency (Taiwo, 2022). This framework keeps African scholars focused on analysing colonial damage rather than building alternatives (Ayorinde, 2021). While the destruction of colonialism was real and lasting, an obsessive focus on decolonial critique prevents constructive action. We expend enormous intellectual energy documenting oppression while our musicians starve to death. Recent critiques reveal this paralysis: scholars have spent decades theorising decolonisation while communities lack basic musical infrastructure (Netshivhambe, 2025; Taiwo, 2022). The decolonial obsession creates comfortable academic careers built on analysing victimhood rather than creating solutions to the problem. We become "students of our oppression" rather than "architects of our freedom." This theoretical paralysis must end if African musicology is to serve a useful purpose beyond academic self-perpetuation.

The Utilitarian Potential of African Musicology

Utilitarian African musicology prioritises practical benefits over theory, viewing music as an economic asset (Mill, 1861). This addresses the failure to convert cultural wealth into economic value, evidenced by African musicians' poverty despite rich musical heritage (Wanyama, 2006). Ayodele and Doe (2018) argue that African music scholarship should serve "social and economic development" rather than abstract theorisation (Nzewi, 2007). This framework transforms music from heritage into an economic driver. African musical philosophy contains systems for knowledge production and economic exchange, undervalued by Western scholarship. These indigenous forms of craftwork that present wealth generation models, where the guild system enables knowledge transfer through apprenticeships, creating sustainable cultural economies (Nzewi, 2007). Patronage networks connect musicians to rulers through relationships exchanging cultural legitimacy for support. Modern patronage maintains direct support between patrons and artists through commissioning programmes. The ritual economy positions musicians in ceremonies, ensuring economic integration. Mochere et al. (2020) show church music markets demonstrate sustainable demand but remain underexploited due to limited formal training (Wanyama, 2006). Information brokerage through praise singers monetises genealogical knowledge, representing indigenous information capitalism. These models need documentation and scaling to transform cultural practices into prosperity.

Digital platforms promise democratisation but deliver new forms of exploitation to African musicians through technology (Kirui, 2023). Kirui (2023) reveals how streaming services extract value while maintaining practitioner poverty, showing how musicians generate billions in revenue but receive minimal compensation without benefits (Nyamwaka, 2025). Recent industry data confirm that Africa's music streaming market is projected to reach \$524.10 million by 2027, with a compound annual growth rate of 8.89% (Statista, 2023); however, this growth primarily benefits platform owners rather than creators. Kirui's research shows that music production democratisation creates dependencies, where African musicians become data providers for platforms they cannot control. The "free streaming" model becomes what Kirui (2024) calls a "blessing in disguise", offering exposure while denying economic sustainability, creating "visibility poverty", where global reach coincides with local impoverishment (Wanyama, 2006). Kirui's documentation reveals how digital platforms exploit gaps in legal literacy to capture disproportionate value from African creative labour. Platform capitalism reproduces colonial extraction through algorithmic means, with Silicon Valley replacing European capital while maintaining exploitative relations (Kirui, 2024). African-owned alternatives must emerge to ensure that value remains within communities rather than being extracted by external shareholders. Contemporary applications of utilitarian musicology would develop platforms prioritising practitioner benefits over shareholder profits, requiring both technological innovation and the reimaging of musical value in digital economies (Nyamwaka, 2025).



Universities perpetuate extractive relationships while studying similar problems (Kidula, 2006). African music remains supplementary in institutions, confined to ethnomusicology, rather than being integrated into musical study (Yende, 2024). Ayorinde (2021) demonstrates how academic structures subordinate indigenous knowledge through hierarchies favouring written over oral knowledge and theoretical over practical expertise. Transformation requires restructuring: hiring traditional masters, developing indigenous certification programmes, creating career pathways, and protecting communal creation. Progressive institutions support practitioners through commissions and performance opportunities, creating economic benefits while building an African repertoire of performance (Ayorinde et al., 2020). These programmes must expand continentally, transforming music departments into engines of development. Institutional change legitimises indigenous knowledge within powerful social structures.

Success in utilitarian musicology requires metrics beyond publications that measure material transformation (Ayodele & Doe, 2018). Practitioner income is the primary measure: traditional musicians must earn wages comparable to those of other skilled professionals (Mugovhani & Nawa, 2019). Community control provides another metric: localities should own and benefit from their musical heritage rather than see external appropriation of it. Market influence indicates whether African musical principles shape global industry practices or provide raw materials for others' profit. Educational outcomes matter when music programmes lead to employment, not just cultural capital without economic value. Progressive commissioning projects offer measurable outputs through commissioned works, fees, performance, and audience reach. Success means that musicians' descendants choose musical careers knowing they lead to prosperity, representing intergenerational validation through economic sustainability. These metrics focus on material transformation, recognising that preservation requires economic viability for practitioners.

