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Pantsula dance -
Case studies on the origins
and makings of a township art form.

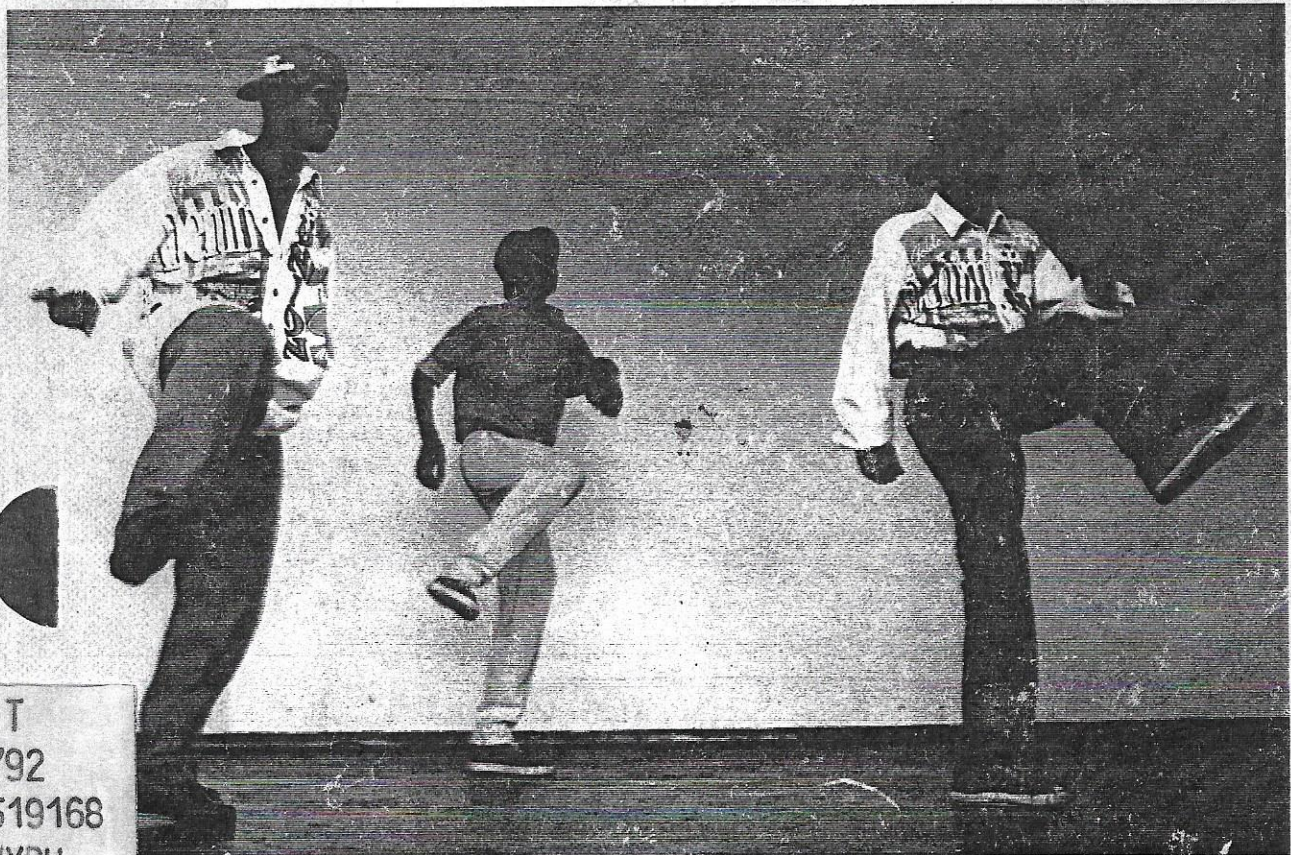
COLLIN VINCENT MYBURGH

The Johannesburg Dance Foundation's Proficiency
Certificate Course - 4th Year (Honours)

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CHAPTER ONE - INTRODUCTION

The central research questions posed in this project are:

- i) What is pantsula dance?
- ii) What are the roots of pantsula dance?
- iii) Who are the pantsula dancers?

Aims of the research:

The key aim of this research is to explore the nature, form and content of pantsula dance in certain Reef townships, through the use of a case study. Pantsula dance is one of few dance forms which have developed in the townships of South Africa. This project thus aims to document, albeit, in a limited way, the experiences of some pantsula dancers.

Rationale of the research:

One of my motivations for documenting some experiences of pantsula dance is that this dance form is largely un-researched and unexplored. Very little research has been done on this dance form.¹ Furthermore, there is a great deal to be learnt about and from pantsula dance, both locally and internationally. Research such as this will also help to facilitate its' recognition by other dance forms.

A brief history of pantsula dance:

Pantsula dance originated in Sophiatown and Alexandra townships, in the 1950's and 60's and then moved to other areas in the Transvaal. In later years pantsula dance went on to grow and develop throughout African townships in South Africa - in many ways it has become a township language for expressing the frustrations, ideals and dreams of many black South Africans. A pantsula dancer summed this up when he said "we have drive,

¹. See: Jilian Hurst, *The Dance Journal*, Vol 1 No 3, 1991.

* we are one, we have power, we are young, strong and quick, we have our own style and we are competitive" (Hurst, 1991, 16).

Pantsula dance is predominantly performed by black South Africans. However, it is interesting to note that pantsula groups within the white community are starting to form. The fact that pantsula dance originated in Sophiatown indicates that it has strong cultural and social roots. According to Keith Ngcobo who works for the S.A.B.C. ('Shell Road to Fame'), "pantsula dance comes from dances called Mpaquanga and Marabi, which was mainly done by Sothos. By then already, the men were competing with each other, because of the different ethnic groups and other influences such as black American artists like Percy Sledge and James Brown and American jazz music" (Interview: 29/06/93). Mpaquanga and Marabi are today known as pantsula. The word pantsula comes from 'tsotsie' slang (gang talk). At first the dance wasn't called pantsula, rather, it was the way the guys (gangsters) dressed that made them pantsulas. Decades ago in Sophiatown the pantsulas were dancing to the live music of Bra Sello and Big Voice Jack. Today, however, they dance to local music like Chiccos, Brenda Fassie, American and international music like 'JM Silk', '2 Unlimited' and many others. When pantsula was still 'Mpaquanga' only the older men in the community used to do it. Today this is different. It is wide spread throughout the community - pantsula dancers include youngsters, teenagers and adults.

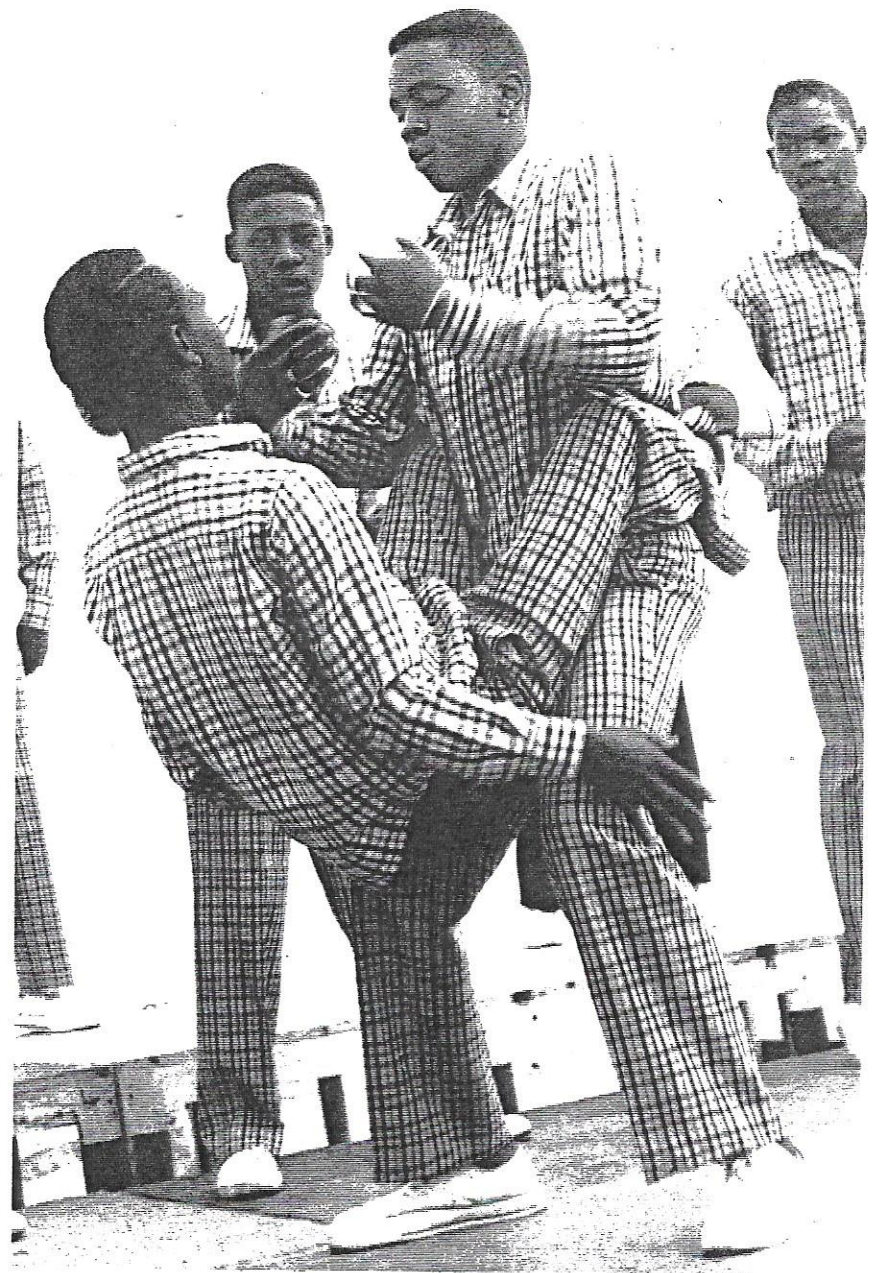
Pantsula, unlike many other dance forms sees no gender, age or colour differences. *Blacks*

Differentiation within the dance form:

There are different styles of pantsula. These are as follows:

- 1) The Western Style: This is the most common style. In this dance form, dancers fall in and out of symmetrical and geometrical lines. Within this style the body is held upright and is very calm, while the arms are bent at the elbows and the wrists and wrapped around the body. The feet usually work in opposition to the body. They move fast and with absolute precision and the steps are very complicated. The knees are always bent and the pelvis (hips) is placed for

These so called geometrical lines have been used for a long period of time. They are patterns which originate from traditional dances. Most of the dances from the 1950s are based on these lines.



balance. Some of the movements are small (shuffling movements) and others are big (jumping movements). The Western Style is very energetic and very exhausting.

2) Slow Poison: This is the total opposite of the western style although, the body structure remains the same. All the movements are slow and calm and jumps are rarely incorporated. The rhythm or beat is maintained throughout. *There's more*

3) Futhuza: *Today it's called choak* This is also known as 'African break'. It is a mix of American breakdance and pantsula. In this form of pantsula the dancers make use of popping and locking. Popping and locking is a robotic, wavelike movement, where a wave starts at your fingers, goes through all your joints and ends up in your foot. This style of pantsula dance has many interesting features. In particular, dancers use 'Futhuza' to make different statements or social comments. Political concerns, educational worries, issues to do with sexuality and relationships, for example, often form the content of these statements.

I discovered many of these different styles of pantsula in my research but this research also highlighted some important characteristics and trends within pantsula dance. One of the central characteristics of pantsula dancers is that they compete all the time, even within their own groups. It is a highly individualised and competitive dance form. 'To be the best' is often the aim of both individual dancers and pantsula groups. Very often their competitiveness leads them to become territorial over their style or steps.

They compete for two reasons: i) to see who is the best, ii) for money. Each group has a central choreographer. However, in a contradictory way the members of the group also rely on each other for choreographic direction, vision and ideas.

The case studies of seven pantsula dancers reveal information about their lives as pantsula dancers and their experiences within the dance groups they have formed. Many of these dancers have backyard rehearsals, however, some of them are fortunate and do have either a classroom or community hall to practice in. Most of these dancers are at school and are financially unstable. Even though they have their own unique style of

dance they are not really recognised by other dance forms. They are recognised mainly by the black community. Pantsula dancers want people and other dance forms to accept their style into the mainstream and not to simply see it as street dance. These dancers are striving for perfection through hard work and dedication to improve their style of dance.

Chapter breakdown:

Chapter Two: Research methodology

The research strategy best suited to exploring my research questions was a qualitative one. The use of intensive interviews and participant observation formed the basis of a case study which documented the experiences of some pantsula dancers.

Chapter Three: Case studies

This chapter documents the information gathered through the intensive interviews I conducted with seven pantsula dancers.

Chapter Four: Discussion and conclusion

In this chapter I attempted to draw out patterns and trends which emerged from my study on pantsula dance.

CHAPTER TWO - RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

2.1 Participant Observation

Participant observation refers to a situation when a researcher involves him/herself in the life and world of those being studied. Consequently the researcher experiences the lives of those under investigation or study. Furthermore, the researcher should actively participate in the social worlds of the actor. In my study I could not involve myself completely in the social worlds of my respondents. I did however interact with pantsula dancers at night clubs and parties, where I actually competed with them doing breakdance and hip-hop.

According to Lofland (1971) "participant observation is a method or strategy which involves social interaction between the researcher and the actors in the environment in which data is systematically and unobtrusively collected". Moreover, it has been stated "data collecting involves looking, listening and recording" (Taylor 1984).

Gold (1958) suggests four ideal typical roles open to the participating observer:

1. **The complete participant:** The researcher becomes a fully-fledged member of the actors under study. This role is kept secret with the result that covert observation is involved. Schatzman and Strauss (1973) refer to this role as a hidden identity.
2. **The complete observer:** In this role, the researcher, has no direct contact with the actors under study. The disadvantage here is that there is no sustained interaction between researcher and actors, and there are no limits on what can and cannot be observed.
3. **Participant-as-observer:** This is where the researcher participates as well as observes by developing a relationship with the informants in the research setting.
4. **Observer-as-participant:** In this role the researcher wishes to keep involvement with the subject brief, formal and where possible, limited to a minimum.

In my research I made it clear to my respondents that I was researching pantsula dance. I had to tell them what I was doing and what I was not.