The Emancipatory Promise

The contradiction between Africa's musical wealth and musician poverty reflects the failure to transform cultural excellence into prosperity (Wanyama, 2006). Research shows that cultural expertise does not translate into economic security in extractive systems (Mugovhani & Nawa, 2019). Musicians face high opportunity costs due to unpaid preparation. In Kenya, Wanyama (2006) identifies music education as an "unexploited goldmine" while educators lack resources. His research shows that institutions maintain colonial hierarchies by positioning African cultural knowledge as supplementary. Music educators possess sophisticated knowledge of broader roles but remain marginalised. Mogashoa and Malatji (2022) demonstrate how inadequate career structures disadvantage South African musicians, while Akinlolu (2021) documents how socio-economic inequalities prevent Nigerian musicians from accessing economic opportunities. Nigerian musicians with global influence die without adequate healthcare, showing how cultural exports generate unreturned wealth for the country. Recent cases include Mohbad, who died at 27 from complications of an ear infection; Fela Kuti, who died at 58 from AIDS-related complications; and Sound Sultan, who died at 44 from lymphoma in the United States due to inadequate local healthcare (Premium Times, 2024). Master drummers maintaining traditions earn less than taxi drivers, demonstrating their devalued cultural significance. Mugovhani (2009) showed that indigenous practices face extinction without practitioners, and recent research has confirmed this trend (Netshivhambe, 2025). Economic marginalisation creates cultural death, as youth cannot invest in unrewarding traditions. This represents both poverty and the loss of sophisticated knowledge systems. The data condemn academic complicity in studying, rather than alleviating, poverty.



Practitioner obscurity stems from the structural factors that musicology must address (Kidula, 2006). Academic extraction creates relationships in which scholars build careers studying anonymous musicians, reproducing colonial patterns of knowledge flow (Agawu, 2014). The informant-researcher dynamic perpetuates these patterns, with communities providing knowledge and academics gaining recognition. Mugovhani and Nawa (2019) demonstrated this through the case of Vho-Ntshengedzeni Mamphodo, showing how traditional musicians face exploitation. Recognition without economic empowerment represents cultural tokenism. Traditional musicians possess extensive community knowledge but lack institutional recognition. Policy gaps exclude indigenous practitioners from economic opportunities, and linguistic barriers and documentation deficits limit their participation. Ayorinde et al. (2020) argue that documenting musical arts enables wealth generation, building on Nzewi's (2007) work. Platform exclusion through Western digital systems prevents African practitioners from accessing the global market. These barriers require policy interventions that prioritise practitioner benefits.

Liberation from poverty requires coordinated strategies across domains that move beyond charity and toward structural transformation (Ayorinde & Doe, 2018). Direct economic intervention must shift from "sitting allowances" to meaningful compensation, recognising indigenous practitioners as skilled professionals deserving of professional wages (Mugovhani & Nawa, 2019). Research projects should include practitioner salaries comparable to those of academic consultants, acknowledging cultural knowledge as intellectual labour. Capacity-building programmes must teach business skills and copyright knowledge while preserving cultural integrity. Infrastructure development requires community-controlled recording studios and venues rather than external institutions that extract value with minimal local benefit. The model should ensure that technological infrastructure serves community needs first while enabling a global reach. Market creation should develop audiences for indigenous performance contexts rather than forcing traditional music into Western formats that distort its cultural meaning. This requires an understanding of how traditional African performances create value through multiple functions: entertainment, education, conflict resolution, and social cohesion, generating community benefits beyond individual consumption.

Progressive commissioning models demonstrate how institutions can provide composers with professional fees for new works, ensuring economic benefits while advancing African art music. Such approaches demonstrate institutional commitment through direct financial investment, providing composers with upfront commissions and professional performance opportunities. This model demonstrates how institutions can create sustainable economic relationships with cultural practitioners while building cultural archives that serve community needs. This model demonstrates how institutions can create sustainable economic relationships with cultural practitioners while building cultural archives that serve the community's needs. Ayorinde (2019) documented how Dizu Plaatjies and Amampondo maintained community control while achieving preservation and prosperity, showing how practitioners can maintain traditional knowledge while generating economic value (Nzewi, 2007). This case study reveals how community ownership, combined with professional practices, enables global market engagement without cultural compromise, creating economic structures that reflect African values rather than Western business models.