At times there was confusion as to my role. Some thought that I was promoting them, others thought I was there to exploit them or copy their style. In most cases I won their confidence. I adopted the role of observer-as-participant. I had to take on this role due to violence in the townships; access to the areas in which the respondents were living was often very difficult.

In my research project concerning pantsula dance, I made use of participant observation to a fairly limited degree as it was impossible to involve myself in any depth in the lives or environment of those whom I studied. Most of the pantsula dance groups that I studied were located in the East Rand. At the time I was conducting this research there was a great deal of violence in the East Rand, therefore at times my own life would have been endangered. Data collection was also hampered by the fact that some of my respondents were politically involved and thus had limited time available for interviews.

Data collection had to be done by looking and observing and recording notes into my research diary. I conducted my observations of pantsula dance on street corners and open spaces in town, pantsula dance festivals and on Television programmes such as 'Lapologa' and 'Shell Road to Fame'. Although (due to the fact that pantsulas are so territorial over their style) I was prevented from seeing some of the rehearsals, I was, however, allowed to see them perform.

In one area in the East Rand (Katlhong) they even have a Pantsula Board to protect their style and to raise funds. Because there is such great competition amongst pantsula dancers, they have become very protective over their 'turf' and where they rehearse.

Several methods can be used in qualitative research to collect data field notes, audio taping and video taping. Field notes ideally should consist of relatively concrete, complete, accurate and detailed descriptions. Field notes should be made during an actual observation which is not always possible. Field notes also should ideally include

a comprehensive description of peoples, events and conversations in the setting as well as a record of the observers' action, feelings and hunches or working hypotheses (Taylor and Bogelan, 1984).

As mentioned previously, I kept a research diary in which I recorded many observations and interactions. Furthermore, in conducting intensive interviews I made use of a tape recorder. I did so with the permission of all respondents.

2.2 Intensive Interviewing

Intensive interviews differ from other interviews in that they are less structured, giving the interviewer flexibility in terms of what is asked and further how questions are phrased. This research method allows for additional detail and comment from the interviewee.

The central research strategy employed in my project was intensive interviewing. Effectiveness depends on the interviewers' ability to ask questions and analyse the answers and on the relationship between the interviewer and interviewee. Often, these two processes (question asking and analysing) can be conducted at the same time thus enabling the researcher to challenge and adjust hypotheses throughout. I developed an interview schedule and often posed additional questions when conducting interviews. As a result of communication difficulties with some interviewees I had to rephrase some of my questions. These communication difficulties revolved mainly around language barriers. I had to conduct the interviews in English even though all respondents only used English as a second language.

In some instances I conducted group interviews. This situation gave rise to some difficulties, for example, the interviewees sometimes argued and debated amongst themselves during the interviews. I always tried to keep my questions short and clear so as not to confuse the respondents.

Most of my interviews were conducted in my flat and in the Johannesburg CBD, for

example, in shopping centres, at the dance factory (City Hall) and in some interviewees homes. By taking the interviewee into my home it strengthened our relationship and therefore it was easier for me to be trusted. I made them feel at ease.

After I completed the interviews, I transcribed all of the tapes and wrote up the interviews conducted as case studies, which will be documented in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE - CASE STUDIES

1.GIFT

Gift is 24 years of age and is at present dancing for 'Via Africa'. He was born in Katlehong and grew up there. He is an only child and lives in a four roomed house with his parents.

He wrote matric in 1992 at a school in Katlehong but failed. He then planned to further his studies as an electrical engineer but due to financial difficulty he could not continue studying. He earns his income by hawking.

"This is the only way I can make my income at the moment due to job scarcity" (Interview:2/03/93).

When he was in standard 6 in 1988 he was inspired by Michael Jackson and was 'into Jackson fever'. He said,"I idolise Michael Jackson" (Ibid). When I asked him if he had learnt any other dance techniques, he commented:

"Yes I did, I went to Jazzart workshops last year December 1992. There I learnt some basic jazz, contemporary dance and ballet" (Ibid).

In 1986 he stopped doing Jacksons' style and started a group called the 'Pro Cats'. When I asked him "who taught you to do pantsula"? he said:

"No one did, it just came naturally. It was a township dance and everybody was doing it. I taught myself pantsula and I added a few of my own steps in as well and I have been doing it for approx 7 years" (Ibid).

Pantsula is not the only dance form which Gift does, as he does modern and freestyle disco as well.

Gift dances for the group 'Via Africa' but he does solo acts in freestyle disco and dances for modern dance clubs too. In 1989 he started dancing for a group called the 'Initiators' which was a mixed group of boys and girls. Due to some differences and misunderstandings some of the guys broke away from the 'Initiators', now known as 'Via Africa', which means 'to go through Africa'. This, according to Gift, is the dream of 'Via Africa'. At present 'Via Africa' has 9 dancers, 5 old members and 4 new ones. The age of the dancers ranges from 15 -24 years with Gift being the oldest. Seven of the nine members attend school, Gift included. All of the dancers are from Katlehong. In this regard Gift said:

"We had dancers from other areas but because of transport difficulties they could not always make it and you can not depend on people like that" (Interview: 2/03/93).

'Via Africa' has got their own stage dress code; they enjoy wearing shiny satin trousers - mashwabanas. These dancers are very innovative; they buy their own material and have their costumes tailor made, very cheaply.

Gift is involved in township politics. He is an executive member of one of the street committees in Katlehong. Commenting on this Gift said:

"The function of the street committee is to have unity and peace among the street people" (Interview:2/03/93).

According to Gift there are no pioneers of pantsula dancing. Pantsula dancing started out as a township jive:

"A jive at house parties mainly in Sophiatown, then it was taken into night clubs. For Gift pantsula is an 'art form'" (Ibid).

In this regard Gift said:

"Pantsula will never die it is here, even in the year 2000 it will still be here. If I get old I will train the younger kids and in turn they will teach the new generation too, so people will know that pantsula is here to stay" (Interview: 2/03 93).

From Gifts' experience one does not need a 'special body' to do pantsula dance and "anyone can do pantsula whether you are black or white". Gift does not see pantsula as limited to black people only.

"It would be great if there was a school for pantsula, then we could get professional training" (Interview: 2/03/93).

Gift says different pantsula groups from different areas have different styles, but they are similar to a degree. The steps and footwork look the same but in fact are very different. According to Gift:

"To do pantsula one needs lots of stamina, stretching and strong feet. We run a few times around the grounds and do some stretches too" (Interview: 2/03/93).

These dancers rehearse for three and a half hours a day, four days a week. Sometimes they rehearse at a nearby school in a class room and sometimes in Gifts' backyard.

"Space is important to me but where we rehearse the place is small" (Interview: 2/03/93).

Pantsula dancing is very tiring. Gift told me:

"They get so tired sometimes that our chest start paining" (Ibid).

"When I do pantsula I sweat and I work" (Ibid).

For Gift it is impossible to do a one hour show of just pantsula dancing, because it is tiring, unless one mixes Futhuza (African break) with it. Gift does most of the choreography for 'Via Africa'. On occasions, however, the choreography comes from one

of the other dancers or as a group effort. Gift tries to motivate the younger members to choreograph as well so they do not feel left out.

Gift states that pantsula is a performing art because it is:

"An art of dancing and also because he has performed with other professional companies at the Grahamstown festival" (Interview 2/03/93).

But he claims it will become more professional when pantsula's get better training. Gift states that pantsula can also be seen as a form of entertainment because:

"People enjoy themselves if they see us dancing but at the same time we can educate people" (Interview:2/03/93).

For Gift, pantsula dancing can make different statements whether they be political, cultural or social. This, he says, can be done by making use of Futhuza (African break) or play dance (miming) at the same time. Statements about political unrest and violence, shabees and township life are made when dancing.

'Via Africa' dance to both local and international music as long as there is a message in the music. They dance to beat, rhythm and lyrics. At times Gift finds pantsula dancing very repetitive. However, when they dance the steps are so fast that it is almost impossible to see that they are repetitive.

According to Gift pantsula is 'its own style'.

"The moment you mix it with something else it loses its' quality except in one thing you use Futhuza" (Ibid).

'Via Africa' has competed in lots of competitions and always achieves good results. Gift says they do not want to compete any more, because they want to 'give the up and coming groups a chance'. The reason why they compete is to see how well they can do.

They also compete to win money for their club. 'Via Africa' gives about three shows a year depending on invitations.

"I am not dancing for fun but I am not doing it for money too. I am also trying to educate people about pantsula dance. I would prefer to get paid cause I am working, there is nothing for 'mahala'" (Ibid).

Gift believes that pantsula was the dance of the eighties and is still the dance form of the nineties. This, however, applies mainly in the townships. For Gift all of the youngsters enjoy pantsula dancing and most of them are doing it.



2. ISAAC AND ROMEO

Isaac is 18 years old and is in matric. He grew up in Meadowlands, Soweto and lives with his parents and grandparents. His sister and brother are both teachers. Isaac plans to study management engineering at a Technikon in the future. Romeo is 17 years old and is in matric. He also grew up in Meadowlands and lives with his parents and grandparents. Romeo has two sisters, one out of school and one who is presently completing matric. Romeo plans on becoming a chartered accountant in the future.

Isaac started dancing pantsula at 17 years of age. He has not done any other type of dancing. Romeo on the other hand started with breakdance which he saw on Television and was influenced by friends concerning pantsula. Both Romeo and Isaac started off with the same group and have been together ever since. Their group is called 'Perfect Boys'.

'Perfect Boys' started off as a group in 1990. They started out by performing at school concerts. One of their members danced for a famous South African musician named Chicco. At the present moment there are four members and their ages range from 16 to 19 years. They are considering taking on four female dancers.

All the dancers from 'Perfect Boys' are from around the same area. Isaac says:

"They prefer to take guys from their area only because others from far places give them problems" (Interview: 09/06/93).

'Perfect Boys' dress in black and white when they perform on stage, but when it comes to street gear they wear mashwabanas.

According to both Isaac and Romeo, pantsula will not die.

"He says that he will keep it alive by promoting it through concerts and continuing

to change the style" (Ibid).

Both dancers feel that pantsula dancing does not require a special body. According to Isaac 'you can even be fat', but you are more restricted or you will not be able to move freely like those who are more slender in build. They also believe firmly that anyone can do pantsula no matter what race they are.

"But it will not be easy for whites because it is not their own thing. One needs training to be able to do pantsula. Some are obviously lucky, they do have it in them" (Ibid).

Different pantsula groups in different areas do different styles. In this regard Isaac said:

"As we are people we cannot have the same style. I know that from past experience; that I have seen at the pantsula competition at the City Hall" (Ibid).

But he claims, the majority of the groups have the same basic steps which is known as the western style.

'Perfect Boys' exercise their bodies by running in the morning and playing soccer in the afternoon, but they don't rehearse regularly as they do not have any concerts and are not encouraged or sponsored like other dancers. When they do rehearse, 'Perfect Boys' use their resident hall (Bapedi Hall), or Isaac's garage when his father is not home. Romeo does most of the choreography but as in other groups, it's also a combined effort.

Both dancers claim that they do not try to impart political or social messages when they dance rather they dance 'mainly to entertain the people'. They don't see pantsula as a performing art but more as a form of entertainment. But they would like to see it recognised as a part of South African dance culture and as a performing art. They would ultimately like to dance professionally in concerts at the City Hall and the Civic Centre.

'Perfect Boys' believe that only black people are really interested in pantsula dance and

like other groups, they prefer international music to local music, although they do use local music as well. Neither Romeo or Isaac see pantsula as repetitive and prefer dancing to beat and rhythm rather than lyrics. Romeo's choreography is a combination of hip-hop and pantsula giving their pantsula a different style.

'Perfect Boys' participate in competitions mainly for the cash but also to prove that they are "not scared of other people". They see themselves as "the best group" and perform in school concerts about twice a year.

Isaac admits that pantsulas smoke dagga, but condones it by saying:

" It is not only pantsulas smoking it but other people too" (Ibid).

The reason he gives for smoking is that it "hides shyness and loosens up the body". Neither Isaac nor Romeo see pantsulas as 'criminals' and say that people misunderstand the meaning of the word pantsula. To them, pantsula is just a dance. Isaac says that when they come together to dance, they are almost a gang and they have their own language - 'tsotsie taal' (gang talk), but they do not partake in criminal activities.

3. PRIDE, NORA AND ZITHA

Pride (21 years old), Nora (19 years old) and Zitha (19 years old) are all from Katlehong and dance for a group called 'Jiving Kids'. Their group consists of 5 dancers, 1 male and 4 females. Zitha was born in Qwa Qwa and grew up in Katlehong. He has lived there for the past 16 years. He has one brother, one sister and is in standard 9. Nora and Pride were both born in Katlehong and grew up there. Nora has two brothers and two sisters and is in matric. Pride has two sisters and one brother. Pride has matriculated and is studying computers (word processing and lotus 123) at P.G. Auto Glass Computer school in Nugget street, Hillbrow. She travels into Johannesburg every day by taxi.

Zitha started dancing in 1990 when he was 16 years. He hadn't done any other dancing before he started pantsula. Nora started dancing when she was 17 years and Pride when she was 19 years old. They have only done pantsula. The three of them got their inspiration from Television programmes such as 'Lapologa', Diwetsi, 'Shell Road to Fame' and other pantsula dancers. Both Nora and Zitha taught themselves to dance and Zitha then taught Pride.

The 'Jiving Kids' (named by Zitha) dance mainly as a group although Zitha does do some solo pieces. All the dancers come from Katlehong; Pride is the oldest - 21, and Justine the youngest - 16. 'Jiving Kids', for convenience sake prefer dancers to come from their own area but will also accept dancers from other areas.

Before rehearsing they warm up their bodies by doing exercises and running. Nora says that you have to have a strong body to be a dancer. All the dancers agree that pantsula dancing is very tiring and Nora and Pride say it is impossible for them to do a 1 hour show. Zitha said he could if he had many routines.

On stage, both Zitha and the girls wear trousers. Both Nora and Pride feel strongly that pantsula originated in the streets of the townships. Nora says the name pantsula comes from a gang from Soweto who called themselves pantsula and dance this style of dance.

They say that pantsula is taken from different cultures and experiences within the community.

The dancers believe that pantsula sees neither size, sex, nor colour. In other words, no matter how fat you are, whether you are male or female, black or white, if you want to do pantsula you can do it.