Mugovhani and Nawa's (2019) research on Venda musicians reveals how cultural policy deficiencies and inadequate arts management contribute to the exploitation of indigenous practitioners, highlighting the need for systematic intervention rather than individual solutions. Their analysis exposes how government cultural policies often focus on symbolic recognition without creating material support systems that enable cultural practitioners to earn a sustainable income from their expertise. They document how traditional musicians possess sophisticated knowledge of acoustic principles, social psychology, and community leadership, which qualifies them for diverse



professional roles. However, cultural policy frameworks confine them to entertainment categories, limiting economic opportunities. Their research demonstrates how adequate arts management can transform cultural practice from an economic burden to a community asset through proper event planning, marketing, and revenue sharing, ensuring practitioners receive appropriate compensation for their contributions. These strategies recognise that emancipation requires material transformation, not just theoretical recognition, moving beyond discussions of cultural value to concrete economic empowerment that enables practitioners to maintain cultural traditions while achieving material prosperity in the long term.

Transforming practitioners from informants to authorities represents a crucial shift that challenges assumptions regarding knowledge production and academic expertise (Kidula, 2006). Currently, master drummers provide the "data" (Agawu, 2014). Simultaneously, ethnomusicologists become "experts" on drumming traditions, creating inversions where those with practical knowledge are treated as sources, while those without it become authorities. This inversion perverts knowledge relationships and perpetuates poverty by denying practitioners the economic benefits of their expertise. Practitioners possess theoretical sophistication through performance rather than writing, demonstrating an understanding of temporal organisation, harmonics, and social dynamics equal to academic knowledge. Their understanding of acoustics emerges from generations of experimentation that could inform engineering and design if properly recognised. Universities should create positions for traditional masters, recognising performance expertise as a scholarly contribution deserving of tenure, research support, and supervision equivalent to other academic expertise.

Nzewi's career trajectory provides a model for maintaining performance practice while developing theoretical frameworks that serve practitioner communities rather than external academic audiences (Nzewi, 2007). His work demonstrates how indigenous African knowledge systems can generate theoretical insights that surpass Western frameworks in integrating practical and conceptual knowledge while maintaining accountability to cultural communities rather than to academic institutions (Fasiku, 2008). The praise singer's genealogical knowledge equals any historian's depth and accuracy while serving contemporary community needs for identity formation and conflict resolution. The ceremonial musician's understanding of social cohesion matches any sociologist's analytical sophistication while providing practical interventions that strengthen community relationships. These comparisons are not metaphorical but identify measurable competencies deserving of institutional recognition and compensation that acknowledge cultural practitioners as intellectuals whose work deserves academic respect and economic support. Authority brings respect and resources, enabling practitioners to command fees commensurate with their expertise while building institutions that serve their communities.

Individual success stories cannot substitute for the systemic transformation of practitioner communities that lift entire cultural systems rather than selecting individual tokens for advancement (Taiwo, 2022). The praise singer achieves international recognition while colleagues languish, representing a pyrrhic victory that masks continued exploitation while providing cover for the systems that maintain structural inequality (Mugovhani & Nawa, 2019). True emancipation must be collective, raising entire communities rather than selecting tokens who prove that individual success is possible while leaving the systems unchanged. This requires rejecting competitive frameworks that pit musicians against scarce resources and developing an abundance mentality that recognises how collective success expands opportunities for everyone. Traditional African music emphasises ensemble over solo performance, modelling collective success through musical practices that demonstrate how individual excellence serves the community rather than individual wealth accumulation. Economic structures should reflect these values through cooperatives and guilds rather



than individual contracts that create competition among practitioners while enabling external exploitation.

Senegalese griot families maintaining intergenerational wealth demonstrate the possibilities of knowledge circulation within communities rather than extraction by external institutions (Omojola, 2012). Their success results from maintaining control over cultural content while developing economic relationships that serve family and community interests across generations (Nzewi, 2007). Contemporary applications might include practitioner cooperatives controlling recording facilities and distribution channels, ensuring that the technological infrastructure serves community needs while enabling global market engagement. Collective liberation ensures that rising tides lift all boats, rather than creating new hierarchies that reproduce inequality within cultural communities. Without community transformation, individual success merely provides cover for continued systemic exploitation, which maintains poverty while celebrating exceptional cases.