Zitha, like other pantsulas prefers American music as, according to him, it has more of a beat and is faster. Zitha choreographs mainly to the beat, using some repetitive steps. According to the dancers, pantsula is not a free style dance, but a pure dance form and although it can be mixed with Futhuza it does not mix with other dance forms thus, in their opinion showing limits to pantsula dance. Although pantsula is mainly a fast dance Zitha showed me a few steps called Slow Poison. This is a combination of slow steps with no jumps where the feet slide and glide backwards, forwards and sideways across the floor.

The dancers participate in competitions mainly for the money but also for exposure and to see 'if they are the best'. Like other pantsulas, they don't give their own concerts due to lack of funds, but they do dance in concerts when invited to partake. The only payment they take for these concerts is taxi fare.

Nora says that pantsulas are not gangsters or criminals. She says they don't have a street slang but use the same language as they use at home. When I asked the girls to compare themselves with the guys, Pride said:

"the guys were more flexible and loose" (Ibid).

She said that they started pantsula because they liked it and decided to give it a try, unlike other girls who just avoided it.

When I asked the group if they would like to be professional pantsula dancers, Zitha and Nora answered by saying that they would like to show other countries South Africa's own

style, which is pantsula.

4. JOEL

Joel is an 18 year old young man from Dobsonville, Soweto. He is in standard 8 and comes from a family of 5 children, three sisters, one brother and himself, all of them are at school. They live in a four roomed house with both of their parents.

Joel started dancing pantsula at age 9 in 1984/85. Joel started pantsula by watching older friends doing pantsula. He then taught himself how to do pantsula dance. Before Joel started his own group at the beginning of last year he was dancing for a group called the 'Saloon Boys' from Dobsonville. The name of Joel's present group is 'Skom Boys'. Joel doesn't always dance with this group; he does his own solo acts as well. He is largely responsible for training the dancers in his group. The dancers in his group range from the ages 13 - 16 and they are all from the same area - Dobsonville. All the dancers are still at school.

Joel believes in taking dancers from his area not because of any fears or differences but mainly because he doesn't want to struggle to get to them if anything comes up, for example, a competition or a concert.

When performing on stage the 'Skom Boys' dress up in ducsies (which are black and khaki check shirts) with khaki and blue trousers, white socks and black shoes.

For Joel there are no cultural, social or political roots attached to pantsula dancing and he doesn't know who the pioneers of pantsula dancing are. According to Joel, pantsula originated from Dobsonville in Soweto and it comes from the 'Tswanas'.

Joel believes that anyone can do pantsula whether you are black or white, fat or skinny. But of course he says:

"you do need training" (Interview: 08/06/93).

Joel states that although pantsula groups have the same style they can also differ. Joel does exercise his body but prefers to rehearse for shows. Joel and his group rehearse from Tuesday to Friday for about an hour and for him it is plenty, as a matter of fact, he says:

"its too much" (Ibid).

Joel's group rehearses in a friends garage nearby. When they rehearse they do not warm their bodies up by doing exercise but merely with dancing. Space is not really a problem for Joel and his group, as long as they have a place where they can dance or rehearse, even if it's a small little room. During rehearsals Joel's group will dance 'flat out' and then rest for about 3 minutes and then continue. They work on about three combinations during the hour that they rehearse.

Joel, like other dancers I interviewed, sees pantsula as a form of entertainment. But he also believes it can become a profession by participating in as many competitions as possible. Pantsula dancing does not mean anything to Joel. He just does it because he likes it. When Joel is dancing or choreographing he is not trying to make any political or social statements, he dances:

"just for dance sake" (Ibid).

It seems that all pantsula groups prefer American music instead of local music, this is because:

"it's got more power, meaning it's got more beat, more rhythm and more instruments" (Ibid).

When Joel and his group dance, they dance mainly to the beat and they are not influenced by the lyrics. Joel stresses that others dance to rhythm but he dances to the beat. Even though pantsula is seen as repetitive Joel says they are changing steps all the time.

Joel and his group participate in competitions for the same reasons other groups do; for money and exposure. Even though Joel admits they are not the best group around he still participates in competitions. Joel and his group also dance in concerts in their area. They do this to show off their talent even though they don't get paid.

Joel says pantsulas smoke dagga because they want to hide their shyness away. In other words dagga gives them confidence. Joel does not take any drugs (or stimulants) when performing. Speaking for himself, Joel says he is not a criminal but he suggested 'that others are'. Joel commented:

"Pantsulas are gangsters because they live in the same area and that's why they make gangs" (Ibid).

Pantsulas also have a way of talking in a sort of a street language that is not Zulu or Sotho.

Joel would like to expose and promote pantsula dance by telling other people to do it. Joel's dream is to have a competition at the Standard Bank Arena and become famous. In that way he can promote pantsula and go to the United States.

Joel's final comment about pantsula dance is that some pantsulas 'do bad stuff' at competitions: they break the other dancers' cassettes and fight. He says, the reason they fight is:

"that other groups steal their style and do their style or steps at the competitions and that is why they fight, that's why pantsulas become bad" (Ibid).

5. PETRUS

Petrus is a 21 year old young man who comes from Orlando, Soweto. He grew up there. Petrus comes from a family of 7 children, but is now left with one brother and two sisters. He lives with his parents, his brother and two sisters.

At the present moment he is acting in the play 'Josi Jos Guide' in which he plays several characters. He also does a solo pantsula dance in the play.

Petrus' highest education level is form 2 (std 7). His acting career started in 1989 when he was dancing for a group called 'KSL Sweet Lovers'. The group started off when Petrus invited guys over to his house just to come and dance - but only pantsula. They started giving shows in the townships.

At the age of about 13 he started doing pantsula. When he started acting he did some ethnic, modern and jazz dance. No one taught him to do pantsula - he taught himself by looking at others and by experimenting with moves.

The 'Sweet Lovers' broke up. Petrus says:

"They found it boring and did not want to dance any more" (Interview: 27/05/93).

Petrus does not dress like any other pantsula, he dresses very casually. He only dresses in pantsula clothing when he dances because he says one cannot dance with tight trousers, because you must be able to "feel yourself move".

Pantsula has changed over time. Petrus says:

"pantsula is no more like it was in Sophiatown. The new generation has taken over, its got a new flair, more vigour, more power and new style. Even the clothes have changed from the American Dobbs to the Spotty, from the Flosheim

to takkies, from the suit, the shirt and the tie, to dickies and mashwabanas (trousers) and T-shirts (collard T-shirts)" (Ibid).

Petrus believes pantsula is here to stay:

"and it will never die, because all over guys like pantsula, pantsula can be found nowhere else except in the township, because it is a dance of the township" (Ibid).

For Petrus, to be a pantsula you must walk like one, talk slang like one and dress like one. The pantsula walk is very stylish - sort of sluggish. Petrus says you don't need a special body to be a pantsula, you can be fat too, so anyone can do pantsula, even white folks if they want to.

"Anyone can do pantsula providing they get training" (Ibid).

Like any other pantsulas, Petrus would love pantsula to go overseas, so people can get to know pantsula all over the world and not only in South Africa.

Pantsula in different areas has different styles, but the styles do not differ to a great degree, maybe just a few variations added here and there. Petrus does not believe in exercise and:

"he doesn't need to stretch because when he does pantsula there is no time to stretch your legs, you are always bend by the knees" (Ibid).