Emancipation requires concrete metrics beyond inspirational narratives to measure actual transformation (Ayodele & Doe, 2018). Key indicators include income levels; practitioners should earn professional wages with benefits comparable to those of other skilled professionals (Mugovhani & Nawa, 2019). Research shows that experienced African musicians earn around R26,000 (\$1,392) monthly, similar to formal sector wages, but lack employment contracts or guaranteed income. Institutional recognition is crucial: traditional masters should receive faculty positions with job security equal to that of their academic colleagues (Bruinders, 2024; Yende, 2024). Despite century-long documentation efforts, African musical traditions remain unsustainable without incorporating instruments and practitioners into institutional frameworks (Netshivhambe, 2025). Educational institutions face barriers in providing African music education and in recognising traditional practitioners. Market access indicates whether musicians control distribution channels and their intellectual property (Kirui, 2024). Legal frameworks designed for Western contexts disadvantage African musicians, while copyright systems favour written creation over oral creation. Musicians across Africa lose millions in royalties despite collecting organisations gathering licensing fees.

Intergenerational continuation indicates whether the youth view musical careers as viable paths to economic security, ensuring cultural transmission alongside prosperity. With Africa's growing youth population and high unemployment rates, music offers important employment opportunities. However, youth face barriers to accessing loans and receive inadequate education. Musicians deserve respect that matches their cultural contributions. While African music has historically positioned practitioners as vital community members, contemporary musicians often lack professional standing. African music connects practitioners to spiritual and cultural worlds but remains materially undervalued. Success requires structural changes rather than exceptional individual outcomes (Taiwo, 2022). Africa's economies need changes for sustainable development, with creative industries being a crucial sector (Ayodele & Doe, 2018). When musicians achieve comparable prosperity, security and respect, emancipation becomes a reality. Material measures matter more than abstract cultural values because dignity requires resources and economic security (Mugovhani & Nawa, 2019). Music serves as a cultural expression and economic activity, and practitioners deserve compensation that reflects their expertise (Netshivhambe, 2025). Cultural preservation requires economic viability, making material transformation essential for emancipation from poverty.

Future of African Musical Expression

African music in the 21st century challenges Western musicological frameworks while generating billions in revenue that rarely benefits African creators (Kirui, 2024). Contemporary genres such as Afrobeats, Amapiano, Gengetone, and African Drill are reshaping global soundscapes. Academic musicology remains fixated on "traditional" forms, while young creators revolutionise world culture



(Netshivhambe, 2025). Nigerian Afrobeats artists sell out global stadiums, South African Amapiano dominates worldwide, and Kenyan Gengetone demonstrates cultural hybridity. These genres represent the African creative genius responding to contemporary conditions while maintaining ancestral practices.

Waterman (1990) demonstrates how Yoruba musicians' function as "cultural brokers in heterogeneous urban environments," showing how jùjú music incorporates foreign elements while maintaining Yoruba aesthetic consciousness and polyrhythmic structures. His research reveals how adaptation represents cultural vitality rather than erosion, with traditional concepts persisting across different musical contexts. Agawu (2016) reinforces this framework, arguing that African composers should not be "sent on a wild goose chase looking for 'authentic' or 'African' spaces," since creative synthesis demonstrates cultural strength rather than weakness. Mugovhani (2012) examined the relationship between indigenous African music and globalisation. His analysis shows how global forces affect local musical traditions based on the distribution of benefits and cultural control. Success requires maintaining community control while engaging with global structure. His framework suggests that contemporary genres merit scholarly attention as they transform musicians from cultural workers into creative professionals.

Contemporary African genres emerge through processes that existing frameworks cannot adequately analyse. While technological adaptation enables competitive production with modest equipment, Kirui's (2023) research shows how digitalisation masks exploitation. His analysis reveals how streaming platforms extract data from African musicians while providing minimal revenue sharing, creating "digital sharecropping".

Cultural synthesis in contemporary genres blends indigenous rhythms with global influences to demonstrate an understanding of local and international musical systems. Afrobeats adds electronic production to highlife guitars and talking-drum patterns, creating a uniquely African yet universal sound that maintains cultural specificity (Mugovhani, 2012). Cross-cultural collaborations have accelerated global assimilation, with artists such as Ayra Starr featuring Brazilian and American singers and Asake collaborating with British rappers. This synthesis requires knowledge of traditional African musical principles, combined with contemporary production technologies. Linguistic innovation sees artists code-switching between indigenous languages, colonial languages, and global slang, creating multilingual artworks that reflect contemporary African identity. Social commentary continues the griot tradition, as artists such as Burna Boy provide political critique while maintaining accountability to African communities.