Pantsula is not always repetitive, when danced the movements look the same but are not necessarily similar. There are limits to pantsula dancing, you can't do salts or kick your legs up, everything is bent and fast.

When pantsulas dance, they move about every joint, they isolate every part of their body. Petrus doesn't believe that he can injure himself during dancing if he doesn't warm-up. Petrus rehearses with his group 4 days a week - 4 hours a day, Monday - Thursday, 2.00 -

6pm. They use 2 days for rehearsing and making new routines, and two days for polishing - making the steps more precise and clear. Petrus' group rehearses at the YMCA in Orlando.

Petrus admits that he took dagga and that others take it too. The reason why they take it is so they can feel good. Petrus says he feels like he is flying when he takes it. Petrus also suggested that pantsulas takes dagga to 'give them stamina'.

Petrus does some of the choreography but most of it emerges as a group effort. For Petrus, pantsula is not a performing art, rather it is just there to entertain people, for example at clubs, parties and theatres.

International music (American music) is the music that pantsulas love, whether it be soul, funk, rap or hip hop as long as it's fast and it has beat and rhythm. Petrus loves music with power. Sometimes they use local music if it's got some power in it, but preferably international. Some pantsulas dance to just about anything, from lyrics to beat to rhythm.

Petrus has never participated in competitions; the IGI Life Vita Pantsula Competition was his first, and his friends forced him to enter.

Petrus like any other dancer, prefers to get paid instead of dancing for free. He will only dance for free if he goes to a party where they get paid with food and drinks. This is an opportunity to promote themselves.

Petrus does not see pantsula as the best, but he says each dance has its own crowd. He says:

"It will be great if you combine all of this (dancers) in one show, he thinks then everyone can see everything" (Ibid).

Petrus sees pantsula dance as the dance of the 90's because all over South Africa in the

main areas like Durban, Cape Town, Johannesburg and Pretoria everyone is doing pantsula, or having pantsula competitions or concerts.

7.SIPHO

Sipho is an 18 year old dancer from Diepkloof, Soweto. He dances for a group called 'Dickies Lovers', a group of six, four old members and two new members.

He comes from a family of three brothers and two sisters. His three brothers are at school and the two sisters are working.

Sipho is in standard 7 at a school in Meadowlands Zone 5. He travels from Diepkloof to Meadowlands by taxi and gets transport money from his father. Sipho doesn't work. Sipho was born in Orlando East, and has stayed in Diepkloof since 1987.

At age 12 he started dancing when he got lessons from his older brother, Dinky. So one can say he was inspired by his brother from an early age.

After doing pantsula for a few years he joined a rap group called 'MCG' also in Diepkloof where he was doing breakdance and hip hop. After leaving 'MCG' he started 'Dickies Lovers', in 1991. He said he only does group dancing, and no solo acts. The name 'Dickies Lovers' actually comes from the trousers - dickies. Pantsulas love wearing these pants including mashwabanans.

All the dancers are from their area (Diepkloof) except for two who are from Pretoria. The dancers ages range from 17 - 20 and all of them attend school.

They wear heavy slacks like dickies and mashwabanans, coloured skippers, spotties and takkies (all star).

According to Sipho, pantsula originated on streets in townships. Sipho told me that I can teach myself to do pantsula and Sipho showed me how easy it was just to move my feet around.

Sipho doesn't believe that pantsula will ever die because it is the dance of the township and because of its' deep cultural roots. He says:

"even at school every one does it" (Interview: 12/05/93).

To him, breakdancing is still part of pantsula because Futhuza is African break (mixture of pantsula and American breakdance).

Sipho says that the body must be very loose to be able to do pantsula, and not just anyone can do pantsula according to Sipho. Sipho knows a white singer called Istadela who performs good pantsula dance. For Sipho, some whites can do pantsula dance if they want to. But he says:

"Most whites do not have a natural rhythm so it is difficult for them to pick up something like pantsula" (Ibid).

Sipho's understanding of pantsula dance is that not all groups dance the same but some do. Some dance alone, others do the same style and others dance as a group and have solo acts included.

Sipho agreed with me that mixing Futhuza with pantsula kills the feel of pure pantsula because pantsula has lots of jumps and foot movements and is fast, and Futhuza slows it down. It is not easy to do fast steps (sequences) while doing Futhuza.


Sipho says that he exercises his body by doing lots of push-ups, so as to make him strong. He said one needs to be strong to do pantsula. After he exercises he thinks up combinations / steps and if he likes them he uses them in the group combinations.

The choreography is developed as a group effort but Sipho does most of it. Group choreography makes the dancers feel equal and confident with each other. Sipho's group, like other pantsula groups, rehearses from about 3.00pm - 7.00pm, Mondays to Fridays. They are very fortunate, they don't have backyard rehearsals, they rehearse in

the Diepkloof Hall.

Sipho finds pantsula dancing very tiring and energetic, but he insists he can dance for five hours by using different styles.

For Sipho pantsula is:

"a traditional dance, from the black people" (Ibid). 

Once when Sipho and his group were performing they tried to make a statement on witchcraft and spirits, but people were against it, even though the group enjoyed it.

Sipho's group, like other groups, prefer American music instead of local music. He says this is because American music has more power in it - black American music has more rhythm in it and most South African black teenagers enjoy it. Sipho dances mainly to rhythm and beat, and words or lyrics don't mean anything to him.

If Sipho and his group participate in a competition they do so only for the money so they can buy new costumes and a music centre. It doesn't matter whether they win or lose, to him there is always another chance.

It seems like most pantsula groups want to be the best and no one wants to admit they are weaker than the others, including Sipho. 'Dickies Lovers' give most of their shows in the Diepkloof area. Pantsula dancers also seem to think they are the best performers. Other dance forms come second.

Some pantsula dancers do smoke dagga, Sipho admitted it. He says:

"When he goes and dances it makes his body feel good and he can make lots of action, then people enjoy" (Ibid).

General Discussion with Keith Ngcobo

Keith Ngcobo is in his 40's. He works for S.A.B.C.'s 'Shell Road to Fame' which is situated in Milpark (Metal Box), near the Holiday Inn. He is also an ex-musician.

According to Keith, pantsula comes from:

"Mpaquanga which is a mixture of dance and instrumental music (African jazz). The musicians, who were accompanied by dancers went around town and townships and performed. Artists like Boa Sello, Big Voice Jack and other artists would play musical instruments and the dancers will dance to them. These dances came from Alexandra and Sophiatown and later on from Soweto," (Interview: 29/06/93).

The dancers and musicians had a venue where they all came together to compete, which still exists up to this day, a take-away café in Eloff Street near the Faraday Station. They competed with Mpaquanga and Marabi.

"These dancers were mainly Sotho and not Zulu. Sotho dancers made use of shuffles and slides while Ndlamo dancers stamped the feet and had high kicks," says Keith.

It is clear to see from what Keith is saying, that pantsula is a dance form which has developed historically. Furthermore, it is a dance form which has deep cultural significance.

So as time went along pantsula developed into what it is today. Pantsula over the decades was influenced by different cultures; American, British, and European.