Traditional ethnomusicology's search for "authentic" village music cannot comprehend urban studio creativity because it assumes that authentic culture exists only in rural contexts (Kidula, 2006). This framework prevents scholars from recognising how contemporary African musicians demonstrate creative intelligence while responding to different conditions. Urban studio creativity represents cultural evolution, demonstrating how African creative systems adapt while maintaining core principles.

The global success of African genres demonstrates the economic potential currently captured by foreign interests through digital platforms and intellectual property systems (Kirui, 2024). Afrobeats generates billions in revenue; however, wealth distribution remains colonial, with foreign stakeholders taking disproportionate shares. Nigerian artists earn approximately \$400 for every million local streams compared to \$4,000 earned by American artists (Royalti.io, 2024). The Sub-Saharan African recorded music market grew by 34.7% in 2022 (IFPI, 2023), while projections suggest significant growth in streaming revenues. Nigerian artists achieve global recognition, while local producers struggle, revealing how success can coincide with local impoverishment. Kirui (2024)



shows how copyright systems systematically disadvantage African musicians who lack access to legal resources, favouring written over oral creation and individual over collective authorship.

A utilitarian framework for genre development would ensure creator ownership through education about intellectual property and collective bargaining, enabling African musicians to capture the value of their creative labour (Kirui, 2024). Production infrastructure requires African-owned studios and distribution networks that retain value within the continent rather than extracting it from external shareholders (Ayodele & Doe, 2018). Genre documentation by academic institutions establishes a priority for innovation claims while creating archives for future studies that serve African communities rather than external research agendas. Market development should prioritise African and diaspora audiences over Western gatekeepers who impose external values while extracting cultural content. The success of Nigerian music video production demonstrates the possibilities with appropriate investment that maintains African creative control while achieving a global reach. These economic structures transform creative innovation into sustainable prosperity for entire creative communities rather than selected stars who succeed despite, rather than because of, existing systems.

Framing African genres requires theoretical innovation that goes beyond Western frameworks. Rhizomatic analysis shows that genres develop through horizontal connections rather than hierarchical evolution. Contemporary fusion genres such as Afropiano demonstrate African creativity through networked influence. Amapiano influences Afrobeats and Hiplife in networks that defy categorisation. Temporal fluidity merges the past and present as producers' sample 1970s Afrobeat. Collective creativity challenges the Western emphasis on individual genius, as producers and performers contribute equally. Attribution models must reflect these collective processes. Aesthetic multiplicity allows tracks to serve multiple functions beyond mere entertainment. African-centred frameworks must emerge from practice.

Universities and cultural institutions fail to address contemporary genres through outdated curricula (Bruinders, 2024). Music departments teach classical harmony, while Amapiano reshapes global harmonics, revealing institutional lag (Yende, 2024). While ethnomusicology departments archive recordings, TikTok spreads African dance videos daily. Progressive responses require hiring contemporary practitioners; Amapiano producers deserve academic positions alongside classical composers. Curricula must analyse Wizkid's polyrhythms alongside Bach fugues, recognising different forms of excellence. Some institutions demonstrate possibilities by engaging in contemporary forms that blend traditional and modern techniques (Bruinders, 2024).

Today's frameworks shape the future of African musical expression. Treating contemporary genres as degraded traditions perpetuates poverty while denying African creativity (Kirui, 2024). Young creators in major African cities need frameworks that honour innovation while ensuring that the community benefits. They require institutions to recognise theoretical sophistication rather than dismiss contemporary creativity. When traditional patterns appear in electronic production and praise singing informs rap, cultural continuity persists. Utilitarian musicology provides frameworks for understanding these transformations, ensuring benefits serve African communities. The future of African musical expression depends on frameworks that adapt to innovation while maintaining African foundations.

Conclusion

We stand at a crossroads, demanding immediate choices. We can continue with our current approaches of studying African music through Western frameworks, publishing in inaccessible journals, and building careers while communities languish in poverty. Alternatively, we can choose transformation through utilitarian musicology, which converts cultural wealth into economic prosperity. The evidence condemns inaction: musicians die impoverished while creating sounds that



move the world; traditional knowledge holders watch their expertise appropriated without compensation; and contemporary innovators sign away their rights for momentary recognition. This is not inevitable but is chosen through collective academic complicity. Some scholars demonstrate the possibilities of scholarship serving communities through documentation projects and direct financial support for composers, providing replicable models for institutional change. However, individual efforts cannot substitute systemic transformation. I challenge every reader: What will YOUR contribution be? Will you perpetuate extraction or enable prosperity? The time for utilitarian African musicology is now; our musicians have waited long enough.

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