Keith says, "When Percy Sledge came to South Africa he wore bell bottoms and they were wearing three quarter stove pipes. They had a name for the bell bottom which I can't remember, but the way we were dressing was called pantsula, it is a clever (tsotsie / slang). It was the way you dress and the way you talked that made you a pantsula" (Ibid).

One can say that pantsula has a small degree of American influence in it. But, it appears that famous pop stars like Michael Jackson 'took steps from pantsula'. Keith says that pantsula couldn't have taken steps from Michael because he is older than Michael Jackson and some of the steps that Michael is doing, he did long ago.

Keith also said:

"that when pantsulas are dancing today, they are trying to get a message across through dancing to their audience about township life" (Ibid).

CHAPTER FOUR - DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

Pantsula dancing comes mainly from townships and is danced mainly by 'guys' ranging from ages 12 - 25. However, some girls dance in pantsula groups as well. I have observed that when girls do pantsula, it has a different feel to it. The girls don't move as vigorously as the boys, but they don't move in a feminine way either. They try very hard to make it look as masculine as possible. So pantsula sees no colour, age or sex.

Most pantsula dancers have created their own style or take it from someone else in the townships. Some of them, it seems, 'just have a natural feel towards it'. It is part of the lives, experiences and culture - pantsula is not something learnt and taught in dance studios.

Pantsula dance is well known in South Africa, but pantsulas want the world to know about them. Most of them wish to perform overseas.

Members of pantsula dance groups are mainly from the same areas, as they are afraid that others might 'copy their style' or, because some belong to gangs or, because of access to the place of rehearsal.

Some of these dancers are at school while others are either working or are unemployed.

Pantsulas from all groups dress in more or less the same style. They wear either Dickies (pants) or Mashwabanas (pants), Skippers, Spotties and All Star Takkies.

To be a pantsula you have to walk, talk, dress and dance like a pantsula. Pantsulas enjoy speaking slang and mixing African languages with Afrikaans.

Because of its' origin in Sophiatown, and the fact that it is mainly danced in townships,

indicates that it has social and cultural meaning. Pantsula originated mainly on the streets, at house parties and clubs. It has been passed on from generation to generation and will be passed on again. This research reinforces the common perception that pantsula dance is a dance which is mainly found in black communities in the townships. Interestingly, pantsula dance is growing among other communities, for example, white and coloured communities.

Everyone can do pantsula. It makes no difference whether you are black or white. But because it is a township dance form, it is done mainly by black people.

Most pantsulas belong to gangs and in the interviews it was suggested that they engage in criminal activities. This can be a problem for pantsula groups as it taints the image of all groups. Also there appears to be no necessary connection between pantsula dance and gang involvement.

Because these groups are in different areas they have different styles, but these styles do not differ to a great degree. This research demonstrates that there are different groups of pantsula in different areas and that they have different styles, but some of their steps are similar. Therefore, one finds great competition among pantsula dancers to see who is 'the best'. Because of the differences in style and the dancers from different areas, these dancers will take every opportunity to compete at house parties, nightclubs and even at concerts. Competitions have now been devised to accommodate these pantsula dancers, one of the biggest thus far is the IGI Life Vita Pantsula Competition, another is the 'Shell Road to Fame', where they compete regionally as well as nationally. Therefore, pantsulas are so territorial over their styles - 'turf'. Through these competitions gang fights occur because some of the dancers 'can't take it if they loose especially if they felt they worked hard and deserved to win'.

Because most of these dancers are young and school going, their rehearsals are from 3.00 - 7.00 pm five days a week.

Their choreography very often develops as a group effort, but in most cases the group



leader is the central choreographer.

One finds amateur pantsulas and professional pantsulas. The amateur pantsulas are not serious about the dance form - they do it just for the fun of it. The professional pantsulas are those who are serious and dedicated about the dance form and are trying to develop it more systematically. These dancers are proud of the dance form and treasure its' history and culture.

All that pantsulas want is to be recognised by other dance forms and groups, that is, by the dominant mainstream groups. They also want international recognition. They want people to know that they have got their own style, and that their style is as perfect and pure as any other dance form.

Pantsula is seen, both as an art form and as a form of entertainment. Even though pantsula is a local dance form, international music is preferred, because it has more 'power' in it, and it is fast. This is perhaps one of the more interesting contradictions to emerge in this research. It also demonstrates the extent to which American culture in particular has influenced youth in the townships.

In the townships, pantsula dancing is the dance of the nineties. It is the dance form which best reflects township life and experience. Just about everyone does it and enjoys doing it.

Conclusion

In conclusion, there is a great future for pantsulas in the new South Africa since many of them are hard working and dedicated to their style of dance. A force, which should indeed be recognised by the mainstream dance groups. With more people focussing on this dance form and more professional training given to these dancers, this dance can become a performing art. With more exposure this dance can become internationally recognised. Pantsula is growing steadily in townships but it is also growing among other

communities. A dance like pantsula should become more technical and less commercialised and in this way, its' chances of extinction will be minimised. Pantsulas should be less territorial and protective and in this way their style will be seen by other people and consequently receive more exposure.

APPENDIX
PANTSULA

- 1) What is your name?
- 2) How old are you?
- 3) Where do you live?
- 4) How long have you been living there?
- 5) How many bothers and sisters do you have?
- 6)
 - a) Are you at school ?
 - b) Where do you go to school?
 - c) What standard are you in?
- 7) Are you working? What kind of work are you doing?
- 8) When did you start dancing? At what age?
- 9) What style of dance did you start off with?
- 10) Did you learn other dance techniques?
- 11) When did you start dancing pantsula?
- 12)
 - a) How did you get to start doing pantsula?
 - b) For example; did you see it somewhere or from someone?
- 13) Who taught you to do pantsula dance?
- 14) How long have you been doing pantsula?

- 15) a) Do you do it solo or are you dancing in a group?
b) If you are doing solo, why are you doing it?
- 16) a) When did your group start together?
b) How many dancers in your group?
c) What is your group called and how did it get this name?
- 17) Are all the dancers from around your area; why is that?
- 18) a) Will you take pantsula dancers from other areas?
b) If not, then why not?
- 19) a) What do your ages range from?
b) Do all of you attend school?
- 20) Do you have a dress code?
- 21) Are there any social, political or cultural roots attached to pantsula?
- 22) Who are the fathers (pioneers) of pantsula?
- 23) Where did pantsula originate from?
- 24) Is it here to stay or is it to be outmoded?
- 25) Does one need a special body for this type of dancing (pantsula)?
- 26) Can anyone do pantsula?
- 27) Does one need special training for pantsula dance?
- 28) Can white folks also do pantsula dance?

- 29) Does each and every pantsula group have a particular style of dance? Why?
- 30) Do these styles differ to a great degree?
- 31) Do you exercise your body regularly?
- 32) Do you rehearse regularly?
- 33) Do you warm you body up before dancing?
- 34) Where do you rehearse?
- 35) Do you confine yourself to space and time?
- 36) How many hours do you rehearse in a week?
- 37) Pantsula is very energetic and can be exhausting, how do you get to save your energy?
- 38) Is it possible to do a 1 hour show of pantsula dancing?
- 39) Who does your choreography?
- 40) Do all of you contribute to the choreography?
- 41)
 - a) Is pantsula a performing art?
 - b) Can it become a performing art?
 - c) Do you see it as a form of entertainment?
- 42) Is there a meaning to pantsula dancing?
- 43) Are you trying to make a statement whether it be social, political or cultural?

- 44) What music is used for pantsula dancing?
- 45) If you dance to music, do you dance to the lyrics, or do you dance to rhythm and beat?
- 46) Do you see pantsula dancing as repetitive?
- 47) Are there any boundaries to pantsula movements?
- 48) Do pantsula dancers use an assortment of local and international music?
- 49) Do you participate in any competitions? Why?
- 50) Do you ever see yourself as the best group around?
- 51) Do you ever give any shows? Where?
- 52) a) Do you get paid for dancing or are you doing it for fun?
b) Would you prefer to be paid?
- 53) How would you compare pantsula dance with other modern dance forms?
- 54) Would you say pantsula dance is the dance of the nineties? Explain briefly?

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PANTSULA DANCE - CASE STUDIES ON THE ORIGINS AND MAKINGS OF A TOWNSHIP ART FORM

COLLIN VINCENT MYBURGH

Collin established a set of clearly defined research questions giving good direction to the project as whole. I feel this was particularly difficult area of research which Collin approached imaginatively.

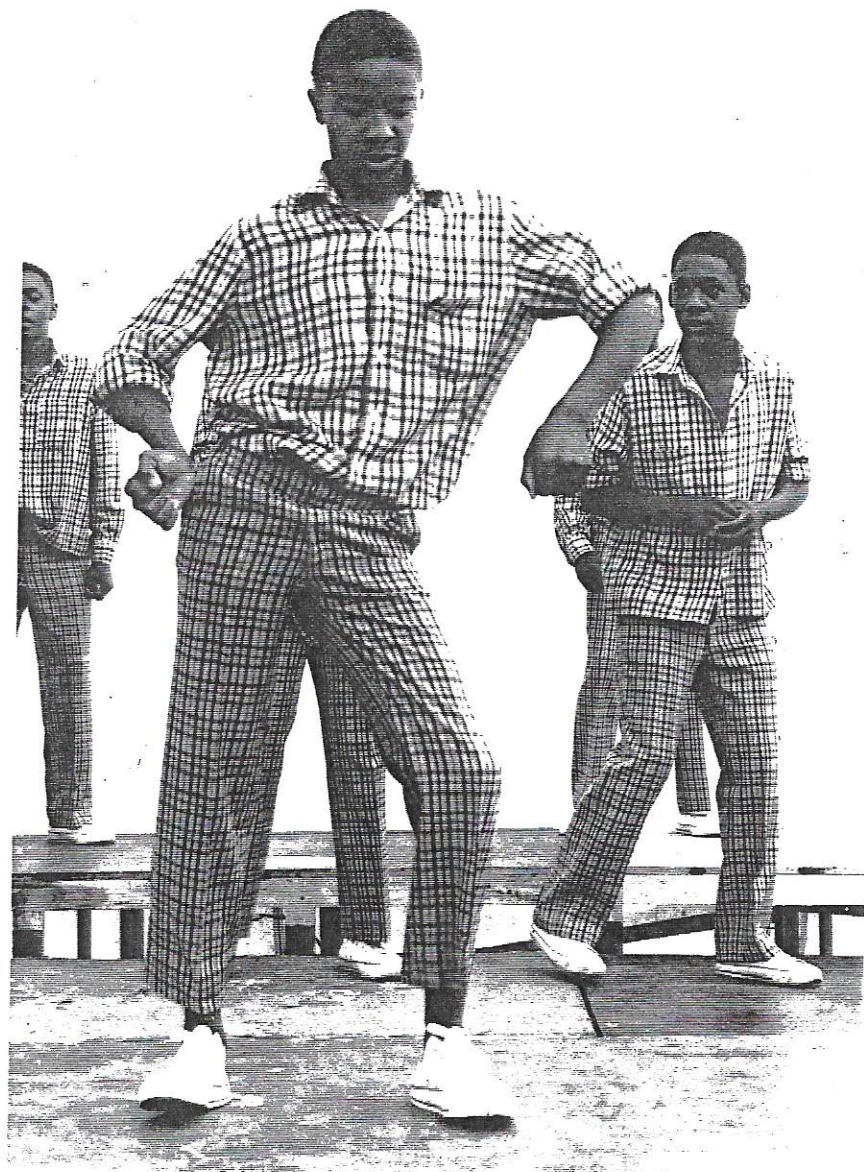
Collin demonstrated a clear understanding of the research methods chosen and relevant literature was appropriately used. He highlighted the difficulties and limitations of the research well. His use of participant observation was particularly good, given the obstacles he experienced in gaining access to the respondents and their rehearsal situations.

The case studies were written up clearly and concisely. The experiences and life styles of the pantsula dances were interestingly recorded. The data which Collin obtained in his interviews was interesting and insightful. I feel that this is the strongest aspect of the project. As he indicated, very little research has been conducted into pantsula dance, particularly research which explores the lives and experiences of the dancers themselves. In this respect the project was insightful and informative.

Collin could have analysed the data in more detail. A lot more could have been made of the research findings. The ability to analyse data and develop arguments based on the research findings is however a difficult process - perhaps this could have been developed if Collin had had more time to devote to the project.

In general I feel that Collin tackled this project creatively. Importantly, the research data will be of interest to many people involved in dance and the arts more generally. This is a good effort.

Liz Walker - Internal Examiner



External Examiner's Report

'Case studies on the origins and makings of a township art form'

by Collin Vincent Myburgh

This is generally a very good research project which demonstrates knowledge and technical competence in the use of research methods. By interviewing a number of pantsula dancers Mr. Myburgh has shed light on township popular culture, and on an extremely important popular art form, as well as on the lives and aspirations of the pantsula dancers themselves. His ability to gain the trust of his subjects, and his close and personal understanding of dance and of the dancers' social circumstances enable him to gather very interesting information. The project is extremely well written, and clearly presented. The photographs successfully illustrate the pantsula style and technique, and Mr. Myburgh demonstrates that he is as skilled an observer with a camera as he is with his pen and notebook.

However, while Mr. Myburgh touches on some crucial issues, he does not explore them in great depth, though his evidence may have allowed him to do so. An important theme in the project is the relationship between popular and performing arts, with the former tending more towards commercialisation and the latter calling for more professional and technical training. I'm not sure that there is such a solid distinction between these art forms, but nevertheless the differences ought to be more thoroughly spelled out with pantsula situated more carefully as an art form.

It seems from the evidence Mr. Myburgh presents that pantsula is not simply an art form, but something much broader, which involves social relationships (groups and/or gangs), as well as ways of dressing, speaking, and socialising (including dagga smoking). While these characteristics do not always go together, especially the last item, pantsula dance seems to be part of a broader 'way of life' highly valued by the young men and women. This 'way of life' can certainly be commercialised and appropriated for merchandising (witness the attention paid to pantsula by big companies such as IGI, Shell, and SATV), it is also seen by the dancers themselves as a possible way to success: to making money and attaining 'fame'. On the other hand, while the dancers spend considerable amounts of time developing and practising their routines, they don't express in their own words desires to become professional dancers (at least not in the text). There thus seems to be a tension between the 'commercialising' and 'professionalising' paths which Mr. Myburgh does not explore.

A good piece of work which demonstrates a capacity to conduct research and gather interesting information, while raising thought-provoking questions.